THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

THE SETTLEMENT OF THE RURAL MUNICIPALITY OF SIFTON 1881 - 1920

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY

DONALD MERWIN LOVERIDGE

WINNIPEG, MANITOBA

AUGUST, 1977

THE SETTLEMENT OF THE RURAL MUNICIPALITY OF SIFTON

1881 - 1920

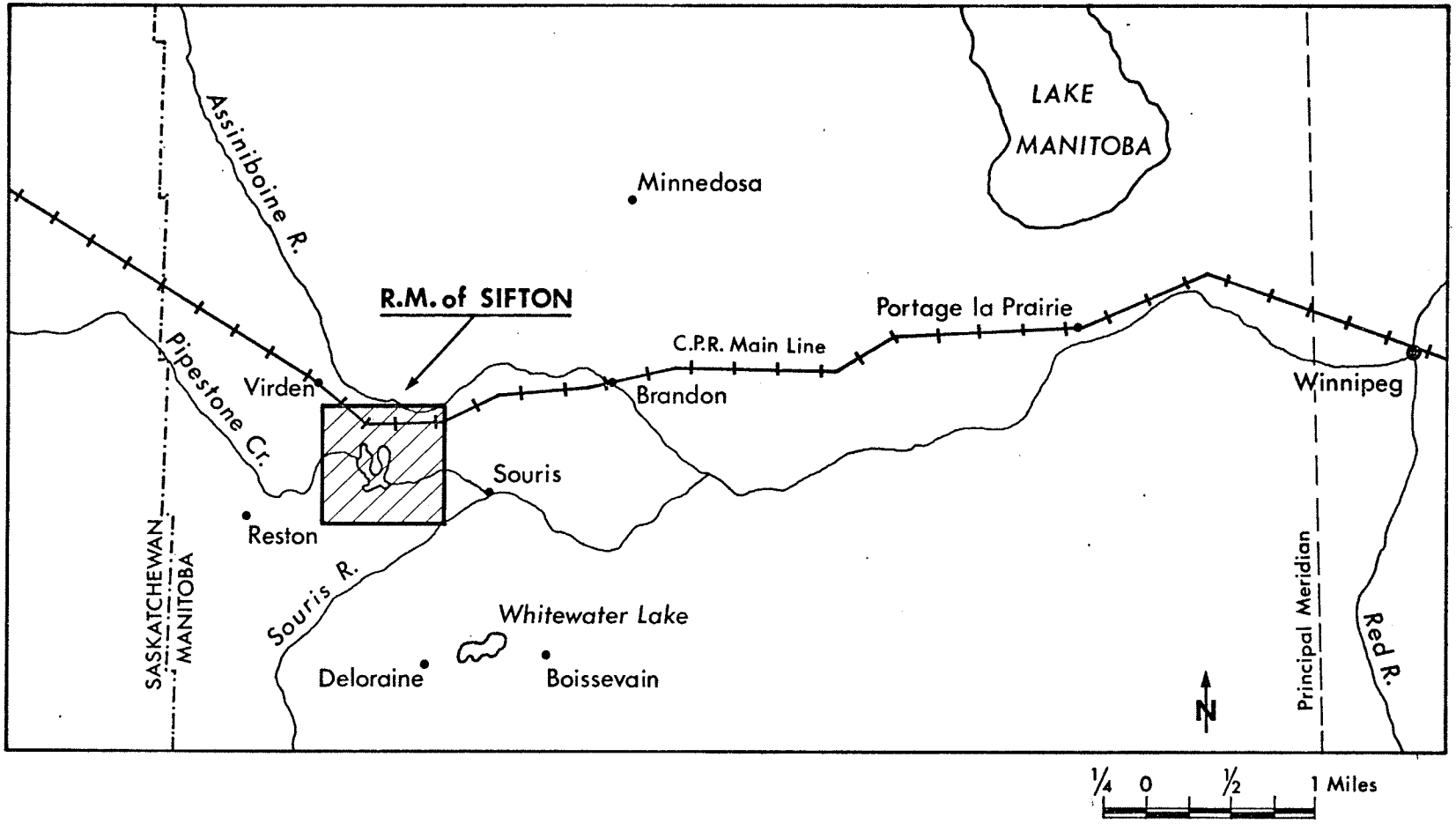
BY

DONALD MERWIN LOVERIDGE

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

LOCATION MAP



SOUTHERN MANITOBA

CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures

Maps

Tables

Acknowledgements

This thesis has been a long time in the writing. It would not even have gotten underway without the materials generously provided by Dr. John Tyman, late of Brandon University. His transcribed land records--few of the originals of which are available in Manitoba--furnished a solid foundation for the study. Moreover, exposure to his research materials gave rise to several ideas as to how the Sifton data could be handled and applied. The assistance of Ms. Jean Fox of U.B.C. in working with Dr. Tyman's and the Municipal records was invaluable.

Many individuals and organizations have contributed useful information. I would like particularly to thank the Council of the R.M. of Sifton for their permission to examine municipal documents. Reeve C. Bothe, Councillor Masson, and Mr. C. Heepy of Oak Lake were particularly helpful in this. Mrs. B. Parsons of Brandon made a great contribution in giving me the opportunity to examine the Baker Correspondence, and allowing me to monopolize her time and her dining room table in doing so.

Several people have read drafts of this paper. Their criticisms and suggestions have been very valuable. The true pioneer fortitude displayed by Professor W. D. Smith and the students in his 1975-76 Western History seminar, in sitting all the way through an interminable presentation of the first version of the study, must be noted and applauded. My advisor, Professor J. E. Rea, and Professors W. D. Smith and G. Friesen made detailed commentaries on the paper, the results of which have been incorporated in the final version.

A part of the research for this study was done with the aid of a grant from the Explorations Committee of the Canada Council. This grant was made to support work on a forthcoming local history of the Oak Lake area.

Since, in the final analysis, an author must take all of the blame for his mistakes, it would seem only logical that he should get any and all of the credit for the work. However, while making the mistakes is a one-man operation, doing something right takes a great deal of assistance. I would therefore like to thank those, named and unnamed, who have made a contribution; and to accept the responsibility for any misinterpretations or errors of fact, whether of ommission or commission, which may raise their ugly heads. This thesis is dedicated to my parents, for their unfailing optimism; and to my grandmother, Mrs. Hazel Gibbons of Horsefly, B.C., whose example set off my interest in the history of western settlement.

Introduction

This thesis is a study in local history, dealing with the settlement and development of a nine-township rural municipality in southwestern Manitoba. It examines the period from 1881 to 1920; from the arrival of the C.P.R. line and the opening of the area to settlement, to the end of the First World War. In 1881 Sifton was all but uninhabited. By 1920 it held a thriving farming community. This singular transformation has been reconstructed in as much detail as possible, and an attempt made to identify and place in context the major elements involved. In short, the aim has been to explain how and why the area developed as it did.

Sifton swiftly became, and remains today, an agricultural community. Its land has been, and remains, its reason for being. Much of the history of the municipality revolves around the theme of land; encompassing the men, women, and institutions who owned it, and the ways in which they made use of it. This unifying theme provides a point of departure for the implementation of a comprehensive and analytic approach to the history of small rural areas on the Prairies. Rather surprisingly, historians have tended to overlook its possibilities and, so, the extensive records available for its development. An analysis of land ownership records for the R.M. of Sifton, focusing on those concerned with the disposition of lands by the Dominion and their initial disposal to settlers, constitutes the core of the study.

The underlying premise of this thesis is that there is much more to "local history" than usually meets the eye. The existing literature on the history of small western communities hardly begins to indicate, let alone develop, the interpretive potential of the subject. Nor do these interpretive possibilities exclusively relate to the realms of local history. It goes without saying that national and regional history are something more than 'local history writ large'. At the same time, however, national and regional historians may tend to underplay the composite character of their subjects. If not simply the sum of all their parts, they are certainly the product of these parts. Conclusions drawn at these generalized levels of study must be measured against and tempered by those drawn from the examination of specific components. Intensive analyses of the development of small Prairie communities can offer an insight into the validity of wider interpretations of western settlement. Moreover, the key elements in settlement can best be understood by studying their actual and interrelated operation in a specific environment. Most of the local-historical studies presently available are chronicles rather than analyses. The reasons for this are too numerous (and, for the most part, obvious) to go into here. Suffice it to say that the problem lies with the spirit in which local history is approached; not with any intrinsic limitation of the subject. The equation of "local" with "parochial", in this regard, is a spurious one. The following study is an attempt to demonstrate that

the differences between national and regional history, on the one hand, and local history, on the other, are more apparent than real: that, on the contrary, these areas of historical study represent two sides of the same coin.

CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND OF SETTLEMENT

Ch. I Part 1: The Area

The Rural Municipality of Sifton is comprised of nine townships, arranged in a square block 324 square miles in area. It is situated about forty miles west of Brandon, and the town of Virden is a few miles west of its northwest corner. The Municipality spans the short gap where the Souris and Assiniboine Rivers bend towards each other for a short space before again diverging, to meet some sixty miles to the east. The Town of Oak Lake is the largest in the R.M., and has been a municipality in its own right since 1907. Sifton has one major feature which distinguishes it from its neighbours in the region. This is the presence of Oak Lake, one of the largest bodies of water in southwestern Manitoba. The Lake itself is about five miles long by three wide at its extremities and covers about ten square miles. Taken together with the associated Plum Lakes and other sloughs and marshes it fills a good part of the west-central area of the R.M.. The streams feeding and draining it (Pipestone and Plum Creeks) effectively cut the municipality in half. Marshes are also associated with these Creeks. In total, an area, more than a township in size, is normally either slough, marsh or open water.

The R.M. is a local governmental unit. It has been used as the basis of this study for two main reasons. In the first place, it is a useful size for analytic purposes. A larger unit would probably require the employment of a sample, with all the problems this method entails, while a smaller one would be difficult to justify as being representative of development in any larger area. In short, the nine-township R.M. is small enough to be dealt with comprehensively, yet large enough to provide a variety which lends itself to generalized conclusions. In the second place, the R.M. offers a ready-made focus for research. It is a well-defined area in its own right, and has provided a specific focus for record-keeping and report preparation, by all levels of government, on a long-term basis[1].

In Manitoba the period from 1870 to 1886 was a time of experimentation in forms of local government. At first, the single-township municipality (as used in Ontario) was tried. This proved too small in the context of prairie settlement patterns. Then, a system of very large counties was attempted but, with the existing communications, this proved too large for effective administration. Finally, in the mid-1880's,

---

[1]Municipalities keep their own local administrative records, largely relating to taxation. The rural-municipal structure has often been used as the basis of province-wide investigations. For examples, see R. W. Murchie and H. C. Grant, Unused Lands of Manitoba (Winnipeg: 1926) and H. C. Grant et al, Agricultural Income and Rural Municipal Government in Manitoba (Winnipeg: 1939). Since the rural municipal unit is more or less uniform across the prairies, it could well serve for useful comparative historical studies. Unfortunately, nothing along this line has yet been produced.

the multiple-township rural municipality was chosen[2]. Sifton was first organized as a part of the County of Dennis in 1883. A local man, Walter G. Knight, was the Secretary-Treasurer. When the county system was abolished in 1884 Sifton was formed out of Townships 7 to 9, Ranges 23 to 25 W1 inclusive. The first Reeve was an Oak Lake merchant named Edward Dickson.

The R.M. of Sifton lies entirely within the fossil basin of Glacial Lake Souris, a meltwater formation which covered the area during the last glacial retreat (ca. 9000-7000 B.C.). As a result, the general topography is that of a gently rolling plain, and the soils are almost all of a light sandy nature developed from glacial lake deposits of sands, silts and clays. The latter underly the area in their original state and impede drainage in depressed areas. The clays have on many occasions been used for the manufacture of pottery and bricks[3]. Another feature of this soil complex is the extensive areas of duned sand. A wide, broken belt of high dunes stretches in a south-westerly direction across the northern half of the municipality, while another stretches away from the southern end of the Lake in the same general direction. Significant concentrations of high dunes can be found in Townships 8-23, 7-24 and 9-25, and the islands in the lake and marsh are also dunes.

---

[2]See Murray Fisher, "Local Government Reorganization," H.S.S.M. III #17 (1960-61), p. 18-19 for a short sketch of the history of rural municipal organization in Manitoba.

[3]Mrs. F. E. Watson, "Notes, articles etc. ...for the history of 'The Early Days of Oak Lake, Manitoba'" (hereafter cited as Watson, "Oak Lake"), Fall and Macfarlane interview notes. See also Irene Robson, History of Deleau-Bethel District

The main body of arable land in the R.M. consists of light, slightly-duned sandy soils which cover about half the area. These are well-drained, but are highly susceptible to drought and to drifting if not properly utilized. In addition, the northwest corner has a limited area of good sandy-loam soils, while the Assiniboine River Valley and the area around the Pipestone Creek channel offer some excellent alluvial soils. The latter, however, are subject to periodic inundation. Due to the sandy formation reliable supplies of good water are readily available almost everywhere in the municipality[4].

The vegetation cover of any given area depends on many different factors. The most important of these is the general climatic zone in which the region lies. Next in significance are the nature of the topography and the soil cover. Local, periodic climatic fluctuations (particularly in precipitation) and the pattern of landuse being followed at a given time must also be considered, as short-range variables.

Sifton lies in the transitional zone between the parkland to the north and east and the grassland to the west and south[5]. This has meant that, subject to the considerations noted above,

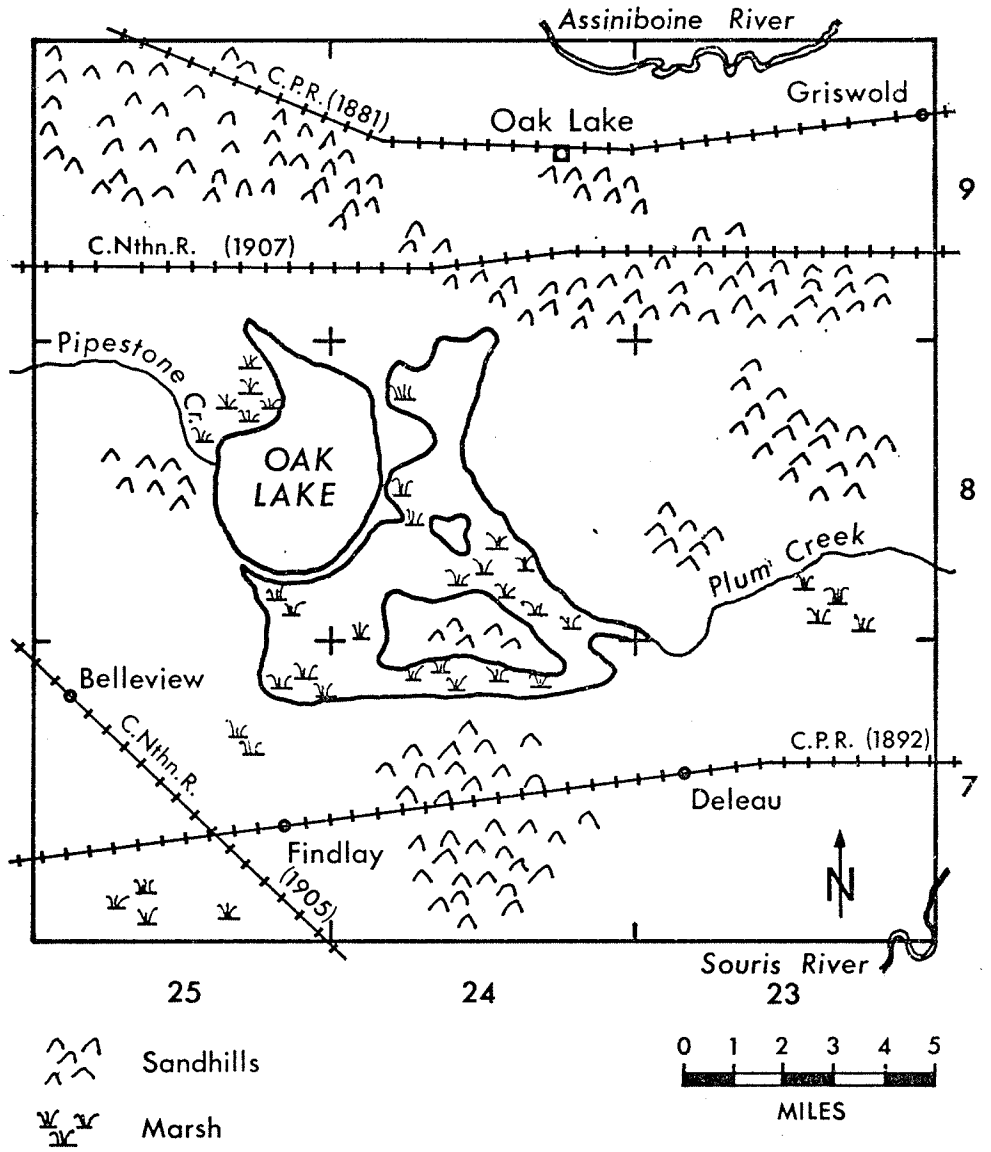
---

(n.p.: 1967), p. 2. With the exception of the "American Pottery Company" which started up and folded in Oak Lake in 1884, these operations involved the manufacture of bricks by settlers for local use.

[4]See E. C. Halstead, Ground-Water Resources (Ottawa: 1942) and W. A. Ehrlich et al, Report of Reconnaisance Soil Survey (Winnipeg: 1956) for good specific summaries of the geology and soils of the Sifton area. See also Appendix C regarding Agricultural Capability ratings.

[5]See W. A. Mackintoch, Prairie Settlement (Toronto: 1934), Fig. 23 p. 22; note that the parkland/grassland border given runs directly through Sifton.

MAP 1



THE R.M. OF SIFTON: FEATURES

either parkland or grassland characteristics might dominate. At the present time most of the area is parkland, but at the start of settlement it appears that the better part was given over to mixed-grass prairie[6]. The notes and maps of the surveyors of 1880-81 show that prairie dominated in 57% of the 1230 quarter-sections surveyed, stands of bush in 19%, and marsh and water in 24%[7]. These proportions, of course, varied considerably by township: prairie from 38 to 76%, bush from 5 to 32% and marsh from 13 to 53%. In general it can be said that prairie predominated in the southeast and southwest, while making up a significant proportion of all townships. The main concentration of parkland coincided with the main sandhill areas; townships 7-24 and 8-23 having the most and 8-25 the least, with the others ranged in between. While the greater part of the marsh and open water were to be found in and around the Lakes in townships 8-24 and 8-25, significant amounts appeared over the entire area.

---

[6]H. Y. Hind, Narrative Vol. I (London: 1860), p. 307, while travelling in the Sifton area in 1858 noted that "Small 'hummocks' of aspens, and clumps of partially burnt willows, were the only remaining representatives of an extensive aspen forest which formerly covered the country between Boss Creek and the Assiniboine" some twenty years before. In 1898 the Virden Board of Trade's pamphlet Manitoba Homesteads (Virden: 1898) advised new settlers that "When the prairie fires are kept down large numbers of poplar bluffs spring up and when once the fires are controlled the country will be covered by bluffs". It would appear that permanent, agricultural settlement has greatly stabilized the local environment, in one aspect at least.

[7]This data comes from unpublished "Township Summaries" drawn up by Dr. Tyman as working papers for his dissertation. I have adjusted his categories to give three classifications; "prairie" is defined as a dry, open area and quarter-sections were so classified when two-thirds or more met this description. Some 76 quarters were not fully surveyed at the time due to the

The last half of the 1870's and the early part of the 1880's were abnormally wet in Manitoba[8]. Many areas which, afterwards, were open meadow were then inundated. The surveyor for township 9-24, for example, noted that "a large swamp extends across the Township.... the swamp varies from two to three miles wide , and in the summer season is quite impassible except along one narrow edge where the trail passes"[9]. Similar passages are frequently found throughout the surveyors' notes for the Sifton area, and also in the recollections of early settlers. To give one instance of the latter, E. G. Bulloch has recorded that in March of 1882 two men homesteading near Belleview "walked there from Oak Lake, wading through water a great part of the way", and had to sleep in trees to avoid the flood waters[10]. The relatively low figure given above for marshland may be deceiving, as these observations indicate. Township 7-25, for instance, was classified as 75% prairie on the basis of the surveyors' map. Yet, as Evans and Bolger commented in their accompanying

---

very wet conditions (see below).

[8]A. S. Morton, History of Prairie Settlement (Toronto: 1938), p. 68 et al; Macoun's "refutation" of Palliser's report that the high plains were unfit for agriculture was based on a survey made during this wet period. Palliser (1857) had made his observations during a normal-- i.e. dry-- one. See J. Warkentin, "Steppe, Desert and Empire," in Prairie Perspectives 2, ed. A. W. Rasporich and H. C. Klassen (Toronto: c. 1973), p. 102-137 for an excellent discussion of the controversy.

[9]Field Notes of the Dominion Lands Survey, for Township 9-24 (G. McPhillips, 1880); also those for 9-23. Comments by early settlers confirm this. The area today is open meadow.

[10]E. G. Bulloch, Pioneers of the Pipestone (Reston, Man.: 1929), p. 8.

notes, "there is no large tract of uniformly good land in the township unbroken by sloughs and marshes"[11].

With the exception of a few high sandhills, all of the Sifton area lies between 1400 and 1425 feet above sea level. In other words, it is basically flat. Relatively minor variations in precipitation and runoff can have a disproportionate effect. This is strikingly evident in the name given to the dune formation on the eastern shore of the Lake. Popularly known as "The Island", its burr oak groves gave the Lake its name. It was first settled in the mid-1870's by two métis brothers named Marion. According to one of them it "actually was an Island during the first years there" and a boat was kept on hand for visitors. Yet, in one year in the same period, the Lake dried up completely and a road which ran straight west across the lakebed was used[12]. When the entire Lake could disappear, it can well be imagined what would happen to the shallower swamps during less-spectacular fluctuations.

The area comprising the R.M. of Sifton is an unusual one for southwestern Manitoba: but in degree rather than kind. Instead of one dominant environmental characteristic, such as prairie or parkland, it offers a considerable range of variant "microenvironments". That is, it has a little of everything: semi-arid forested dunes; flat, open and well-drained agricultural land; flood-endangered, but excellent,

---

[11]Field Notes of the Dominion Lands Survey, for Township 7-23 (Evans and Bolger, 1881).

[12]Watson, "Oak Lake", Fall and Lafournaise interview notes.

river-bottom land; and an assortment of marshes. These divers types are intermingled, rather than being confined to specific areas. Further, the whole is sub-divided by the major streams and lakes. Each given location in other words offers a unique assortment of characteristics and resources. Users have therefore been required to make a specific choice from among these, based on their own needs and capabilities.

Ch. I Part 2: Perceptions of the Land

Given the wide variety and variability of the physical environment in the study area, it may be appropriate here to consider the different ways in which it has been perceived and utilized. The settlers who arrived in Sifton in the 1880's were by no means the first people to live in and make use of the area. They were, however, different from those who came before them. These settlers brought with them a way of understanding the relationship between themselves and their environment which was as radically new to the west as the environment itself was radically novel to the majority of its new inhabitants. A concept which may be useful in understanding the dimensions and direction of this change is that of "site".

W. L. Morton has defined "site" as "a position of comparative advantage for production, exchange or transfer". In this sense it is not simply a result of physical location but is, rather, "a function, more or less complex, of position, environment and technology"[1]. That is, it is a matter of

[1]W. L. Morton, "The Significance of Site in the Settlement of the American and Canadian Wests," Agricultural History Vol. 25 (1951), p. 97.

balancing means, ends, and perceived potential to survive in a given situation. Morton makes use of this concept in reconstructing patterns of western development, in terms of changes in the "comparative advantage" offered by different forms of "site" to different cultural and economic groups. All of the combinations which he identifies have been active in the Sifton area.

The seasonally nomadic lifestyle of native peoples before its disruption by European influences revolved around what Morton calls "primitive" site. This area, the so-called "hunting ground", was less a defined physical region than an integrated set of all the various resources necessary for the well-being of a band or tribe; or as close to this ideal as the group could manage[2]. Archaeologists working on the northeast shore of Oak Lake have recently discovered materials which show that the area has been used regularly by native hunters for at least five thousand years, and probably more[3]. Bison hunting seems to have been the primary resource-activity for most of this period; probably by small groups in the spring or fall. An early settler was told that the last buffalo hunts had taken place in the area about 1875, and

---

[2]See Irene Spry, "The Great Transformation," in Man and Nature on the Prairies, ed. R. Allen (Regina: 1976), p. 21-23.

[3]For summaries of the work done at the "Cherry Point" excavations, and of the archaeological potential of the area as a whole, see J. K. Haug, "The 1974 end of season field report on the Cherry Point site excavations, southwestern Manitoba," Archae-Facts Vol. 2 No. 2-3, p. 2-21. Haug's final report, "The 1974-75 Excavations at the Cherry Point Site (Winnipeg: 1976) contains excellent illustrations of the complexity of the natural history of the lake area.

saw "fresh" bones which seemed to confirm this[4]. The relatively high and dry northeast shore of the Lake is the only point at which it can normally be approached without first passing through marshes, and for this reason was probably used by the Indians (and possibly the metis) as a bison-drive route. Other areas nearby were probably exploited for other specific purposes. The Island, for example, would offer a reliable supply of wood, while the lakes and marshes could provide waterfowl, fish and small mammals.

The fur trading post was a "neat insertion" of European commercial interests into the dynamic system of primitive site. These were established at important seasonal assembly points, which offered a ready-made trading population. With this in mind it is interesting to note that trading posts were operated on the Island on at least two occasions; once in the 1820's and again in the 1870's[5]. Obviously, native activity at Oak Lake was of sufficient dimensions to warrant special attention by the traders. Yet another local post was the North West Company's Montagne la Bosse, established near the present site of Virden in the 1790's[6].

---

[4]Watson, "Oak Lake", Parsons interview notes. See also E. G. Bulloch, Pioneers 6. One spot on Pipestone Creek near the Lake "was covered thickly with the bones and skulls of buffalo when the first settlers arrived".

[5]The first date was supplied to Mrs. Watson by the Hudson's Bay Company archivist. A post was established at the Island in the winter of 1827-28, working out of Brandon House (Watson, "Oak Lake", notes). Watson, "Oak Lake", Ms. p. 5 also refers to a company which worked the area in the 1870's. The Marions may have been involved with this.

[6]See the Harmon and McDougall journals for references to Montagne la Bosse (17-10-25 W1). Unfortunately, the 'fort' was

The métis conception of "site", which Morton terms "squatter" site, also appeared in the fur trade period. This focused on subsistence agriculture, in combination with hunting and operating the transportation systems of the fur companies. Locations suitable for squatter site were not too common, for they depended on "a distinctive union of water, wood, and clearing"[7] as a base, in conjunction with a good hunting area and proximity to the rivers and trails used by the traders. The Sifton area offered all of these attractions and, after 1870, a fairly large number of métis arrived to take advantage of them. The southern cart trail from the Red River crossed the northern part of the area, and split here into two separate trails; one to Fort Ellice and one to Wood Mountain. These crossroads seem to have been particularly important in drawing the métis. The surveyors of 1880-81 reported sixteen different "squatters". Most of these had established themselves along the Assiniboine near the trail, with the rest near Oak Lake. The Island itself was a stopping-place for the cart trains, for it offered a supply of oak timber. A resident carpenter (M. Andre Berard) was available to make repairs, and the Marions seem to have run the rest stop and a storehouse until 1881 when the last cart brigade passed through[8A].

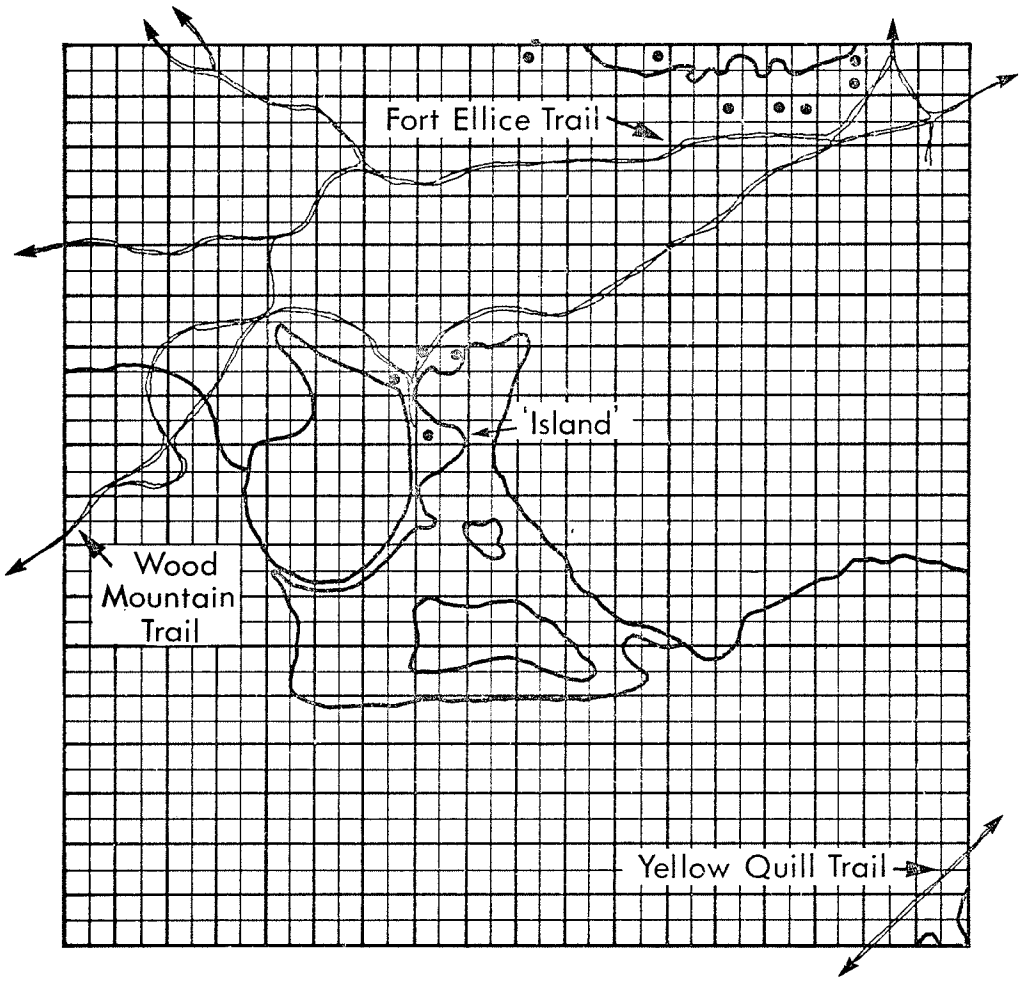
---

situated on extensive gravel deposits, and is now probably incorporated in several local road-beds. A small cairn has been erected on the spot by the I.O.D.E.

[7] W. L. Morton, "Site", 100-101

[8A] See Watson, "Oak Lake", Carberry and Gillespie interview notes. The last cart train was headed for Winnipeg from Wood Mountain, reportedly with a load of buffalo hides. The Marions probably came to the district in 1874 or 1875, although

MAP 2



TRAILS AND SQUATTERS, 1880-81

The native peoples and the métis coexisted in relative harmony on the prairies until the 1870's, sharing the abundant (if unreliable) natural resources upon which both groups depended. Both ways of life, however, were overcome with the arrival of the agricultural frontier in the west, and the new conceptions of "site" which both accompanied and underlay it. One was "homestead" site, as Morton aptly calls it. This evaluated the land in terms of its capacity for commercial, monocultural agriculture; involving the production and sale of surplus products derived from the intensive exploitation of private holdings by their individual owners. The other was "distributive" site; a corollary of the first. This was a concentration of services and institutions at a particular point from which it could minister to the needs of a specialized agricultural hinterland, and integrate the latter into the regional and national economies[8B]. The new system which these two forms represented was based essentially on the fulfillment of the needs of an economy of scarcity. Natural resources were seen to be in short supply and, therefore, access to them had to be limited. In order to make their way

---

an American journalist's claim that their house "was the first building erected between Portage la Prairie on the east to the Rocky Mountains on the west" (Oak Lake News 3 #135, Aug. 14, 1901) is exaggerated. Nonetheless, Oak Lake seems to have been an important point in the road network of the time. Marcel Giraud, "Metis Settlement in the North-West Territories," trans. C. M. Chesney, Saskatchewan History Vol. 7 No. 1, p. 12-13, has noted that groups of Wood Mountain metis wintered at Boss Hill (a high point in the sandhills north of Oak Lake). Also, a number of persons connected with the cart trains later settled in the area. One of these was Joseph Leblanc, who had been a driver from about 1876 until 1880.

[8B] W. L. Morton, "Site", 101

in these restricted circumstances, individual owners employed a labour and capital intensive mode of exploitation[9].

Homestead and distributive site did not so much compete with the earlier forms as simply displace them. In occupying the seasonal meeting points and subsistence areas with a new idea of 'private' property they broke up the essential patterns of primitive site. The Indians were pushed onto reserves and forgotten. The case with squatter site was similar[10]. In physical terms there was little direct competition outside of the Red River valley, for the métis' favourite locations were not always well suited to commercial agriculture. When, for example, the métis were granted 1,400,000 acres of land in Manitoba in 1870 it was at first feared that they, knowing the country, would take all of the best lands. As it turned out, however, this was not the case. As a contemporary commentator put it, "if it had been the object... to select the poorest land available then they succeeded"[11]. The métis chose land which resembled as much as possible the river lots of the Red. This was not necessarily the best for commercial agriculture, yet they would have to survive in an economy and governmental system oriented towards this type of land use.

---

[9]See I. Spry, "Transformation", especially p. 42.

[10]See W. L. Morton, "Site", p. 98. Irene Spry, in her study of "The Great Transformation", deals at length with the dynamics of the shift from communal to private ownership of western land, with a particular emphasis on the impact of this on the "archaic" peoples of the region. W. L. Morton, in "A Century of Plain and Parkland," in A Region of the Mind, ed. R. Allen (Regina: c. 1973), examines the political aspects of this transformation.

[11]Quoted by Chester Martin, "Dominion Lands" Policy (Toronto: c. 1973), p. 20.

This meant, for instance, that municipal taxes had to be paid even though the métis' holdings were not necessarily geared towards the production of a saleable surplus. After 1870 many Manitoba métis moved westwards to avoid these pressures. It would appear that, of those who came to the Sifton area, most had either been assimilated or had moved away by the end of the century[12].

Commercial-agricultural and distributive site were not, as were the others, internal western developments. Primitive site, squatter site and, to a lesser degree, trading site were adaptive perceptions, evolved to suit and deal with an existing environment. Homestead and distributive site, on the other hand, were essentially exploitive mechanisms geared to the modification or circumvention of elements which were not already adapted to their ends. To an important extent, the environment was made to be what it was conceived to be. One elementary difference between the old and the new was the size and density of the population which could be supported. When large numbers of people came west and began the intensive

---

[12]The Marions, for example, sold the bulk of their holdings on the Island in 1885-88, to Robert Lang, but remained in the area for some time thereafter. Amable Marion was a municipal councillor in 1894-95. The Oct. 9, 1901 issue of the Oak Lake News stated that "Amable Marion has disposed of his property at the Island to Mr. Henderson of McGregor's ranch, only reserving to himself the house and lots lately owned by his brother, Roger Marion, ex-MPP for Carillon. It is rumoured that next spring Mr. Marion will go west to the Duck Lake District". This family, however, seems to have been an exception. It appears that most métis settlers sold or mortgaged (and lost) their lands soon after getting the patent. Of the resident métis who acquired land in 1881-82, none still held it in 1925. The problem of tracing the course of the métis community in Sifton is greatly complicated by the later influx of French Canadian and Franco-Belgian settlers.

exploitation of the natural resources open to them, they upset the older balance[13]; and, in effect, created a new situation which justified the way in which they had faced the earlier one in the first place.

These new attitudes were not simply casual arrivals in the west. They are best described as weapons; instruments utilized by the commercial-industrial east, and the wider system which it represented, for the conquest of the "archaic" west. All of the elements of the Canadian takeover and assimilation of the region--the sectional survey, the North-West Mounted Police and, especially, the Dominion Lands system--were directed towards the implantation and encouragement of this new way of life. It is particularly significant that the Red River "Insurrection" of 1869-70 began with a confrontation between the métis and the Ontario surveyors, and concluded with the takeover of all western lands by the Dominion.

Ch. I Part 3: Canada and the West, 1867-1881

When Manitoba was admitted into Confederation in 1870 an important proviso was included in the enabling Act. This stated that "all ungranted or waste lands" in Manitoba and the North-West Territories were to be "administered by the Government of Canada for the purposes of the Dominion"[1]. This

---

[13] I. Spry, "Transformation", makes it clear that the operative factor in the destruction of the 'economy of plenty' of the presettlement period was the onslaught of persons who abused it, upsetting "the traditional balance between what was available and its use" (p. 28). A classic example of this is the destruction of the bison herds for commercial purposes.

[1] Canada, Statutes of Canada 1870, 33 Vic. c. 3 (Manitoba Act).

clause embodied a decision which held enormous implications for the future of Canada, generally, and the West, specifically. For the country as a whole, as Chester Martin put it

> the transfer of 1870 marked a revolution. It transformed the Dominion from a federation of equal provinces each... vested with the control of its own lands, into a veritable empire in its own right.[2]

For the West, it meant that a distant, national government was to administer the territory of its new "colony" for the achievement of its own national "purposes".

In 1929 the Royal Commission on the Transfer of the Natural Resources of Manitoba reported that "the purposes for which the Dominion retained the agricultural lands have now been achieved; the railways have been built and the lands settled"[3]. This statement served as the rationale for the Commissioners' conclusion that the balance of the Dominion Lands remaining could now safely be transferred to provincial control, the Dominion having accomplished all that it intended to do with them[4]. It was, however, somewhat misleading. It told only a part of the story. The "Dominion Lands" policy under which the western lands were retained after 1870 was the means chosen for the development of the west. The

---

[2] C. Martin, Policy, 9.

[3] Quoted by Chester Martin in his original (1938) introduction, Policy, xxi; the statement was made in 1929 by the Royal Commission on the Transfer of the Natural Resources of Manitoba.

[4] C. Martin, Policy, 173 notes that "the transfer of the remaining resources to provincial control in 1930... was an indication that the free homestead system like the railway grant system--the twin 'purposes of the Dominion' in retaining control of the public lands in 1870--had fairly run its course".

construction of the railways and the settlement of the lands were the ends which this policy eventually achieved. All of these elements, however, were subordinate regional aspects of the promotion of certain national objectives by the Dominion.

The Canadian plans for the west were not accomplished overnight. Some fourteen years were required for the preliminary steps alone. There were three main stages in these preparations. The first might be termed political, in that it involved the acquisition of sovereign powers over the territories involved. After several years of negotiations with the Hudson's Bay Company (largely preceding Confederation), a number of Acts of Parliaments, and an insurrection Canada finally assumed title to the west (1870). As part of this acquisition the Red River colony was "pacified" and admitted as the land-less province of Manitoba (1870). British Columbia was then taken into Confederation in 1871; one of the terms of union being the construction of a trans-continental rail connection with the east within ten years. Martin has called this promise--not a British Columbian demand-- "a self-denying ordinance on the part of Macdonald and his party to commit the Dominion inescapably to that national project"[5]. These transfers and agreements, however, were largely nominal. They set the stage for, rather than actually initiated, western development.

The territory acquired gave the new Dominion "a region... capable of rapid development and capable in turn of stimulating

---

[5]C. Martin, Policy, 11.

development in other parts of the Dominion"[6]. The task at hand was to make use of these capabilities. Two elements, a railway and large numbers of settlers, were necessary to create the "moving frontier of settlement" which seemed so desirable. The two were complementary: without a railway, rapid and intensive settlement would not be possible, while a railway unaccompanied by such settlement would soon become a giant among white elephants. To fulfill its self-appointed role in promoting these enterprises the Dominion had but one real asset; the land which it had carefully reserved to itself in 1870. The cost of western development was bound to be staggering, and Macdonald had soon reached the conclusion

> that the enormous potential of the undeveloped resources of the Northwest Territories would be allocated to defray the expenditures required to achieve his trans-continental objectives. His western policy was based on the premise that the land and the mineral wealth of western interior was to be exploited for the national purpose.[7]

The chief difficulty was to determine the best way in which to use this resource. The process of hammering out a workable "Dominion Lands" policy, along with the auxilliary agencies and institutions necessary for the control of the frontier, took some time. While the "purposes of the Dominion" were themselves fairly clear, the constant instability of national and international economic conditions meant that the optimum means of their implementation were obscured.

---

[6] W. A. Mackintosh, The Economic Background of Dominion-Provincial Relations (Toronto: c. 1964), p. 22.

[7] E. A. Mitchner, "William Pearce and Federal Government Activity in Western Canada 1882-1904" (PhD. Dissertation, Univ. of Alberta, 1971), p. 4. Mitchner is describing the situation in 1881 but, as will be shown, the comment applies equally to the first Conservative government.

In retrospect, the second stage of preparation was surprisingly short. In the decade of the 1870's a legislative, political and judicial framework for settlement was erected. Provincial and territorial governments, a basic program for land disposal, and a regional police force were established. Also, native rights to the land were extinguished[8]. But, despite these accomplishments and despite the arrival of the first wave of settlers in Manitoba, the expected railway did not appear. Embarrassing complications with the first Pacific Railway contract let led to the fall of Macdonald and the Conservatives in 1873. The new Liberal government attempted to attract private capital, but failed due to the depressed conditions of 1873-78[9]. They were, however, effectively committed to the general plan, and Mackenzie decided to build the line out of the public purse. While this policy may have had other advantages, it did not lend itself to the rapid construction required.

The settlers coming into Manitoba in the 1870's moved westwards by oxcart and boat, and "spread themselves out in a fan shape from Winnipeg, without regard to future needs in the form of railway transportation"[10]. This created a pattern

---

[8]Sifton fell under Treaty #2. However, the only Indians with reserves in the immediate area were the non-treaty Sioux, who came as refugees from the U.S. in 1862 and 1876.

[9]See J. B. Hedges, The Federal Railway Subsidy Policy in Canada (Cambridge, Mass.: 1934), 13 for the terms which the Liberals offered in 1874.

[10]A. S. Morton, History, 55. See also p. 66 where Morton argues that, as a result, the C.P.R. Main Line was already obsolescent at the time of its construction.

of settlement which lacked a cheap outlet for its products, and which failed to create readily-accessible markets. Nor did it attract substantial capital investment, which might have induced further expansion. In the long run, this breathing-space between acquisition and intensive settlement proved very necessary. Chaos would undoubtedly have resulted had the flood of settlers of 1881-82 arrived in 1871 instead. Aside from the aforementioned institutional considerations, the pause gave the settlers time to take the measure of their new environment, adapt their agricultural techniques accordingly, and import new technology where necessary[11]. At the time, however, development was less--both in quality and quantity--than had been hoped for. The optimism and enthusiasm of the time were largely unfocused, and did not bring the desired results. It was apparent that little more could be expected until direct rail service was available[12].

This condition was finally fulfilled in the early 1880's and, accordingly, settlement began in earnest. The central element of the Boom of 1881-83 was the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Macdonald's government had returned to office in 1878 on the strength of a "National Policy" which

---

[11] See J. Friesen, "Expansion of Settlement in Manitoba, 1870-1900," H.S.S.M. III #20 (1965), P. 40; notable imports in this period included the chilled-steel plow, barbed wire, rolling mills and the new faster-maturing strains of wheat (especially Red Fife). It should be noted that major readjustments were needed later, as settlement moved into the semi-arid regions.

[12] H. E. Jahn's thesis "Immigration and Settlement in Manitoba (1870-1881): the beginnings of a pattern" (M.A. thesis, Univ. of Manitoba, 1968) provides a specific and well-balanced coverage of this period.

articulated the three national goals of western settlement, a trans-continental Canadian railway, and tariffs for the encouragement of native industry. The possibility of fulfilling these commitments was greatly enhanced by an upswing in the international economy, which made it possible to attract investment capital. Construction of the C.P.R. on the prairies was begun in 1881, and some 150 miles of track were laid west of Winnipeg in that year. In the next, the line crossed 400 miles of prairie to Moose Jaw, and beyond. In 1884 the line was completed on the prairies, and in 1885 the symbolic last spike of the main transcontinental line was photogenically driven. In front of, along with, and behind "end of track" came settlers by the thousands. Some idea of the enormity of this influx can be gained from immigration figures for the period. The population of Manitoba in 1881 was given as 64,945 people. In that year and the next, an equal number of immigrants arrived; and in 1885 alone 50,000 more entered[13].

In 1881 it seemed that the time for the fulfillment of the "purposes of the Dominion" had finally arrived. A railway was being built for which, according to John A. Macdonald, "not a farthing of money will have to be paid by the people of Canada"[14]. The Prime Minister, of course, was referring to payment by direct taxation: to call the C.P.R. "free" would involve considerable abuse of the common usage of the word. Rather, twenty-five million acres of Crown Land on the prairies

---

[13]See A. S. Morton, History, 55 & 77.

[14]Quoted by C. Martin, Policy, 11.

had been allotted to the railway Syndicate, to be sold to pay for construction. Relieved of the burden of finding hard cash to pay for this itself, the government was able to offer "free" and low-priced Crown Lands to settlers; thus ensuring an immediate wave of settlement. The railway would carry these newcomers and the necessary supplies in and, later, would carry out their produce; thus making both its own and their long-term operation feasible. Eastern commerce and industry would, hopefully, be able to supply the capital necessary for western development and exploit the new markets opened. On the whole, the scheme seemed a simple and workable one. In fact, it was; but in terms of the "purposes" which it was designed to serve. Whether the way of life which it was designed to foster was equally viable was another matter altogether.

The settlers who followed the railway west in the 1880's were not "pioneers" in the strict sense of the word. A pioneer, according to Webster, is "one who goes before, preparing the way for others". It can be said, then, that the true pioneers of the Canadian west were the government surveyors, the police, and the railway builders who prepared the way for rapid settlement. Those who arrived in the 1880's, on the other hand, stepped in to a highly structured situation.

The opportunities open to a new settler had clearly defined limits. The costs and conditions of acquiring land, of transportation, and of making a living were more or less set. All were keyed to the creation of a commercial-agricultural economy based on independent proprietors producing

surpluses of a staple product. Neither the area, nor the institutional and economic structure lent itself to either self-sufficient subsistence agriculture, or to localized economic self-sufficiency of any kind. Settlement was thus a market-oriented procedure, with both the markets and the sources of supply being outside of the region.

Many settlers--a majority in fact--were not able to survive under these conditions. Chester Martin has noted a 'black joke' current at the time, that a free homestead constituted a bet by the government that a settler could not live on it for five years. And, he comments, "all too many wagers have been lost by the settler in the silent but deadly attrition of the frontier"[15]. This silent attrition was the almost-inevitable result of a situation in which the success of a settler depended on the favourable combination of three major elements over which he had little or no control: the land distribution system, external market conditions, and the unreliable climate. To offset these, the settler had only his own resources and abilities to fall back on. All too often they proved insufficient.

Western settlement was an extremely complex process. In studying it, historians have directed their efforts at identifying its chief characteristics, which has usually meant working at a provincial or regional level. Overall, their aim has been a synthesis involving the major ingredients of the process and their cumulative effects. As the many fine

---

[15]C. Martin, Policy, 172.

studies available attest, this approach has been very rewarding. At the same time, however, it has produced incomplete results. In dealing with its causes and effects, the dynamics of the process of settlement have largely been ignored. The nature of the interaction of the major elements of settlement, and of the direct effects of such interaction, are more or less unknown.

In order to study this aspect of settlement it is necessary to approach the problem from a different direction and on a different scale: to analyse the process of settlement in terms of the settlers on which it focused, and on the local level at which the actual operation took place. The settlement of any district in Manitoba or the west was not, and could not be, a self-contained process. With the exception of the climate and the land itself all of its elements were imported, and continued throughout to be affected by external events and developments. Yet, in the end, everything centred on the areas themselves. Families could not be raised nor wheat grown on abstract rules and regulations alone, whatever their origin or authority. This study, then, is an attempt to understand the history of western settlement through that of one of its constituent parts.

CHAPTER II

THE DISPOSITION AND DISPOSAL OF LANDS

Ch. II Part 1: Introduction

Under the terms of the Manitoba Act of 1870, "all ungranted and waste lands" in the Northwest Territories and Manitoba were taken over as Dominion Lands. The Sifton area lay in the Territories until 1881, when the westward extension of the Manitoba boundary brought it into the province. In any case, all of its lands were held by the Dominion; to be granted to settlers, sold, or reserved for other purposes. Before any of these operations could be undertaken, it was necessary to survey and subdivide the land. The 1870 Act also provided that "the survey... of lands in the North-West Territories... shall be under the direction and at the expense of the Government of the Dominion"[1].

To avoid confusion and the loss of reserved land to squatters, the government generally tried to complete the survey before the arrival of settlers. On the whole it succeeded. Sifton's nine townships, for example, were all

---

[1] Canada, Statutes 1870, 33 Vic. c. 3 sec. 19 (Manitoba Act): in 1883 the C.P.R., claiming that "it would be impossible for the Department of the Interior to survey such an amount of land as (was) in their grant", tried to take over western surveying. The Outside Service, however, was able to survey 27 million acres that year and demand was dropped. D. W. Thomson, Men and Meridians: Vol. II, 1867-1917 (Ottawa: 1967), p. 42-43.

outlined in 1880 with all subdivision being completed by 1881. It would appear that a complete township took between three weeks and a month to do (see Appendix A). There were only about sixteen squatters, and their families, in the area before the survey crews were finished. Squatters were not in theory allowed any special privileges in the legal acquisition of their chosen lot. However, in practice almost anyone who had settled on a piece of land and made improvements was allowed first entry for a regular homestead or sale; subject to conforming the holding with the linear system[2]. Surveyors made detailed notes of claims and improvements. In Sifton, it happened that only four of the squatters claimed reserved land and, in the event, all of these claims were allowed[3]. With these minor exceptions the study area in 1881 offered a clear field for the implementation of the "purposes of the Dominion".

Although the Dominion initially owned all of the land, certain committments had been made and additional ones were added, which affected its disposition[4]. The disposition of

---

[2]See T. R. Weir, "Settlement in Southwest Manitoba: 1870-1891," H.S.S.M. III #17 (1960-61), p. 56 and J. L. Tyman, By Section, Township and Range (Brandon, Man.: 1972), Ch. 9. Since Sifton was almost empty at this time, turning the squatters' holdings into quarter-section units did not pose a problem. In any case, they knew what was going to happen and may have prepared for it; by spacing their claims, for example.

[3]N½ & SW 29-9-23 were School Land. NW 35-9-23 was C.P.R. Adjustments were made to the reserves (See appropriate grant disposition, below, for these).

[4]Terminology: "disposition" describes the manner in which lands were allocated to the different grants and reserves by the Dominion. "Disposal" refers to the passage of land from the Dominion and the companies to private ownership; and so,

western lands, it might be said, was based on the repayment of one debt and the making of two investments. The "debt" was to the Hudson's Bay Company for surrendering control of the lands to Canada in the first place. The two "investments" involved the construction of the railway and the promotion of rapid and effective settlement.

These initial requirements led to the creation of two distinct components within the final disposition of the lands. On the one hand large blocks of land were granted to two private companies; the Hudson's Bay Company (in 1870) and the Canadian Pacific Railway Company (in 1881). The C.P.R. Co., in turn, transferred a part of its grant to yet another corporation--the Canada North-West Land Company--in order to finance immediate expenditures. Together these companies controlled 89,409 acres in Sifton; about 43.1% of the total area of the Municipality. On the other hand, lands were retained by the Dominion Government. These consisted at first of free and low-priced lands open for settlement and of closed reserves set aside for the future support of education. Later, a new element was added, when part of the former were transferred to the Province of Manitoba by special agreement. The Dominion and the Province together held 118,271 acres; about 56.9% of the area.

---

strictly speaking, land was not actually 'disposed' until title had been transferred. As used here, however, the term also covers conditional transfers--as when sales contracts were signed and entries filed--with any cancellations noted later. See J. L. Tyman, Section, 2. Note that in this thesis the C.N.W.L. Co. has been dealt with on the same terms as the H.B. Co. and the C.P.R., even though its lands were actually part of the C.P.R. grant.

These different public and corporate grants and reserves were not laid out in discrete blocks. Rather, they were mixed together in such a way that a quarter-section from any one grant usually bordered on at least one quarter, and often two or more, from other grants. Since each grant was created for a different purpose each had a different policy governing its disposal. Moreover, these policies changed with changing conditions. A settler putting together a farm could be directly affected by several of these land disposal policies, not to mention the general climate engendered by the system as a whole. In order to fully understand the process of settlement in Sifton, it is first necessary to understand both the theory and practice of the disposition and disposal of land in the area. To this end each component of the system--public and private--will be examined in terms of its constituent grants. By comparing and contrasting the elements of each component, and the components themselves, it may be possible to identify and focus upon significant elements of the process of settlement as a whole.

Ch. II Part 2: The Hudson's Bay Company Grant

The Rupert's Land Act of 1868 provided that, in return for its proprietary rights over the Canadian west, the Hudson's Bay Company would receive £300,000 in cash, 450,000 acres around its existing posts and one-twentieth of the land in the area between the Red and the Rockies (about 7,000,000 acres). It was arranged with the Dominion that the land grant would consist of section 8, and three-quarters of section 26 in each township; except for every fifth township (i.e. nos. 5, 10,

15 etc.) where the remaining quarter of section 26 was also assigned, to balance out the grant to one-twentieth of the area overall[1]. In Manitoba this amounted to 1,274,147 acres, or about 18% of the total grant on the prairies[2]. Title was automatically passed to the Company on completion of the survey by simple "notification" that the subdivision had been completed. In the nine townships of Sifton this pattern was followed exactly, giving the Company 63 quarter-sections. These comprised 4.85% of the total area of the municipality.

For the above reasons the Hudson's Bay Company lands have been called "the most regular element in the land map of Western Manitoba"[3]. This regularity had both advantages and disadvantages. For the first, the Company was largely relieved of the difficulties of finding, selecting and gaining title to its land. At the same time, however, the lands which it received were allocated almost at random, and the Company did not have the option of rejecting and replacing undesirable ones (as was enjoyed by the C.P.R.). On the whole, it tended to receive a representative sample of the types of land available in a given area. If the area was a good

---

[1]See the Dominion Lands Act of 1872 (37 Vic. C. 19 sec. 5) for the mechanics of disposition. C. Martin, Policy, 5 gives a useful summary of the terms of transfer. The Company's Charter had made it the proprietor of the land, not the owner. It had an established "interest" in the west, but not fee-simple title.

[2]C. Martin, Policy, 5.

[3]J. L. Tyman, Section, 186: It came very close to not being an element at all. In 1875 the H. B. Co. tried to sell its grant to the Dominion for $2,500,000. An agreement was actually reached, but at the last minute the government was not able to find the necessary funds. See J. S. Galbraith, "Land Policies

one, this was satisfactory. If not, it had to be borne. The latter was, to a degree, the case in Sifton. Of the Company's 63 quarters 8% were of the best and 35% were of good quality, while 35% were mostly sandhill and 22% were marsh and water. In comparison with proportions for the entire area, this means that the Company received almost exactly its "share" of the best lands, less of the good lands, and relatively more of sandhill and marsh (see Appendix C).

This factor was strongly reflected in the disposal record for H.B. Co. lands in Sifton. Of the 63 quarters, 21 were still unsold in 1921. Only four of these were of good quality. In effect, the Company was able to dispose of 85% of its better lands (23 of 27), but sold only 47% (17 of 36) of its poorer ones. In the period 1881-1920, 61 quarter-section units were "sold" but the contracts on 22 of these sales were later cancelled before completion, with the lands returning to the market (20 quarters before 1921). Most of this turnover involved the good land. Much of the poor land was never sold, permanently or otherwise, and of that which was more than half of the sales were cancelled before 1921.

The total of Company lands available for sale in Sifton reached a low point of 31 quarters in 1893; but this rose rapidly to 39 on hand in 1897 due to cancellations. It remained at about this level until a minor improvement of sales from 1904 to 1910 again reduced the total available to 30 quarters. These consisted of six quarters of good land and

---

of the Hudson's Bay Company: 1870-1913," C.H.R. XXXII #1 (March, 1951), p. 4.

24 of marsh and sandhill. With this poor inventory it is not surprising that the Company did not make a single sale between 1910 and 1916. In the latter year, however, business picked up sharply under wartime demands. By the end of 1920 the Company had reduced the total of its unsold lands by almost one-third over 1911. And, of the ten quarters sold in this period, fully 80% were of low quality.

The H.B. Co. grant was unique among those allocated under the "Dominion Lands" policy. The other grants and reserves were intended, in different ways, to facilitate settlement. The lands given to the Company were purely and simply a payment for services rendered, with no strings attached. The Company's disposal policy reflected this situation. To its Directors and shareholders "the land... represented capital... and once sold provided no further income". Ideally, this would have meant holding onto the land "until the most profitable bargain could be struck"[4]. In practice, however, this approach was not entirely feasible. For one thing, the Company's unsold lands were liable to municipal and provincial taxation. For another, it had to avoid arousing the resentment of settlers and their political representatives--which outright "landlock" tended to do[5].

---

[4] J. S. Galbraith, "Company", 5.

[5] Ibid, 6: In 1878 for example the Provincial government attempted to impose special (and high) non-resident tax rates which were clearly directed at the Company--the only non-governmental reserve holder at that time. While the measure was overturned in the courts it was, as Galbraith puts it, "an instructive lesson to the directors on the need to consider local public opinion as a factor in land sales policy" (p. 6).

Furthermore, some shareholders were more interested in an immediate capital return on their investment than in long-term profits[6], and therefore insisted upon a policy of rapid disposal. Overall, it can be said that the Company's sales policy was an attempt to balance maximum sales with maximum profits[7]. As might be expected, this optimistic mixture often led to mixed results.

The boom of 1881-83 caught the Company unprepared. Although a special Land Commissioner had been appointed in 1880, his guidelines were rather imprecise. "The policy of the Company", the Directors ordered, "should be to meet the demands of incoming settlers; on the one hand, not checking sales by holding out for extreme prices, and on the other, not sacrificing the Company's property"[8]. In practice this worked out to a policy of selling to anyone who offered a reasonable price: which amounted to a license to speculate, in the atmosphere of the Boom. The terms of sale which had been decided upon in 1880 had been directed at actual settlers. They called for one-eighth of the price down and the rest in seven annual installments, the purchaser being "required to erect fences and buildings" as part of the contract[9]. But these latter conditions were not enforced during the Boom,

---

[6]Ibid, 7 and 13.

[7]J. L. Tyman, Section, 186; see also C. Martin, "Policy", 24.

[8]J. S. Galbraith, "Company", 7: The Commissioner appointed to direct western land disposal was C. J. Brydges, formerly the General Manager of the Grand Trunk Railway.

[9]Ibid, 8.

with predictable results. As one Governor delicately put it in 1882, "The Company has sold a certain amount of land to settlers, and a very large amount to people who bought with the intention of selling again"[10].

In Sifton 14 quarters were sold from 1881 to 1883[11]. Almost all of these went in blocks of a half-section or more. The average price received was $6.89 per acre, with individual quarters going for as high as $8.50 and as low as $6.00 an acre. In 1882 the Company disposed of 20,000 acres a month in Southwestern Manitoba at an average price of $7.35 an acre[12]. Sifton supplied 1120 acres of this, at an average price of $7.43. Some of the land sold appears to have gone to speculators. As has been noted, this was a common problem with H.B. Co. Boom sales. Indeed, there were accusations made of corruption among Company employees; that Company representatives were selling land near the C.P.R. line to "a favoured few"[13]. This may well have been the case with the three H.B. Co. quarters of 26-9-24. This land, just north of the Oak Lake townsite, was sold en bloc in February of 1881 to one Campbell Sweeney for $6 an acre. On the completion

---

[10] Ibid.

[11] Unless otherwise noted data concerning the grants is taken directly, or extrapolated, from the original disposal records of the agency concerned. See Appendix C, Sources and Methods.

[12] J. L. Tyman, Section, 188.

[13] J. S. Galbraith, "Company", 9-10: Unfortunately for the Company, this does not seem to have been discovered until well after the fact.

of the sale in January of 1882 Sweeney resold the land to S. Knight, W. H. Cooper and others--for $50 an acre[14]. Sweeney was either very lucky or very well informed. Others did not do as well. Of the quarters sold in Sifton in 1881-83, the sales on almost half (6 of 14) were later cancelled[15].

The prospect of a rapid and profitable disposal of the Company's landed estate faded dismally with the collapse of the Boom in 1883. In Sifton itself there were no sales at all in either 1884 or 1885, and only one quarter-section was sold each year in 1886 and 1887. Beginning with 1886 the average price per acre received for H.B. Co. lands in the municipality fell to only $5.00 and, from 1886 to 1901, averaged only $5.76 (ranging from $5 to, in one case, $7) for 30 quarters sold. Nor were these lower prices compensated for by a significant improvement in the permanency of sales. Of the quarters sold in this period, 14 (47%) had their contracts cancelled before completion. Prices did not change appreciably in Sifton until 1908-09, when three quarters were sold for an average price of $11.08 an acre. This increase was in line with general Company price levels in the region, but substantial sales at this rate were not made for another five years. From 1911 to 1915 the Company was not able to

---

[14]Brandon Land Titles Office, Abstract Books. Entries for NW & S½ 26-9-24 W1: Some of the profits realized by persons speculating in H.B. Co. lands, which J. L. Tyman, Section, 188 gives, make this 834% return look rather modest by comparison.

[15]The overall Company cancellation rate in Manitoba for 1882 alone was 60% (Galbraith, "Company", 10). The cancellation rate for southwestern Manitoba for the three-year period was slightly lower than this, putting Sifton very close to the regional pattern; see J. L. Tyman, Section, 188.

sell a single acre of the 4800 available, at any price. After the general recession in demand which coincided with the start of the war[16], however, the Company's selling position improved considerably, and by 1920 ten quarters had been disposed of. The average price for these sales was $10.59 per acre, ranging from $5 to $13.90.

Some shareholders were discouraged by the high early ratio of cancellations to sales; which in Sifton alone amounted to 17 quarters cancelled for 35 sold before 1892. In the late 1880's a more conservative sales policy came into force. This move was championed by Donald A. Smith, the largest single shareholder in the Company. In 1883 Smith accused the incumbent Directors of showing a "great want of judgement" in their direction of land disposal and, to make his point, forced his own slate of officers on the Company[17]. This, however, did not stop the pressure from other shareholders who wished the Company to sell land for almost any price for the sake of maintaining annual returns and, so, dividends. In order to negate this influence and protect his investment, Smith made himself Governor in 1889. His land policy was, generally, "to sell land at reasonable prices whenever demand appeared, but not to force land upon a passive market"[18]. This policy of small sales at the going rate to responsible buyers

---

[16]This phenomenon shows more clearly in the C.P.R. grant disposals; see J. B. Hedges, Building the Canadian West (New York: 1939), p. 390 and below.

[17]J. S. Galbraith, "Company", 11-12; see p. 12, note 38 regarding Smith's holdings.

[18]Ibid, 17.

was complemented by efforts to keep costs down, and thus further relieve the burden on shareholders. Municipal assessments, for example, were often challenged; with some success. In 1897 alone a reduction in taxes of $5,447 was achieved by such means[19].

The immediate effect of these controls, at a local level, was to reduce the incidence of cancelled sales. The fact that, from 1896 to 1910, there were none whatsoever on the 16 quarters sold in Sifton seems to show that the Company had begun to screen its customers more carefully. It is significant here to note that, of the 33 persons who bought Company land in Sifton, only one (Sweeney) can positively be identified as an outside speculator[20]. Certainly, all of the buyers who completed their contracts appear to have been local farmers or merchants. All of these bought a half or quarter-section each.

It is also apparent that, after the Boom, H.B. Co. lands were bought in smaller blocks. From 1881 to 1883 most sales units (i.e. quarters sold under one contract) were one-half section or more in size (72%); whereas from 1884 to 1921 most contracts (73%) involved only one quarter-section. This change was in part a matter of demand and in part one of policy.

---

[19]Ibid, 15: The minutes of Sifton's Council for May 15, 1894 contain a motion approving a discount of ten percent on the taxes of two H.B. Co. quarters, which may have been the result of such action.

[20]For some of the problems involved in identifying "speculators" see below, Ch. IV. Generally, when this term has been used it refers specifically to non-resident purchasers who bought land hoping to dispose of it later at a higher price, without making improvements in the meantime.

In the first place, the Company simply did not have a great deal of good land to sell and, at the same time, it demanded relatively high prices. Buyers were thus naturally selective and, after about 1890, their ranks were further thinned by the Company's criteria of 'suitability'. This trend towards small-unit sales was reinforced in 1906, when it was elevated to the status of policy.

Donald Smith's conservative land sales policy was, in terms of the Company's long-term interests, an excellent one. While it entailed the maintenance of a relatively high inventory through the depressed 1890's, these lands were bound to become more desirable (and valuable) as the quantity of free and cheap settlement land available declined. When the second western Boom began around the turn of the century the Company was in an excellent position to dispose of the bulk of its lands at a good price. And it could have. In the six years from 1901 to 1906 the Company sold approximately 1,203,000 acres in western Canada at an average price of $6 an acre[21]. In 1906, however, Smith (Lord Strathcona as of 1897) announced a policy change. Thereafter, the Company would "dispose of not more than one-half section to any individual purchaser... with the corollary that only a portion of each township should be sold"[22] at any given time. The balance would thus remain available as prices rose.

---

[21]See C. Martin, Policy, 27; figures compiled by the Department of the Interior in 1930.

[22]J. S. Galbraith, "Company", 18; see also C. Martin, Policy, 26.

The basis for this decision was the idea that western land values would continue their regular increase until they reached stable, eastern levels. In the short term, it appears to have been profitable. While the Company's gross sales fell after 1906, and amounted to only 529,000 acres in all in the six years from 1907 to 1912, the average price rose to $13.50 per acre[23]. In the long run, however, this approach to disposals proved a serious error; as the Company's officials later conceded[24]. In the boom and bust economy of the west the best, indeed the only, time to sell high-priced land was when farmers had the money in their pockets and were willing to buy. The withheld quarters might increase in value, but if they were not sold the only ones profitting from the increase were the municipalities. The wisdom of Smith's policy was particularly dubious when applied to an area such as Sifton, where the quality of the lands on hand was quite low. Only three quarter-sections in all were sold in the ten years between 1905 and 1916. It is, of course, hard to say how much higher this figure would have been without the above-mentioned restrictions on buyers and quantity; but it is significant that when these were raised after Smith's death in 1914 substantial sales were made. Certainly market conditions in 1905-10 had been at least as favourable as were those during the artificial wartime boom.

---

[23]See C. Martin, Policy, 27; figures compiled by the Department of the Interior in 1930.

[24]Testimony before the Saskatchewan Natural Resources Commission in 1934; see C. Martin, Policy, 26.

FIGURE 1

HBC LANDS AVAILABLE ANNUALLY AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL GRANT

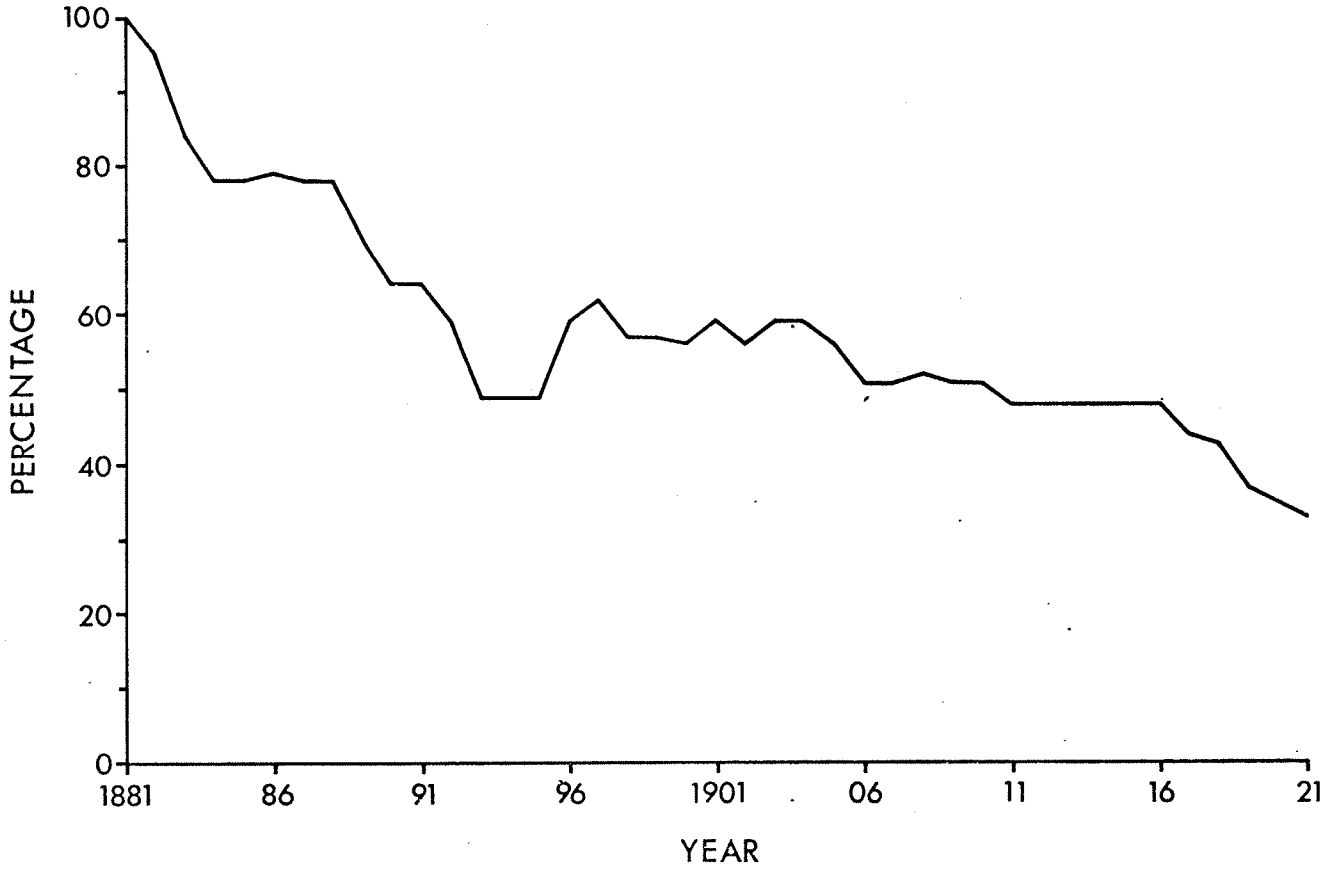
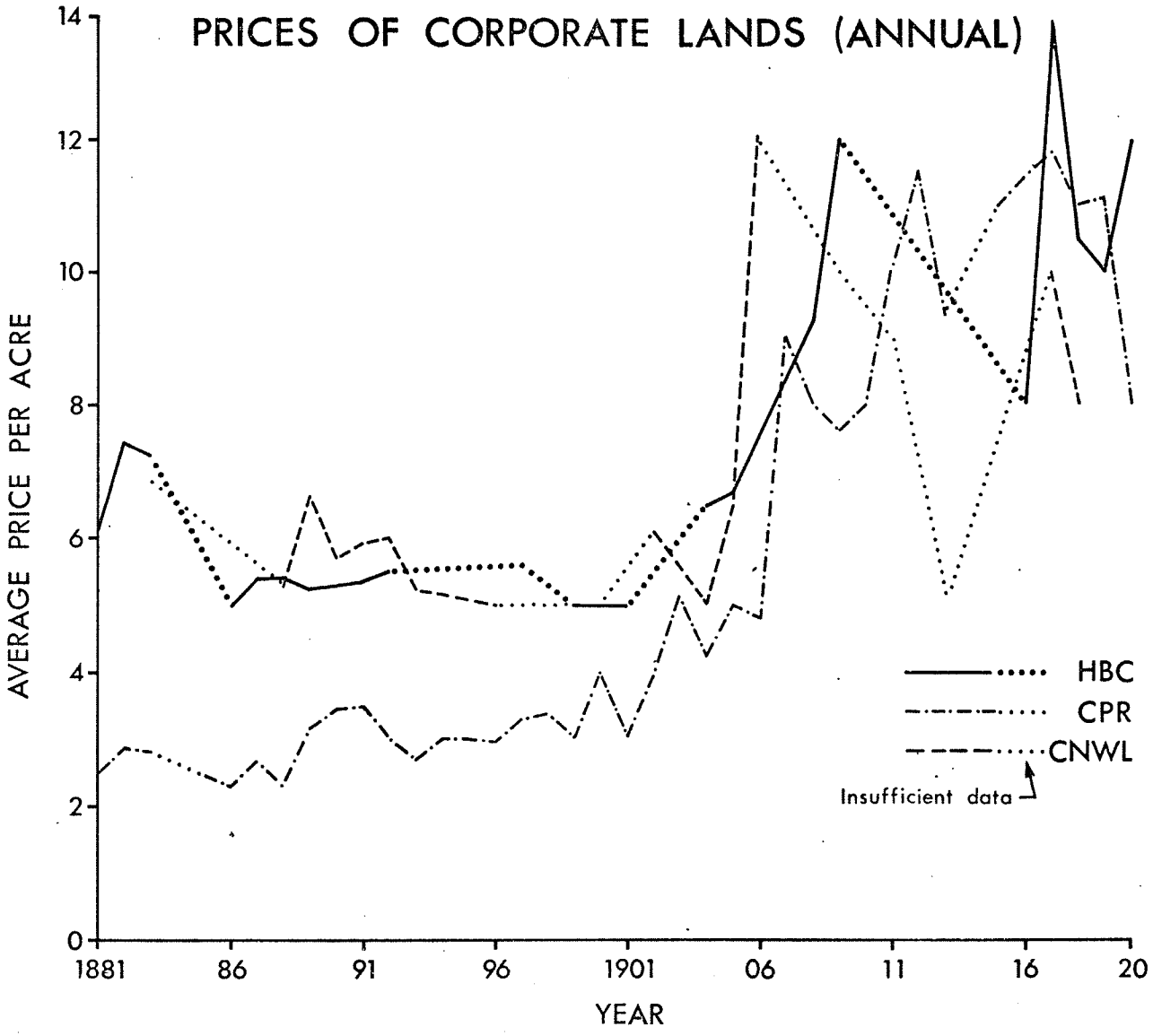


FIGURE 2


PRICES OF CORPORATE LANDS (ANNUAL)
AVERAGE PRICE PER ACRE
0
2
4
6
8
10
12
14
1881
86
91
96
1901
06
11
16
20
YEAR
HBC
CPR
CNWL
Insufficient data

In 1911 the H.B. Co. had the highest proportion of lands unsold of any of the grants in Sifton. By 1921, despite fairly substantial sales during the war, it still had one of the highest rates (33%). One reason for this can doubtless be found in the relatively low quality of the Company's lands, but this alone does not explain everything. The inventory situation in Sifton was in fact fairly representative of the state of the grant throughout western Canada. By 1930 the Company had disposed of only 61% of its original 6,630,000 acres in the fertile belt, and was "saddled with land, in townships all over Western Canada, where there is no one adjacent to buy it"[25]. This situation can be directly attributed to the Company's sales policy, and especially that followed after 1906. Galbraith's conclusion, that the Company "acted in accordance with standards which should be expected of an intelligently directed business enterprise"[26], is open to question. Granted, the Company was in a difficult position, having to compete with land disposal agencies which were working towards much different objectives. Nonetheless, it would appear that the H.B. Co.'s policy makers failed time and again to understand and adapt themselves to western market conditions.

Ch. II Part 3: The Canadian Pacific Railway Co. Grant

One of the principal terms of British Columbia's entry into Confederation in 1871 was that a transcontinental railway

---

[25] J. S. Galbraith, "Company", 18, quoting a H.B. Co. official's testimony before the S.N.R. Commission of 1934; figures above are from C. Martin, Policy, 26.

[26] Ibid, 21.

be built within ten years. The first charter for this was issued in February of 1873 to Sir Hugh Allan and his associates by the Conservative government. This charter promised the Syndicate thirty million dollars in cash and credit and fifty million acres of land, in return for the construction of a railway. The company was given the option of rejecting any lands "not of the fair average quality". The Pacific Scandal, of course, ruined this lucrative agreement. In 1874 the Liberal government offered ten thousand dollars and twenty thousand acres per mile for a transcontinental railway, but could not attract any capital. For the next five years little progress was made. In 1879, when a new Conservative government was formed, it first investigated possible means of building the line itself. Recognizing that the value of the land would be greatly affected by the proximity of a rail line, a "belt" scheme was drawn up. Under this arrangement all of the land within five miles of the line was to be sold for $6 an acre. For the next fifteen miles outwards one-quarter of the land was set aside for free (80-acre) homesteads, one-quarter for sales at $2.50 an acre to supplement the homesteads, and one-half was for sale at $5 an acre for the specific purpose of financing the railway. It should be noted here that this was essentially a "sales" policy of settlement, in that four-fifths of the land within twenty-miles on each side of the line would have had to have been purchased by those desiring to settle.

This scheme was discarded in 1881 when it was decided, once again, to turn construction over to a private company.

This time, the scandal-sensitive Conservatives offered "only" twenty-five million dollars and twenty-five million acres as an inducement. The new Canadian Pacific Railway Company was to receive as its lands all of the odd-numbered sections within a forty-eight mile belt along the actual rail line (except School sections 11 and 29). Two important qualifications, however, rendered this pattern somewhat more flexible than that of the H.B. Co. lands. First, the C.P.R. was allowed to compensate itself for mileage built in Ontario and B.C. (where the Crown land was provincially owned) by taking land wherever it could be found; which meant the prairies, outside of the forty-eight mile belt. Secondly, it was provided that, "if any... sections consist in a material degree of land not fairly fit for settlement, the Company shall not be obliged to receive the same as part of the grant"[1]. Taken together these concessions meant that, subject to the odd-section plan, the C.P.R. could pick and chose the best lands available in the best areas.

Between 1872 and 1880 the federal government had spent a great deal of money surveying a Pacific railway route. All of this work was based on the premise that the line would follow, roughly, the route of the old cart road to Edmonton by way of the valley of the North Saskatchewan, and from there would go through Yellowhead Pass to the Pacific coast.

---

[1]Canada, Statutes 1881, 44 Vic. c. 1 sec. 11 (Charter of the C.P.R.); italics added. Although the Liberals attacked the 1881 contract at length and in detail, the "fit for settlement" clause and its significance were largely ignored. See J. B. Hedges, Subsidy, Ch. I and p. 31.

In 1881, however, the new Syndicate suddenly decided to take a southern route straight across the plains to an as-yet undiscovered southern pass. The specific reason for making this decision is not certain, but it seems probable that it was based on four main considerations. First, the C.P.R. Co. wished to exclude American lines from any share of Canadian traffic. Second, the C.P.R. board had been convinced by naturalists' reports that the so-called "Palliser's Triangle" was arable. Third, as one official put it, "a railroad through virgin territory creates its own business". And, lastly, the southern route would avoid all of the established settlements west of Manitoba, and therefore the Company would have no competition in setting up new towns[2]. Whatever its rationale, or its wisdom, this decision was the making of the Sifton area, for it put the main C.P.R. line straight

---

[2]See A. S. Morton, History, p. 72-73 et al; the quotation is from Pierre Berton's Last Spike, p. 19, who attributes it to James J. Hill. A much different explanation, however, is given by William Pearce, the first Inspector of Dominion Lands for the D.L. Board in 1882, and later a C.P.R. executive. In a chapter of his unpublished history of the West Pearce asserted that the change was made because J. J. Hill "Had no intention of committing the financial resources of the Syndicate to the economic folly of attempting the construction of a line through the Rocky Mountains or across the Canadian Shield". Hill intended to bypass these areas through the U.S., on lines which he personally controlled; this despite the terms of the Charter. Funnelling traffic to the southeast by well-placed branch lines, he would then have had a monopoly on traffic in the northern Plains. This plan was strongly opposed by Macdonald, for obvious reasons, and later by William Van Horne, for personal ones. When Hill and his American partner John S. Kennedy withdrew from the Syndicate in 1883, the latter then took charge of completing the line along an all-Canadian route. According to Pearce, the dubious southern route finally selected by Van Horne was chosen specifically to cut Hill's Northern Pacific out of Canadian traffic. See E. A. Mitchner, "Pearce", p. 5-10. His account is derived from a draft of Pearce's history in the Pearce Papers at the University of Alberta.

through the townships north of Oak Lake[3]. Flat Creek, the first winter's railhead for the C.P.R., was established in Township 9-23 in 1881, and was a jumping-off point for settlers until the line moved on in 1882. Many settlers, naturally, were content with a very short jump.

Having been granted land, and having determined the route, it was then necessary for the Company to locate the actual land in the grant. In most areas, this consisted mainly of examining and then enrolling all of the eligible, vacant odd-numbered sections within the main belt; proximity to the line being important enough in itself to outweigh most other considerations. In Sifton, however, the process was slightly more complicated. It would appear that the C.P.R. accepted all of the odd-numbered sections in townships 8 and 9-23, 9-24, and 9-25 in 1882[4]. The main line passed through three of these, while township 8-23 was the only one of the remaining six in the R.M. which was not cut off from it by creeks or marshes. These early selections, accordingly, followed the C.P.R.'s initial policy "to examine the lands at and surrounding the principal centers of settlement and those in the immediate neighborhood of the railway, which

---

[3]The final C.P.R. line north of Oak Lake followed a route laid out in 1879-80 by Dominion surveyors. This was surveyed to provide either an option to a more north-westerly route, or a branch line, as circumstances required. The surveyors were particularly interested in providing access to the southern coal fields. See S. Fleming, Reports and Documents in Reference to the C.P.R. (Ottawa: 1880), p. 248-49 and p. 260-62.

[4]A specific reference to this transfer could not be found, but see J. B. Hedges, Building, p. 38 notes 1 & 2: NW 35-9-23 had been taken up by a squatter, but it seems that SW 34-9-25 was taken as compensation for this.

would naturally be the first sought by the settler"[5]. Two sections in this area were designated the townsites of Oak Lake and Griswold (23-9-24 and 25-9-23) in 1883 and 1884 respectively[6]. Both of these, incidently, had had two earlier sites and may have been moved to avoid property held by speculators[7].

---

[5]Canada, Sessional Papers 1885, 48 Vic. n. 25 p. 191; extract from a letter written to the Department of the Interior (Lands Branch) by C. Drinkwater, the Secretary of the C.P.R.

[6]Due to the different disposal provisions which governed them, these townsite sections have not been included in this study, and have been treated as undisposed C.P.R. land throughout. Actually, both the Oak Lake and Griswold townsites were transferred to the Canada North West Land Co. under an agreement made June 6, 1882. This gave the C.N.W.L. Co. control of all townsites on the main line between Brandon and the B.C. border, established within a year of the completion of the main line between these points (1885). The C.P.R. received half the proceeds from the sale of these lands (after expenses). See J. B. Hedges, Building, 85-86. The R.M. of Sifton later had some problems concerning the taxation of C.N.W.L. Co. lots in Oak Lake. Hedges (p. 82) notes that the C.P.R. was often accused of sheltering C.N.W.L. Co. lands under its twenty-year exemption. This appears to have been the case in Sifton; definitely so for farm lands (all of which remained under the C.P.R. title transfer system), and probably also for townsite lots. An item in the Council Minutes for July 21, 1894 indicates that extracting taxes from the C.N.W.L. Co. was not always an easy matter.

[7]As was the case in many places, the C.P.R. had some difficulty in locating its stations and townsites in the Sifton area. That of Griswold was moved at least once "Due to some controversy regarding the price of the land" (Griswold United Church Women, Bridging the Years, n. p., 1967, p.5), and that of Oak Lake twice; once, westwards, in 1882 due to the unsuitable terrain of Flat Creek and once more, to the east, in 1882 or 1883, for reasons unknown (P. Fall and M. Heapy, "History of Oak Lake: 1881-1900", Unpub. Ms. 1946, p. 1). As a result of such uncertainty, some problems with title arose. In 1883 the secretary of the C.P.R. was compelled to write the Minister of the Interior that "it is becoming a matter of serious importance and of immediate urgency, that provision should be made for granting title to the numerous applicants for town and village lots along the line of the railway", Oak Lake being one of the points specifically mentioned (Canada, Sessional Papers 1883, 46 Vic. n. 27 p. 46). It might be

In 1884 the C.P.R. began the selection of the balance of its grant lands, and the remaining five townships of Sifton were examined. As a result of this scrutiny, 52% (123.5) of the 237.5 quarter-sections available were rejected, most of which were marsh or sandhill. Most of the 114 accepted were in townships 7-23 and 7-25, 23 of these having already been sold by the Company. As an official later put it, "the Company's standard for lands at the outset was much higher than the Act warranted"[8]. Under the pressure of having to find twenty-five million acres to fill the grant, though, their criteria were soon lowered. In 1887 the Company accepted 43 of the quarters in Sifton which it had rejected in 1884. Most of these were in 7-25[9]. By 1892 they had taken up 74 more quarter-sections in the four southwestern townships. Ideally the C.P.R. should have held 92,160 acres in the R.M. of Sifton, given sixteen sections per township. As it was, and even after the last additions, it had only 86% of this figure. The 14% unclaimed consisted of the open water and permanent marsh area around Oak Lake. The C.P.R.

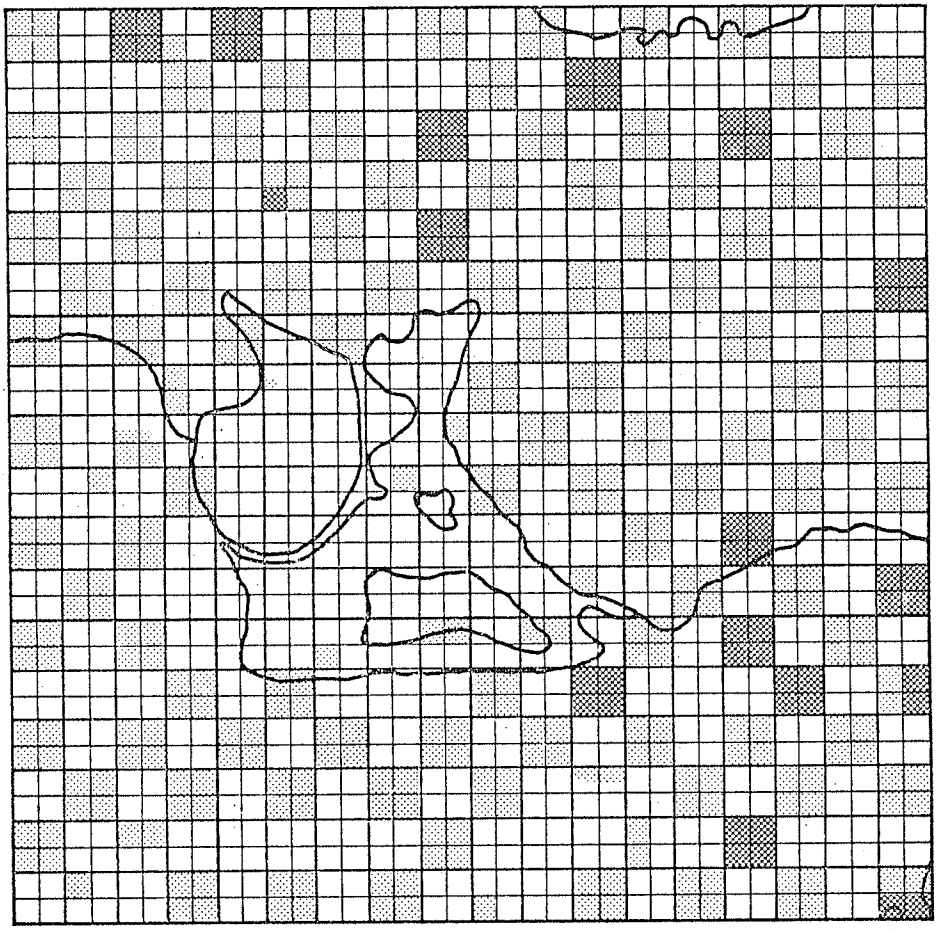
---

inferred from this that the C.P.R.'s rather loose attitude towards "selling" land before it had a specific claim to it was not confined to farm lands (see below). Nor were townsite problems unique to the Company's hectic early years. When the Pipestone Extension was being built in the 1890's at least one station site caused problems. According to a local historian, "The C.P.R. first chose a site for the village of Deleau on Tom Bird's land SE 20-7-23 , but he valued his land too highly, so when Mr. Sebastian Deleau donated his land, the present site was chosen"; the new station being named after the donor (I. Robson, Deleau-Bethel, p. 3).

[8]Quoted by J. L. Tyman, Section, 158.

[9]Canada, Sessional Papers 1888, 51 Vic. N. 25b p. 129-150.

MAP 3



CPR lands

Lands acquired by CNWL

THE CPR AND CNWL GRANTS IN SIFTON

refused to take any totally submerged areas as part of its grant, and took a total of only 33 quarters with a high proportion of marsh. Even then, 400 acres of the latter were later surrendered to the Dominion[10].

Except in the last-mentioned category the C.P.R. ended up with a fairly representative selection of lands in Sifton. Of the quarters claimed by the C.P.R. 7% were of the best and 56% were of good quality, while 30% were sandhill and 7% were marsh. This compares quite closely with the area totals, the C.P.R. having proportionately more good land and less marsh. Altogether, 505 quarter-sections were claimed by the Company. Of these, 64 were later transferred to the Canada North West Land Company (which will be discussed separately), 2.5 were surrendered to the Dominion, and 109.25 remained on hand in 1921[11]. Those unsold included 34% of better quality, but 57% were sandhill and 9% were marsh. As can be seen, 66% of the unsold land in 1921 was of poor quality, while only 37% of the original grant lands fell within this range. Like the H.B. Co., the C.P.R. found few buyers for these types of lands.

The fact that the C.P.R. did not "locate" all of its lands until 1892 should not be taken to mean that the Company did not sell land until it had been located. On the contrary,

---

[10]The exact date of this transfer is not known, but seems to have been 1891 since the land went directly into the Provincial Swamp Land grant (see below). To simplify the situation, the 400 acres have been added to the C.P.R. net disposal total for 1891.

[11]This figure includes the Station sections (eight quarters) which in fact were not on the market.

"location" in some cases did not take place until after a sale had been made. For example, 23 quarters were sold in the southern half of the R.M. before any were officially set aside there. It would seem that the Company followed the generous principle that any land on a potential C.P.R. section in the forty-eight mile belt which anyone wanted could be assumed to be C.P.R. land. That is, if a settler wanted it, it was by definition "fairly fit for settlement" and therefore the rightful property of the Company. A particularly blatant example of such semantic gymnastics, involving two sections in a township immediately north of the study area, may be noted here. In 1886 the Secretary of the C.P.R. wrote the Dominion Lands office that these sections were on the Company's list of rejected lands (for 1885) but that "We have an opportunity of selling these sections... and I shall be glad therefore if you will have them placed on the accepted list"[12]. This open-ended policy was facilitated by the fact that, under the terms of the 1881 Charter, the land grant was exempted from taxation for twenty years. This meant that until 1901 most unsold "C.P.R. land" in Sifton was actually Dominion land designated as the property of the C.P.R. Before this date the Company, in most instances, did not actually receive title to the land until a sales contract was fulfilled, at which time it applied for patent in the name of the purchaser[13].

---

[12]Canada, Sessional Papers 1887, 50 Vic. n. 34 p. 83.

[13]The provision for a twenty year exemption for the main line grant proved to be ambiguous, even then. The municipalities claimed that it started from the date of the Charter, and therefore that all C.P.R.-owned lands were taxable as of 1901. The Company, on the other hand, claimed that it began

This game of juggling titles later caused problems for both the Company and the Municipality. Municipal governments naturally wished to tax C.P.R. lands, to relieve the burden on their ratepayers. The C.P.R., of course, was protected from this by the twenty year tax exemption. However, many municipalities felt that lands which had been sold by the Company and which then had reverted to it by cancellation were no longer protected by the exemption. These accordingly were assessed and, when the C.P.R. refused to pay the taxes levied, were sold at tax sale; being usually redeemed by the Company, under protest. Unfortunately for the municipalities, when the issue went to court in 1891 a decision was handed down in favour of the C.P.R.[14]. The municipalities had thus to compensate the Company. In 1894 the R.M. of Sifton found itself "indebted to the C.P.R. for monies paid by said Railway Company to redeem lands from tax sale" for a total of $9,021.35: this, at a time when the annual budget of the municipality was only $8,622.00. The R.M. (under the Municipal Act) was not allowed to issue debentures to cover the deficit, and had to persuade the C.P.R. to accept "as cash" receipts for $4,041.25 in taxes outstanding against land and to take a note for the

---

with the issue of an actual patent to the Company, regardless of the date of reservation. In litigation which went all the way to the Privy Council the C.P.R. successfully defended its interpretation. See J. B. Hedges, Building, 81-82, J. L. Tyman, Section, 180, and below.

[14] "Cornwallis vs. the C.P.R."; see Supreme Court of Canada Reports 1891, vol. XIX p. 703-12.

balance owing at 6% interest[15]. The municipality, in the event, was not able to tax the bulk of unsold C.P.R. lands until 1921, and even then some probably escaped[16].

According to one historian, "Other companies sold land; the Canadian Pacific actually colonized it"[17]. Unlike the H.B. Co. the C.P.R. did not treat its land grant simply as a capital reserve, to be disposed of for maximum profit. Instead, their lands were treated as a means to a larger end of encouraging the general settlement of the west. For this purpose the C.P.R. used its powerful propaganda machinery to promote the disposal of Dominion lands as well as its own[18]. As a Company official noted in 1885, supporting the free homestead system was "the most practical and effective method of giving

---

[15]See R.M. of Sifton, "Minutes of Council", entries for Jan. 20, and Feb. 12, 1894. See also J. L. Tyman, Section, 179-80 and J. B. Hedges, Building, 81-82 in regard to the municipal taxation problem.

[16]The title to most of the unsold C.P.R. land in Sifton was not transferred to the Company until 1901, and therefore was tax-free until 1921. At a Council meeting on May 14, 1901 a hopeful motion "That a C.P.R. lands be assessed" was passed. However, later entries show taxes being cancelled because of land reverting to C.P.R. ownership, indicating that the exemption was still in force. For examples, see June 1, 1909, July 27, 1909 and August 5, 1910.

[17]J. B. Hedges, Building, 121.

[18]See Ibid, p. 80. Hedges claims that in 1884-87 the Company focused its efforts almost exclusively on the disposal of Government lands, rather than its own. If this was the case, it does not appear to have affected C.P.R. land sales very much. Gross disposal acreages in Sifton in 1886 and 1887 were the third and fifth highest annual totals, respectively, in the study period. While those for 1884 and 1885 were very low, this was the case for every grant at that time.

value to, and creating a market for, the Company's lands"[19]. Clearly, the C.P.R.'s motives were not altruistic: neither, however, were they myopic. The C.P.R. had two primary means of generating revenue; the freight traffic on its lines, and the sale of its lands. The first, as experience soon confirmed, was by far the most profitable and consistent source of income of the two[20]. Sales profits were therefore subordinated to the promotion of freight traffic; which meant putting as much land as possible into the hands of actual settlers, who would produce crops to be carried out and purchase goods carried in.

The C.P.R. sought actual settlers, not speculators, as customers for its land sales. This was shown from the first sales contracts offered. In 1881 C.P.R. lands were priced uniformly at $2.50 an acre, with six years allowed for payment; but cultivation requirements were also attached[21]. To attract

---

[19]Quoted by C. Martin, Policy, 84; see also J. L. Tyman, Section, 174.

[20]See H. A. Innis, A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway (Toronto: c. 1971), Ch. 9 especially pp. 265-66. Revenue from the sale of land was certainly not to be scorned in terms of total receipts. The income from this source, however, fluctuated wildly, and inevitably declined as the better lands were sold off. Innis concluded that "Net earnings were... largely dependent on freight earnings and on freight traffic", the rate of which had "depended directly and indirectly to a very large extent on the expansion of western Canada" (268-69).

[21]According to J. B. Hedges, Subsidy, 119-20 "The land regulations promulgated by the Company in 1881 were frankly an adaption of those of the St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba Company, also controlled by the Canadian Pacific Syndicate. The essential feature of this plan was the sale of land to actual settlers, with appropriate inducements, in the form of a rebate upon the purchase price, to those who would go into occupation of the land". In Building, 62-65, Hedges extends this background to American experiences generally.

settlers a rebate of $1.25 an acre was offered for every one broken within four years of purchase. For a resident farmer only one-half the acreage had to be broken to qualify for the rebate, while a non-resident had to break half as much again. These measures, however, did little to discourage speculation, for the sales regulations did not provide for any penalty beyond a reversion to the original (and still low) price if the conditions were not met. Beginning in 1882 the Company tried reserving to itself the right to cancel a contract completely if the cultivation requirements were not met. This was regarded as "the one protection of the company against purely speculative purchases on the one hand, and retarded production by the settler on the other" (i.e. taking more land than could actually be used)[22]. But, in itself, this was a stopgap rather than a solution.

Late in 1882 the Company put a more-flexible sales policy into effect. The flat rate of $2.50 per acre was dropped, and in its place a choice of contracts was offered. A purchaser could pay $2.50 per acre for the land if he was willing to accept cultivation conditions (half the acreage without residence); in which case a 50% rebate was allowed, this being applied to the next payment due. Alternatively, a purchaser could take the land free of conditions; but had then to pay $4 per acre or more for it. In effect, actual settlers willing to prove the fact were being offered land at about two-fifths the price that persons with dubious intentions were expected

---

[22]J. B. Hedges, Building, 68-69.

to pay. This scheme remained in effect until 1888. At this time, the minimum price was reduced to $2 an acre. Cultivation requirements (with rebates) were made an option, with repayment time being extended to ten years when it was taken[23]. One reason for ending the formal differentiation may have been the fact that, by 1888, many purchasers would have been established local farmers; in partially settled areas such as Sifton at least.

About one-fourth of the people who bought C.P.R. land in Sifton earned rebates, which were set at half the purchase price (for the acreage broken) throughout the study period. The Company was not overly shy about cracking down on those who, in certain cases, failed to meet its conditions. While there is no way of knowing how many of the cancellations of sales contracts were initiated by the Company, lesser actions were common. In one instance rebates were denied in 1884 due to "poor cultivation". In another, the first contract for $2.50 an acre was annulled in 1887 and replaced by one for $5; and in yet another it was decided in 1888 to deny rebates, while keeping the price at $2.50[24]. It would appear that such actions were directed mainly at persons whose claim to being a genuine settler was in doubt. The C.P.R. seems to have been more sympathetic towards actual farmers. The

---

[23]For the above see J. B. Hedges, Building, p. 68-69 and p. 76-77. J. L. Tyman, Section, p. 172 passim has a useful summary of changing conditions as well as interesting illustrations of their actual operation.

[24]C.P.R. Co., "Sales Records"; see 13-8-24, S½ 15-7-23 and NE 35-9-23.

payments on one contract, for example, were extended for a farmer whose crop was very light in 1897, and who stated his intention of putting in ninety acres of wheat in the next season. They were also willing to hold off for another who, in the same year, lost his whole crop off forty acres when the wind blew the seed out early in the season[25].

A general inclination towards the promotion of settlement is also apparent in the prices which the C.P.R. charged for its lands. Until 1888 the average price of land in Sifton was less than three dollars an acre, going as low as $2.26 in 1888 when a half-section (of fairly good land) was sold for $1.25 an acre[26A]. The highest unit price charged in the period was $6 an acre. From 1889 to 1902 the yearly average price stayed below $4 an acre, and for the whole period averaged $3.24 an acre. Individual prices ranged from $1.50 to $7. From 1903 to 1906 the average price was $4.80, with a range of from $4 to $6. In 1907, however, the average price of C.P.R. land in Sifton jumped sharply[26B], from

---

[25]Ibid; see NE 25-8-23 and NW 27-8-23. See also J. B. Hedges, Building, 398-99 for the Company's official attitude to such problems.

[26A]Since the minimum set price for C.P.R. land at this time was $2 an acre and since, in the same year, a section of marsh was sold for $1.50 an acre, this $1.25 price for quite good land (N½ 13-9-23) is rather surprising. By coincidence, no doubt, the bargain was struck by C. W. Speers, a prominent local Liberal who later became the Dominion Colonization Agent for western Canada. He was personally selected for this post by Clifford Sifton.

[26B]According to J. B. Hedges, Building, 166 the C.P.R. in 1903 raised its price on all lands east of the Third Meridian (near Moose Jaw) to a maximum of $10 per acre, depending on location. However, only one quarter in Sifton went for this high a price before 1907.

$4.82 for the previous year to $9; and remained close to this level until 1914 when, for the first time in the study period, no sales were made. From 1907 to 1913 the annual average price was $9.06 per acre. The recovery of demand after 1914 was reflected in prices. The 17 quarters sold from 1915 to 1920 realized an average price of $10.61, with two going for $13.50. Until 1913, average sale prices in Sifton were generally close to those for the C.P.R. grant as a whole. After that date, however, they dropped sharply to less than two-thirds of the general average. This can be accounted for by the inclusion of Alberta irrigation-land sales (which sold for between $42.95 and $66.93 per acre) in the latter figure. Sifton's prices were probably close to the general rates for ordinary C.P.R. lands throughout the period[27].

The prices charged by the C.P.R. for its lands were, until the general increase which occurred after 1906, consistently around half the figure received by the H.B. Co. and the C.N.W.L. Co. for their sales in the same period. This may be explained by the fact that, as the Manitoba Free Press put it in 1890, the C.P.R. was "doubly interested--to get a price for its land and to create traffic. That price can never be an exorbitant or unreasonable one as long as the Company has to compete against free homesteads at a low figure"[28]. This competition served to keep prices down,

---

[27]See J. B. Hedges, Building, 388 for a table of C.P.R. disposal volume and prices, and p. 392 regarding average C.P.R. prices after 1914.

[28]Manitoba Free Press, May 15, 1890.

particularly in the early years. Later on, the need to encourage traffic argued that prices should be kept relatively low to maintain a reserve of cheap land for new settlers, and for established ones wishing to expand.

This is not to say that the C.P.R. did not make a profit from its lands. Chester Martin gives the Company's farm land sale revenue as of 1934 as $143,961,248.00, and its total administrative costs in selling the land as $87,745,567.00[29]. This amounted to a return of about 61% on the investment over fifty-three years. To put it another way, J. B. Hedges has estimated that, as of 1937, the Company would be left with "a net profit of something more than $2.00 per acre on the 19,000,000 acres sold to date, if and when outstanding debts were collected[30]. This was not a great deal when it is considered that $58,700,000 had been spent on construction by Dec. 31, 1883 alone[31]. In all, it would seem that neither the price of C.P.R. lands paid by settlers, nor the direct C.P.R. profits from the sales were excessive. On the other hand, the indirect profits following from such a sales policy were enormous. Harold Innis' note that:

> The total proceeds secured from the land grant and town sites to 1916 were less than the net revenue from operation

---

[29] C. Martin, Policy, 83.

[30] J. B. Hedges, Building, 397.

[31] J. L. Mcdougall, Canadian Pacific: A Brief History (Montreal: McGill Univ. Press, 1968), p. 57; $37.4 million of this was drawn from the Syndicate's private assets, and the balance from subsidies.

> for three years ending June 30, 1916, and about equal to the gross revenue from operation in the year 1912 [32]

tells the whole story.

The disposal of C.P.R. lands in Sifton can be separated into three periods, each a reflection in varying degrees of Company sales policy and general conditions. The first period, from 1881 to 1890, was one of rapid disposal. In the first five years, from 1881 to 1885, the C.P.R. sold 60 quarter-sections; 35 of these in 1881-82 alone. Of the latter, the sales of seven quarters (12%) were later cancelled, four within two years. Rather ironically, the first sale made by the Company in Sifton contributed two of these. On Oct. 29, 1881 the S½ 13-7-23 was sold, as C.P.R. Land Sale Contract No. 49, to one Rufus Atchinson of Winnipeg for $2.50 per acre. In 1884 the sale was cancelled, probably indicating that Atchinson was a speculator who made only the down payment[33]. The gross sales for the first five years, however, comprised only 14% of the C.P.R.'s holdings in the municipality[34]. Given the frenzy of the Boom this was not an exceptionally high amount, and would seem to show that some restraint was being exercised by the Company--if the record is complete. More than 47% of the C.P.R. sales contracts begun in southwestern

---

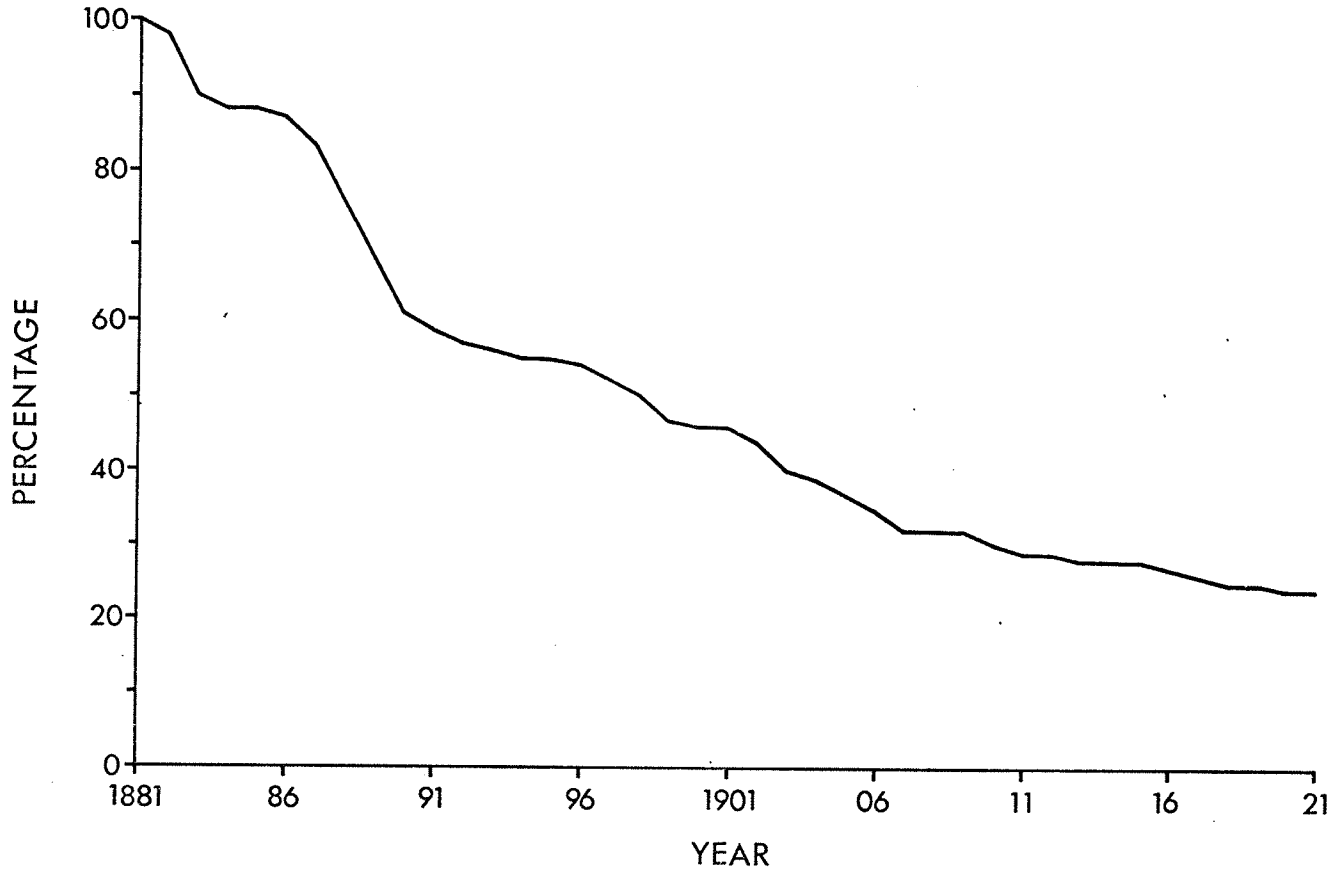
[32] H. A. Innis, History, 265-66.

[33] The next two contracts, Nos. 174 and 233, each of which was for a complete section, fared somewhat better. Both were paid off on schedule by 1886 with both owners earning sizable rebates.

[34] All totals are computed on the basis of 70,609 acres (the C.P.R. grant less the land transferred to the C.N.W.L. Co.); the specific figure here is based on the lands available for sale as of Jan. 1, 1886.

FIGURE 3

CPR LANDS AVAILABLE ANNUALLY AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL GRANT



Manitoba in this period were later cancelled, whereas sales records for Sifton show only 13% cancellations in terms of actual acreage. Some data for Sifton may, consequently, be missing[35].

After a short drop in 1884-85 following the Boom, during which only 1025 acres were disposed of, the rate of sales again improved due to better crops and another influx of settlers. From 1886 to 1889 the C.P.R. sold 122 quarters in Sifton, of which only nine were later cancelled, for a net sale of 113 quarters. This amounted to 26% of the grant acreage in the R.M. By the end of 1889 a grand total of 41% of the total C.P.R. grant had been disposed of. Of this, 78% was of the best (12%) or good quality (66%), while 18% was sandhill and only 4% was marsh. The annual rate of disposal--the proportion of the lands available which were taken--averaged about 5.3% per year in the first decade, with highs of over 8% in 1882, 1887 and 1888 and over 13% in 1889. The low year was 1884, when only half of one percent of the acreage on hand was taken.

In the second period of sales, from 1891 to 1906, C.P.R. sales in Sifton settled down to a slower and more stable pace. After 1893, according to the Company, its lands "were seldom sold to new immigrants but generally to those who have already established themselves on free homesteads, and who, from their improved conditions are able to increase their

---

[35]The figure for Southwest Manitoba is from J. L. Tyman, Section, 172. Sifton was on the outer edge of the main Boom area and consequently the lower cancellation figure may be relatively accurate.

holdings by the purchase of adjoining railway lands"[36]. In other words, the Company's long-term policies were beginning to pay off. From 1891 to 1906 the C.P.R. disposed of an average of almost nine quarter-sections per year in Sifton, with lows of one (1894[37]), and highs of 12.5 (1897) and 16 (1902). Moreover, in the same period only seven quarters were cancelled; 5% of the 130 sold. The annual rate of disposals, while slightly less than that of the first decade, was nonetheless steady. From 1891 to 1906 an average of 4% of the acreage available in the R.M. was taken per year, ranging from 0.4% in 1894 to 8.3% in 1902. Taking the period from 1901 to 1906 on its own, the annual average was 5.7%; higher than that of 1881-1890, despite the generally lower quality of the lands available. Altogether, in the sixteen years from 1891 to 1906 net sales in Sifton amounted to 19,064 acres, or about 27% of the total grant area. At the start of 1907 only 32.4% of the original grant remained on hand. None of the lands available were of the best quality, while only 26% of the C.P.R.'s good quality lands remained on hand.

The third and last sales-period in Sifton, from 1907 to 1920, had several features which clearly marked it off

---

[36]Quoted by J. B. Hedges, Building, 81 from the Annual Report for 1894. Note that the start of this second period more or less coincides with the 1888 change of contract provisions, which reduced the price advantage given to cultivators--a reasonable step if most purchasers were in fact established farmers.

[37]J. B. Hedges, Building, 389 notes that only 9482 acres (net) were sold in the entire main line grant in this year by the Company.

from those before. In the first place, as has already been noted, C.P.R. land prices jumped sharply in 1907, and remained high thereafter. Also, the volume and rate of sales fell sharply, while that of cancellations rose. In the fourteen years from 1907 to 1920 some 5880 acres were sold, but the sales on 800 acres were later cancelled; a rate of 13.6% for the total period, and one of 33.9% for the five years in which all of the later-cancelled sales were made (1916-20). The annual rate of disposal was low and uneven. An average of only 2.1% of the lands available were sold each year, ranging from none whatsoever in 1914 (the first and only year in the study period in which the C.P.R. failed to sell any land in Sifton) to a peak of 5.2% in 1916. The affect of the prewar depression and the uncertainty engendered by the start of the First World War, together, can be seen in the low rate of disposal from 1911 to 1915. During this period, an average of only 1.3% of the lands available were taken each year, with a minor peak of 3.1% in 1912. Similarly, the effects of wartime demand can be seen from 1916 to 1920, when the annual average doubled to 2.6%. In all, this third sales period was not an auspicious one for the C.P.R. Only 8.3% of the total grant area was disposed between 1906 and 1921, leaving a balance of 24.1% on hand in the latter year. Moreover, buyers had naturally been selective in choosing their lands, given the high prices. More than 90% of the quarters sold in the third period were either good quality land or the better marginal sandhill and marsh. The result

was that the Company had little saleable land left in 1921; as was shown by the fact that 89% of it was still unsold in 1931[38].

The intentions of the purchasers of C.P.R. lands were as, if not more important in the process of settlement than the rate or volume of disposals. A study of Company sales records shows that 221 individuals purchased land directly from the C.P.R. in Sifton. Of these, 137 (62%) bought only one quarter, of which all but 13 appear to have been local residents. Some 58 persons (26%) bought two quarters, and of these 52 were locals. The six non-residents had all made their purchases in 1882 and, of their twelve quarters, four had been cancelled by 1887 and seven had been resold to local residents by 1901. Five people (2.3%) bought three quarters, and all were locals. Seventeen purchased four quarters (7.7%): twelve of these were local owners and, of the five remaining, three had resold their land to locals before the end of the study period. Four persons purchased more than four quarters (for a total of 42), and all of these were prominent local farmers or ranchers. It would appear that, while outside parties were buying C.P.R. lands in Sifton, and particularly in the early years, the total amount of land involved was quite small. Approximately 9% of the total sale acreage was involved in such transactions, and much of this quickly found its way into local hands. Since, in any case, all outside owners were not necessarily

---

[38]Extrapolated from C.P.R. sales data and confirmed by R.M. of Sifton Assessment rolls, 1930-33.

"speculators", the incidence of speculation in C.P.R. lands in Sifton seems to have been relatively low. Hedges has concluded that, between 1881 and 1896, the Company's determination

> to sell only to actual settlers proved wholly impracticable. It was an unrealistic approach to the problem of land sale. There were times when the financial necessities of the company dictated another course. [39]

In Sifton, however,--a fairly representative section of the eastern part of the main line grant--it would appear that the Company's "resolve" was in fact followed through. It may well be that this was as much a result of circumstances as of design, but it can at least be said that the Company's intentions were fairly consistent throughout the study-period.

C.P.R. land disposals in Sifton were closely related to the general trends of settlement in the area. The first decade was a time of acquisition as settlers poured in in large numbers and tried to establish themselves. Accordingly, both the volume and rate of C.P.R. sales were relatively high; as were cancellations. The decade of the 1890's was generally one of consolidation, and was marked by slower expansion and piecemeal improvements, but was followed by a new Boom in the late '90's and early 1900's. While the volume of sales was lower than the first decade, as might be expected, the rate of disposal was very nearly maintained throughout the period, and was surpassed in 1901-06. The last period was one of high prices, low volume and a low rate of annual disposal. By this time, Sifton was a settled area with a limited supply

---

[39] J. B. Hedges, Building, 93.

of new land, and the C.P.R. had little good land left to offer. Sales largely depended on the right combination of a farmer (with the means to pay the going price) looking for land, and the C.P.R. having a suitable piece to offer in the right area. Such combinations were probably few and far between; even though the criteria of selection appear to have loosened slightly during the war. In any case, by 1921 the C.P.R. had passed the bulk of its usable lands in Sifton on to private owners, and was left with a fine assortment of sandhill and marsh. In many places the Company was accused of being party to "landlock"[40]; of withholding good land in hope of future profits. This would not appear to have been the case in Sifton, in either the short or the long term. C.P.R. lands in Sifton seem to have been sold as and when they could be, and generally at or below the going market price for corporate lands.

Ch. II Part 4: The Canada North West Land Co. Reserve

The holdings, disposals and policies of the Canada North West Land Company offer interesting contrasts to those of the C.P.R. The C.N.W.L. Co. was formed in 1882 by a group of Canadian and British capitalists (including the Duke of Manchester) to speculate in C.P.R. lands. Their overtures were well received by the Syndicate, for the group offered to take $13.5 million in bonds and to buy five million acres of the grant for three dollars an acre. The C.P.R. was badly in need of funds at this time. The C.N.W.L. Co. selected

[40] See C. Martin, Policy, 51.

their initial block of lands from the C.P.R. main belt in southwestern Manitoba; choosing sections 1, 9, 13, 21, 25 and 33 in each township (providing that these were 'fit for settlement' and had not been sold by the C.P.R.)[1]. In 1883 a map of their anticipated holdings was published which showed 181 quarter-sections for sale in Sifton[2]. In the event, however, the C.N.W.L. Co.'s resources proved to be less than had been expected, and late in 1883 their agreement with the C.P.R. was redrafted to include only half of the initial amounts of bonds and land[3].

In Sifton these adjustments involved striking 124 quarters off of the C.N.W.L. Co. list. The Company ended up, in the north and east, with about half of the land which it had first selected. That which had been earmarked in the four southwestern townships, however, was almost all on the list of lands rejected by the C.P.R. in 1885. In the end, the C.N.W.L. Co. received only one section (25-7-24) in this whole area. It appears that when the C.P.R. first rejected these as unfit for settlement the land company lost interest and was not, later, in a position to take them over.

The C.N.W.L. Co. acquired a very good selection of lands, on the whole. If effect, these had been picked over twice for

---

[1]See J. B. Hedges, Building, 74-77, 157 and 165 for the full details of the C.N.W.L. Co.-C.P.R. transaction, and their later relationship. The Land Company also took many townsites (see above).

[2]The map is reproduced in J. L. Tyman, Section, p. 163; note that Tyman relies completely on Hedges in regard to the C.N.W.L. Co., as does everyone else. A comprehensive history of the Company would be very welcome.

[3]See J. B. Hedges, Building, 74.

their quality. Of the 57 quarters finally selected a total of 69% were of the best or good quality. Only 18 quarters were of poor quality and, of these, most were light sandhill which offered both wood and pasture. This proportion compared very favourably with that of the H.B. Co. grant (of which 43% was good land) or the remaining C.P.R. grant (of which 56% was good), and with that of the area as a whole (55%). The land company managed to sell 51 of its quarter-sections (89%) before 1921, which again was a better proportion than that of the other two companies. Of the lands on hand in 1921 three of the six were of good quality. By 1928, due to cancellations, the number on hand had risen to nine, including five quarters of good quality. Only two of these had been sold by 1937[4].

The C.N.W.L. Co. had purchased its lands from the C.P.R. at a fixed rate of $3 per acre. Thus it charged high prices in order to recover its investment; but, also, it was a speculative enterprise and so promoted volume sales as well. The results of this policy, in Sifton, can be seen in the record of sales, prices and disposals.

In 1883 the Company was able to sell 13 quarter-sections to another land Company--the Calgary and Medicine Hat Land Company[5]--

---

[4] R.M. of Sifton Collector's Roll for 1928, and Assessment Roll for 1934-38.

[5] No further record of the Calgary and Medicine Hat Land Company could be found. All of the 12 quarters were transferred through one Gerrard Talbot of Montreal. It appears as if this large early sale was part of one for a given proportion of all C.N.W.L. Co. lands, judging by the circumstances and nature of the sale. Most of C.M.H.L. Co. had been resold in small lots by the end of the study-period.

for $7 an acre. These sales, none of which were later cancelled, accounted for 23% of the Company's land in Sifton at one blow. This promising beginning, however, coincided with that of the depression of 1883 and proved to be the last sale until 1888[6]. The latter date marked the beginning of six years of good sales. From 1888 to 1893 some 32 quarters were disposed of at an average price of $5.81 per acre, with prices ranging from $4 to $8. The average annual rate of disposals reached almost 18% of the lands available, ranging from 28.6% in 1891 to 9.5% in 1892. But there was less substance to this little boom than met the eye. By 1896 the sales on 12 quarters had been cancelled (38%), and the lands returned to the C.N.W.L. Co. inventory. Where, at the start of 1894, only 29.8% of the grant had been available for sale, by 1896 the total was up to 43%.

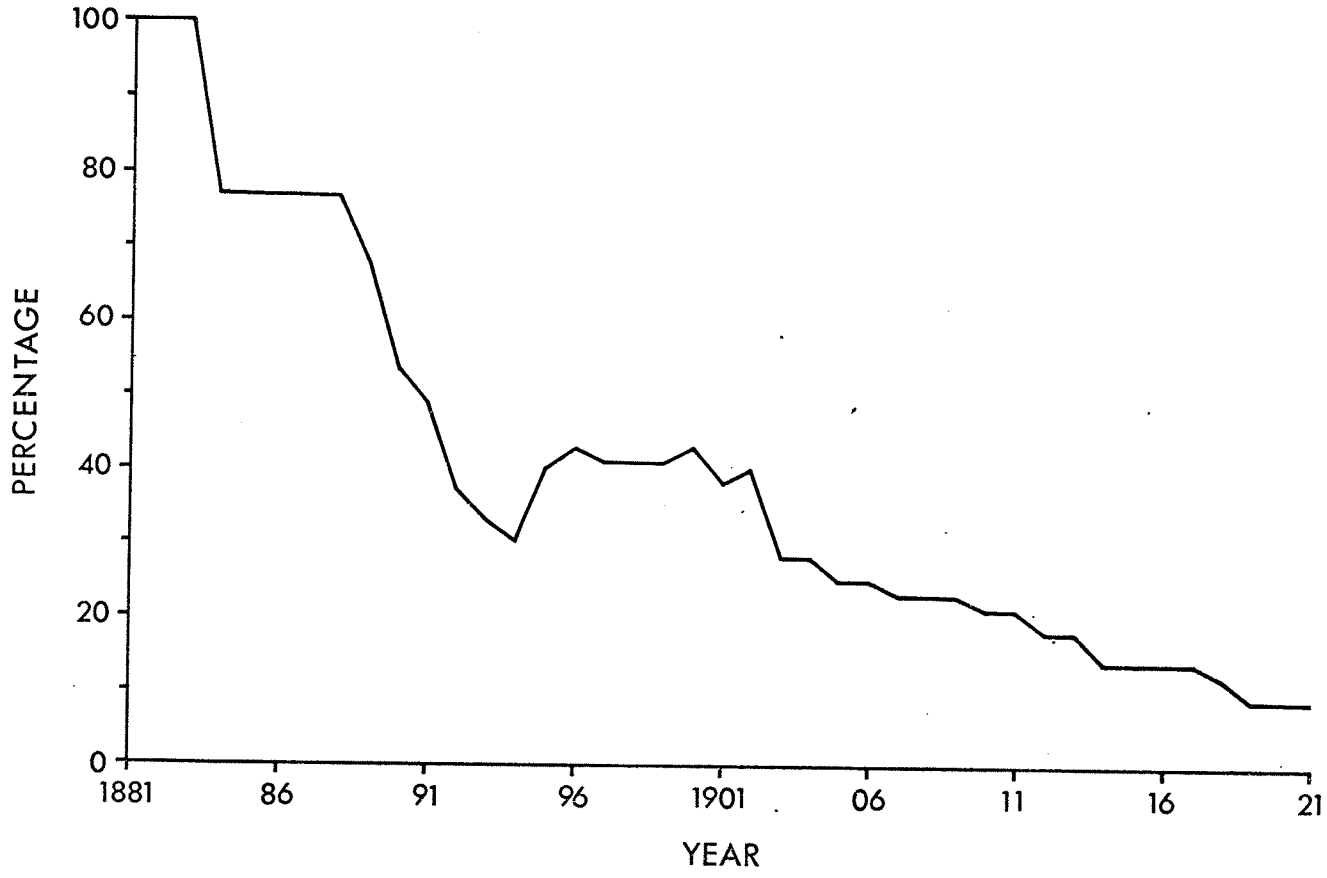
By the 1890's the British shareholders had begun to tire of their slow-moving Canadian investment. The Company's prices were generally too high to encourage actual settlers to buy in quantity, especially with large amounts of inexpensive railway and government lands still available. The permanence of sales to speculators was somewhat questionable. British investors certainly must have noticed that the Booms, during which their lands had the best chance of being sold, were inevitably followed by depressions in which cancellations

---

[6]Internal C.N.W.L. Co. administrative problems may have delayed the sale of land to individuals, but this is not certain. It appeared at first that the confused state of the C.P.R. land selection process had something to do with it. However, almost all of the C.N.W.L. Co. land was in the four main line townships selected in 1882.

FIGURE 4

CNWL LANDS AVAILABLE ANNUALLY AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL GRANT



partially balanced out advances. In any case, the transactions of 1893 had a strong flavour of "getting out while the getting was good", and Canadians gained control of the Company. Specifically, William Van Horne and other members of the C.P.R. Syndicate took over, and C.N.W.L. Co. lands were managed by the C.P.R. Lands Department thereafter[7]. Counting 1888-93 contracts later cancelled, 43% of the original C.N.W.L. Co. reserve remained to be sold.

The C.P.R. applied the same sales methods to the Land Company lands that it employed for its own holdings. Despite the fact that the former were generally twice the price of the latter, they were relatively successful[8]. The basically speculative nature of the Land Company reserve, however, remained.

The first test for the new owners came with the general sales recovery which began in the early 1900's. Between 1900 and 1905 some 2320 acres were sold in Sifton. The average price received was $5.57 per acre, ranging from a minimum of $5 to a maximum of (in one case) $10. By comparison, the

---

[7]See J. B. Hedges, Building, 157 and 165.

[8]Ibid, 76. See also p. 157: The question of the C.N.W.L. Co. reserve's ownership gets rather complicated at this point. In order to avoid taxation the C.N.W.L. Co. lands had been kept under the C.P.R. grant from the start. Officially, they were selected C.P.R. lands designated as Land Company lands. Since unpatented C.P.R. lands at this time were, officially, selected Dominion lands designated as Railway lands, this means that the C.N.W.L. Co. lands were actually selected Dominion lands--twice removed. Moreover, the reserve was owned by the owners of the C.P.R. after 1893 and managed by its land department so that "every acre...disposed of was of direct benefit to the railway and to its officials". To a certain degree, the C.N.W.L. Co. after 1893 was a convenience of bookkeeping.

annual C.P.R. average for the same period was $4.24 an acre. The sales on 400 acres (17.3%) of the C.N.W.L. Co.'s disposals were later cancelled, meaning that the cancellation rate had fallen by about half as compared with 1888-93. The annual rate of disposals also fell, but by only one-third. From 1900 to 1905 (less 1903, in which no sales were made) an average of 12.4% of the lands available were taken each year; ranging from 4.1% in 1900 to 28.9% in 1902. In thirteen years, of which only six were sales-years, the C.P.R. Lands Department thus reduced the inventory of C.N.W.L. Co. lands on hand from 43% of the original holdings to 25%.

The abrupt increase in land prices which hit the C.P.R. grant in 1907 appeared a year earlier in the C.N.W.L. Co.'s disposals. In 1906 a quarter-section was sold for $12 an acre--twice the average for the previous years. The effects of this increase were immediately felt. In the following decade (1906-15) the Company was able to sell only 800 acres in all. Due to the small amount of land left on hand, however, the average annual rate of disposal remained high. Sales were made in only three of the ten years, but these accounted for an average of 14.8% of the lands available in each sales-year, giving a decade average of 4.4% per year. For the same reason, the rates for the last five years of the study-period (1916-20) were even higher. Four quarters were sold in 1917 and 1918 for an average of 27.7% of the lands available per year; working out to a five-year average of 11.1% per year. The Company took in an average of $9.20 per acre on sales after 1905. These promising developments were, however,

largely offset by an extremely high rate of cancellations. Of the 1600 acres sold after 1905, at the new price levels, fully one-half later returned to the Company through cancellation; including three of the four quarters sold during the war.

Overall, the Company had the best disposal record among the corporations by 1921. Only 10.5% of its lands were still unsold in this year, although the total rose to 15.8% by 1928 due to the continuing cancellation of pre-1921 sales. But, in setting this record, the Company's gross sale acreage exceeded its actual sale acreage by two-fifths. Its cancellations were especially high after 1905, as compared with the rates of the other corporations, even though there was little difference in prices among the three. This would seem to indicate that the C.N.W.L. Co.'s original policy of indiscriminate sales remained in effect, despite the change in conditions and ownership.

The proportion of C.N.W.L. Co. sales involving non-resident purchasers seems to have been higher than that of the other grants. Since there were no conditions attached to their sales, and since the lands were generally of a superior quality (and therefore a better investment), this should not come as a surprise. An examination of the Company's sales records shows that 48 people bought C.N.W.L. Co. lands in Sifton. Of these, 24 (56%) bought only one quarter and 18 (38%) acquired a half-section. One individual bought three quarters, while two others purchased six and twelve, respectively. All of the people buying a single quarter, and

all but one of those buying two, appear to have been local residents; but all of those buying more than a half-section were from outside of the R.M. Charles Very, of Winnipeg, who bought three quarters in 1893 cancelled all of them two years later. Augustus M. Nanton (later Sir Augustus) bought six quarters over a period of fourteen years (1888-1902). Nanton was a member of the Winnipeg real estate firm of Osler, Hammond and Nanton, which Hedges has described as an excellent example of the type of land dealers who bought up land early and held on to it "to reap the benefit of enhanced prices resulting from the sale and settlement of adjacent lands"[9]. Nanton had resold most of his land, piece by piece, by 1911. Gerrard Talbot, who bought three whole sections in 1883, has already been discussed (see above). In all, 30% of the gross C.N.W.L. Co. sale acreage (11,280 acres) passed through the hands of outside buyers, many of whom were almost certainly speculators. Moreover, the attrition rate among local buyers was very high. Yet, despite the roundabout route sometimes followed, the bulk of the C.N.W.L. Co. land sold was in the hands of local operators by 1921. This serves to indicate the pervasive influence of the settlement-oriented "Dominion Lands" policy throughout the grant system, given the original purpose and continuing disposal policy of the Land Company.

---

[9]Ibid, 153. Such companies had the advantage over individual speculators, in that they could afford to work on a large scale and on a long-term basis.

Ch. II Part 5: The Corporate Land Grants--Conclusions

The three corporations together held about 43% of the land in the R.M. of Sifton in 1881[1]. By 1921 this had been reduced by sales to about 11%, including more than half of the lands still open. In absolute terms this means that within forty years the equivalent of almost three full townships of land had been disposed of by the C.P.R., the H.B. Co. and the C.N.W.L. Co. Their sales policies and the pattern of their disposals necessarily had an important impact on the development of the municipality.

Due to the selection procedures followed, the C.P.R. and the H.B. Co. both started off with a fairly representative selection of the lands available in the R.M., while the

---

[1]Note that, for the sake of uniformity, disposals have been calculated on the premise that the final disposition of land into grants had been completed by 1881. This, of course, was not actually the case, but the affect of the measure on results and conclusions is negligible as long as the chronological depth of the process is kept in mind. Failure to allow for this historical dimension can lead to a static and essentially unrealistic appraisal of settlement. See for example J. M. Richtik, "Manitoba Settlement: 1870-1886" (PhD Dissertation, Univ. of Minnesota, 1971), p. 557-58. Richtik argues that the "ideal township" model of disposition is "still valid for measuring the degree to which townships deviate from the ideal" (See also J. L. Tyman, Section, 210-13 whom Richtik is arguing against). The model which he defends is only applicable in any degree to areas settled after 1879 within a railway belt or reserve, where settlement did not precede the survey, and where one of the many specific exceptions (e.g. group settlements) was not made. Nor can it cope with the many secondary variations in disposition, such as the C.N.W.L. Co. and Provincial grants, or with the affect of abnormal terrain. Where the 'ideal' has so little in common with that which it is measured against, it is difficult to ascertain the possible value of the result. Testing variation against a model can be very productive, but one with a demonstrable affinity for the subject being tested is first necessary. In the case of a model of the disposition of lands at a township level the complexity and interrelationship of the components, and their development over time, must be fully allowed for.

C.N.W.L. Co. had a much better proportion of good quality land. All of the companies sold the bulk of their good lands and a smaller part of the poorer quality land within the study period. As a natural result, the percentage of lands unsold by 1921 was relatively higher for the first two than for the Land Company.

In the first decade of the study-period, during the main rush of settlement, all three companies enjoyed a high rate of sales in Sifton. By the end of 1890 the H.B. Co. had sold 36% of its land, the C.P.R. 41%, and the C.N.W.L. Co. 51% (gross). Good land was in great demand at this time and, it appears, the best were taken up more or less regardless of price or location. The differing degrees to which the companies were willing and/or able to control this rush through their different sales policies later showed up very clearly. The C.P.R. from the first attempted to limit speculation in its lands. Certain restrictions were placed on buyers, and prices were kept low, to encourage bona fide settlers. As a result, it was able to maintain a slow but steady rate of disposal after 1890, which balanced out that of cancellations and returns. By 1907 it had disposed of 68% of its lands. When prices increased after this date, the Company retained its controls and, while it had the lowest proportionate reduction in its inventory (25.6%) of any of the companies in the period 1906-1920, it also enjoyed the second-highest average prices ($10.90) and the lowest overall cancellation rate (13.9%). Since it controlled one-third of the land in the municipality, the C.P.R.'s disposal policies

were bound to be important for the area. It would seem that the policy actually followed was, in the long run, closely suited to the requirements of settlers.

The H.B. Co.'s sales policy was changed several times in the study period, with noticeable affect on its sales record. At first, the Company charged what the traffic would bear, without imposing conditions. The result, in Sifton, was a fair sales record and large subsequent cancellations. The more conservative sales policy imposed after 1890 succeeded to a certain extent in repairing the damage; but no more than that. The Company still had a balance of 59% of its lands on hand as late as 1904. The new limited-sales policy which was imposed shortly thereafter had two affects. In the first place, it lowered the cancellation rate significantly. In the period 1906-20 the H.B. Co. grant had the second lowest cancellation rate (15.4%) of any of corporations, and the highest prices ($11.01). At the same time, however, it also had the second lowest proportionate reduction of its inventory (34.4%). This left the H.B. Co. with 33.3% of its grant still on hand in 1921; the highest of any company. It is probably fair to conclude that, had the Company controlled its sales more closely from the start, and had it paid more attention to the quality of its buyers than to paper profits, its position in 1921 (and after) would have been substantially better.

The C.N.W.L. Co. started off as a speculative enterprise and, for the most part, remained one throughout its existence. In the first ten years, its sales were heavy and,

apparently, indiscriminate. The high rate of cancellations in the 1890's swamped the few new sales. Despite the high quality of its lands 43% were still unsold in 1900. The C.P.R. takeover appears to have had a moderating affect, but this quickly disappeared when both demand and prices rose. Between 1905 and 1921 the amount of Company lands on hand in Sifton was reduced by 53.9%; the highest proportion for any corporation. This high volume, however, was paid for with a cancellation rate of 50%, and the lowest average price per acre ($9.20) received by any of the companies. The main reasons that the company was as well off as it was in 1921 were the small size and the high average quality of the original grant. The land, in effect, sold itself; and there was little enough of it that the 'policy' worked. The main effect of the C.N.W.L. Co.'s sales policy (or lack thereof) was probably to delay the transfer of some good land into the hands of actual operators. Had the grant reached its originally-projected size, this might have posed serious problems for some settlers; but, as it was, the impact of the C.N.W.L. Co. grant on the process of settlement was minimal.

The Dominion Government's policy of utilizing western land to pay for western development meant, in Sifton, that a sizeable area (including 50.9% of the better land) was put in the hands of commercial interests. The end result of this policy was, therefore, that the settlers buying the lands from the companies paid directly for western development. In this context the land grants were promissory notes issued by the government in order to pay its debts and pay

for improvements. The corporations then extracted both capital and interest from the western farmers and businessmen in need of land. Their means of doing so varied with the aims of each company. Generally speaking, those companies which attempted to control their sales and so put the bulk of the grant into the hands of actual settlers served both themselves and the community best. The degree of speculative activity and, especially, the rate of cancellations varied directly with the extent to which such controls were imposed[2]. In the end, however, the bulk of their usable lands in Sifton ended up in local hands.

It may be that these same results could have been achieved sooner--and more smoothly--by either direct governmental administration of disposals, or by the imposition of a uniform code of sale conditions. As J. B. Hedges puts it, "A calmer and more considered course in 1881 might well have averted the mistakes of the pre-war period". In the early 1880's, however, such measures did not seem feasible. Quick development appeared to be essential and calm consideration might, initially at least, have entailed a delay in western development. Hedges concludes that "From the point of view dominant in the Dominion in 1881 such delay was unthinkable", even though "speed was sometimes unwise and made for waste of national resources, human and material"[3]. Those in charge

---

[2]Estimated proportions of gross sale acreages, 1881-1920:
a) speculative involvement: C.N.W.L. Co., 30%; C.P.R., 9%; H.B. Co., 3%.
b) cancellations: H.B. Co., 32.8%; C.N.W.L. Co., 31.9%; C.P.R., 8.5%.

[3]J. B. Hedges, Building, 409.

of the national interest, both elected and self-appointed, obviously concluded that the advantages accruing to the Dominion from the use of the lands to pay for immediate development outweighed the potential burden which this imposed on settlers.

Ch. II Part 6: Homesteads and Dominion Land Sales

After having passed the requisite lands to the corporations the Dominion government was left with about 750 quarter-sections in Sifton for its own purposes. This amounted to about 57% of the R.M. The Dominion's role in the disposal of western land was not simply that of a holding company, a convenient method for transferring the land to private ownership. Its task was the encouragement of rapid and effective settlement, which meant the creation of productive communities. This imposed two important conditions on "Dominion Lands" policy as it pertained to the lands actually administered by the Dominion. In the first place, it was necessary to so arrange the transfer of lands as to put the better part of it into the hands of productive ranchers and farmers as soon as possible. Secondly, it was necessary to make some provision for a reserve of land to deal with future contingencies and to repay contemporary debts. The former was dealt with by the free homestead system and related Dominion land grants and sales, and the latter by special grants and reserves.

The "free homestead" of 160 acres of Dominion land has been a symbol of Canada's western development since its

inception in 1872[1A]. It is a rare pioneer reminiscence which does not begin with an account of the trials and tribulations of starting a new life on a homesteaded quarter-section. The free homestead was the government's way of drawing actual settlers to the west in large numbers, particularly after 1881. One historian has asserted that homestead land "was intended solely as a gift to the farmer as an inducement to promote settlement; it was not designed for any other purpose"[1B]. This, however, is not entirely accurate. The government certainly wished to promote settlement: but, as the terms imposed for taking a homestead show, a particular pattern was imposed on this settlement by the Dominion, in return for providing the land.

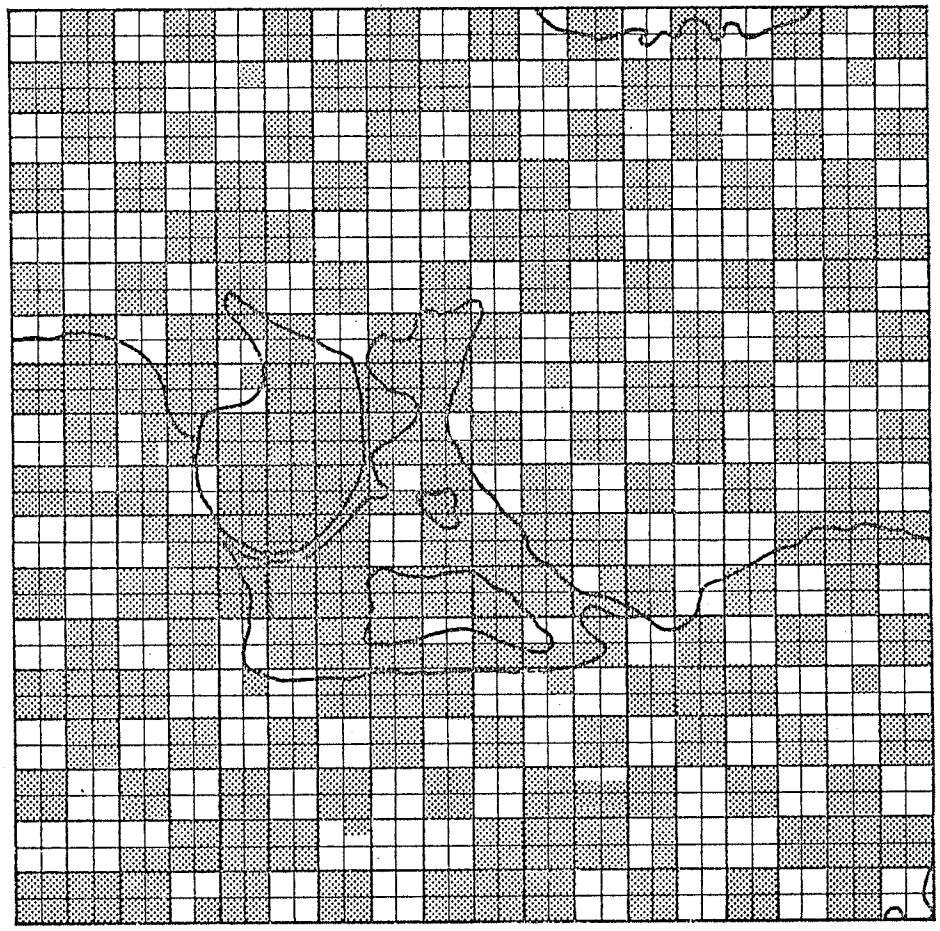
Free homesteads were not actually "free". A person taking one had first to pay an entry fee of $10 (and more,

---

[1A]It should be emphasized here that the 160-acre quarter-section was originally chosen for its convenience as an administrative unit, not because the size was deemed an ideal one for prairie conditions. For that matter, its use in Canada was as much an accident of history as anything else. In 1869 William McDougall had proposed townships made up of 64 800-acre sections, each with four 200-acre quarter-sections. In the end, however, "both section and township were brought into conformity with American practice because it was already 'known all over the world to emigrant classes'" (C. Martin, Policy, 139). In the U.S. the six-mile square township had first appeared in the national land system in 1785, chosen "because townships of this size had proven administratively satisfactory in New England" (H. B. Johnson, "Quarter-Section", 338). The 160-acre quarter became an official sales unit in 1804. Thereafter, as Johnson puts it, "the quarter section became a tradition, haloed by the Homestead Act of 1862, and employed in areas of entirely different climate and topography" (H. B. Johnson, "Quarter Section", 339). In short, any similarity between a viable farm and a 160-acre homestead in Manitoba was largely coincidental.

[1B]E. A. Mitchner, "Pearce", 35.

MAP 4



DOMINION LANDS IN SIFTON

if the land had previously been worked[2]). Then, in order to gain title, the settler had to accept and fulfill certain obligations involving residence on and cultivation of the land. The Dominion was not blindly giving away its holdings to all and sundry. Rather, the intention was to put land in the hands of persons who would live on and farm it. In an attempt to insure this result, the novice settler was required to undergo a form of apprenticeship, which would prove the quality of his or her intentions and abilities. In short the Dominion demanded that, as a condition of receiving title to their land, settlers actively accept a part in furthering its "purposes" by contributing to the development of the west. While the requirements themselves were occasionally changed in order to adjust them more closely to frontier conditions, this basic premise did not.

Under the terms of the Dominion Land Act of 1872 every person who was either over 21 or the head of a family was entitled to enter for one 160-acre homestead on Dominion lands. To acquire this he or she had to pay the above-mentioned fee, swear that the grant was for his or her own use, and then actually live on the claim for six months out of every year for three years and cultivate or otherwise make improvements to the land. At the end of three years, all conditions having been met, the applicant would then be

---

[2]Since fifteen acres of William Baker's homestead had already been broken, for example, his fee had to be determined by the Lands Court in Ottawa (see Baker Correspondence for 1886).

given the patent to the land[3]. It was decided in 1874, as well, to allow the homesteading settler to take up an option to purchase an adjacent quarter, which would be reserved until such time as the homestead was patented. This "pre-emption" right was considered an "interim entry" on the quarter-section, and was intended as a means of reserving land for expansion by successful settlers.[4]. There were no cultivation conditions on this reserved sale, it being tied in any case to the fulfillment of those for the homestead. All that a settler had to do was pay 40% of the price within three years and the balance within six.

The free homestead system was not a viable proposition at the time of its appearance. Nor was it intended to be one. It was formulated to meet the requirements of the existing program for western settlement. This program involved a "sales" policy for Dominion lands[5]. As has been noted above, the plan in 1870 was for the government to pay

---

[3]See J. L. Tyman, Section, pp. 20 & 141 for the terms. This period, of course, was the 'official' one. In practice the time to patent varied considerably. Although the average time for the homesteads entered for in a given year was usually close to the official norm, individual cases were often far longer. Until the mid-1880's government record-keeping was at times less than adequate, while the patent-granting machinery was cumbersome (see E. A. Mitchner, "Pearce", pp. 36 & 43 for examples). Also, there was a positive inducement for the settler to delay the patent as long as possible, since municipal taxation began as soon as it was granted.

[4]J. L. Tyman, Section, pp. 24 & 143. All unreserved Dominion lands at this time were open to homestead entry, and therefore some means of spacing was probably desirable. But there is some doubt as to whether the pre-emption was the best way to do it or whether it worked at all. See below.

[5]See C. Martin, Policy, 12.

for a transcontinental railway by the sale of land to settlers. In 1871 it was ordered that three townships on each side of the proposed line be withdrawn from homestead entry. In 1877 these were opened to ordinary sale, and in 1879 the sales belt was reduced to five miles on each side of the line[6]. With any kind of a belt, however, the free homestead was "virtually suspended... except for lands too far from the railway for immediate development...the fundamental problem of settlement was still left in abeyance"[7]. The purpose of all these measures was to generate railway construction revenue by selling the areas most desirable for settlement. Any settler without a fair capital reserve would have had to put up with the almost insuperable inconveniences of being far away from a transportation centre[8]. The government clearly anticipated a gradual spread of settlement paralleling the gradual construction of a railway. Free homesteads, in this scheme, were of secondary importance.

---

[6]See J. L. Tyman, Section, 21-23.

[7]C. Martin, Policy, 142. As was noted above, the 1879 "sales" policy put four-fifths of the land within 25 miles on each side of the rail line for sale. The extent to which free homesteads were de-emphasized at this time can further be seen in the fact that on Aug. 1, 1879 the homesteads and pre-emptions offered were reduced in size to 80 acres each. However, few settlers would take land under these conditions, especially with 160-acre homesteads available in the U.S. On Oct. 14, 1879 160-acres units were reintroduced. See J. M. Richtik, "The Policy Framework for Settling the Canadian West, 1870-1880" Agricultural History XLIX #4 Oct. 1975, p. 620.

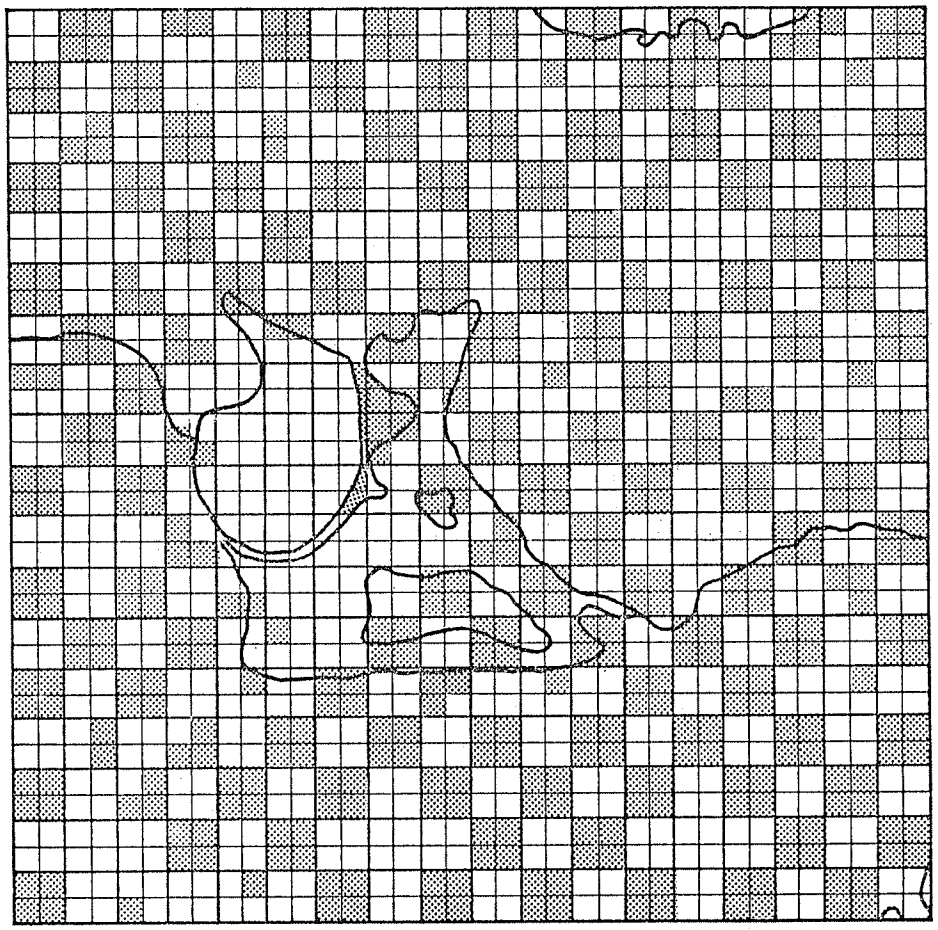
[8]Studies made at the time showed ten miles to be the maximum economical hauling distance for produce under normal conditions. See John Warkentin, "Manitoba Settlement Patterns" H.S.S.M. III #16 (1960-61), p. 43.

This gradual approach disappeared suddenly in 1881. The new plan, based on the privately-built C.P.R., required that settlers arrive in large numbers in a short time. They were to settle on and improve government lands, which would enhance the value of C.P.R. lands, which would then be sold to pay for the railway. In order to attract the requisite numbers of people, a very liberal free homestead policy was necessary, which would make Canadian conditions competitive with those in the United States[9]. Thus, certain adjustments in the somewhat stringent homestead regulations of 1872 had to be made. Prudently, however, the government chose to put off wholesale revisions until western conditions were more clearly understood. The new Dominion Lands Board, set up in Winnipeg early in 1881 as a local authority to deal with the flood of settlers, was ordered by Macdonald "to treat land regulations as mere guidelines until such time as the

---

[9]See C. Martin, Policy, pp. 116-119. American lands policy had an obvious impact on Canadian. In the first place, it served as a general model of a practical method of rapid disposal. Thus Canada borrowed the idea of the sectional survey and the free homestead. In this respect most historians tend to accept Martin's conclusion that, while the U.S. example was extremely important, the adaption of this system to Canadian conditions resulted in significant structural differences (e.g. pre-emptions, the "fit for settlement" clause). An area which has not, perhaps, been adequately explored is the degree to which the American system, in its role as a direct competitor to Canadian, influenced the direction taken in the latter. J. M. Richtik, "Framework", p. 613 for example, argues that "Much of the Canadian system of land alienation was developed in response to this American competition for settlers". His conclusion, that "even in ignoring American precedents, Canadian policy makers could not ignore the system created by the precedents", bears further study.

MAP 5



Note: Revested swamp lands (1913 on) not included

DOMINION LANDS IN SIFTON
TAKEN BY HOMESTEAD AND SALE 1881-1920

Department of the Interior could accumulate enough information to properly amend the Land Act"[10].

In 1882, all even-numbered sections in the forty-eight mile railway belt belonging to the Dominion were opened to homestead entry, except for those within a mile of the actual line. This "mile belt" was reserved from entry so that its value "should accrue to the public and not to enterprising individuals"[11]; but even this was opened by 1884. In 1882 as well, individuals were permitted to make a second homestead entry if they so desired. This legislation was meant to encourage experienced settlers to move on into new areas, selling their old, improved quarters to newcomers; creating a 'leapfrog' effect, with experience always in the forefront of settlement. Also, of course, it gave those who failed on their first try a second chance.

These provisions were quite generous, in that they made it possible for a settler without much capital to put together a half-section farm in a desirable area. They were, however, stopgaps. In 1884 a new set of homestead regulations was put into effect. The new scheme offered all of the above opportunities, plus two optional methods for acquiring a homestead. A settler after this date was allowed either to reside within two miles of his claim for two years and nine months, provided that the last three months were spent on

---

[10]Quoted by E. A. Mitchner, "Pearce", 39; this eventually resulted in the new Act of 1884, a complete revision. See below.

[11]Quoted by J. L. Tyman, Section, 23.

the claim in a "habitable house" and forty acres were broken overall; or, alternatively, he could fulfill the above requirements, but was also allowed an initial two year period in which local residence was not necessary as long as a house was built, fifteen acres broken and five cropped. In the same Act pre-emption payments were converted to a plan of widely-spaced installments, of which the first could be deferred for a considerable time[12].

Such liberal homestead regulations clearly lent themselves to abuse, and within a decade they were tightened up. It is significant that the fairly loose requirements for homesteading itself were not changed appreciably. Rather, several of the privileges which had hitherto been attached to homesteads in order to promote rapid settlement were retracted or redrawn. In 1889 the right of second entry was abolished[13], and that of taking a pre-emption was altered as of Jan. 1, 1890. Where before the pre-emption had been considered an interim entry to be purchased if and after the homestead conditions were met, in 1890 it became an ordinary sale directly attached to the fulfillment of homestead conditions. To "pre-empt" the adjacent quarter the applicant now had to show that he had the means of utilizing it, and then had to pay for it while fulfilling his homestead conditions, patenting both at the same time[14].

---

[12]See J. L. Tyman, Section, pp. 20 & 141-144 for the best summary of requirements.

[13]J. Friesen, "Expansion", 38.

[14]See J. L. Tyman, Section, 143.

These new regulations reflected the actual conditions of settlement more closely than had the old. Macdonald himself had argued for the repeal of the pre-emption right in 1883. With the system, he argued "You do not get the 320-acre farmer, but you get the 160-acre homesteader, who is utterly unable to do anything with the pre-emption right"[15]. The pre-emption right was created in 1874 to provide cheap 320-acre farms within the bounds of a sales-oriented land policy. When, in 1881, the emphasis was shifted to a free homestead system with a setting of intermingled cheap government and railway lands it was no longer necessary; yet it remained on the books for nine more years.

It was later argued that the pre-emption right fixed the "ordinary farm unit" in areas settled before 1890 at 320 acres[16]; but this was not necessarily the case. In Sifton, for example, (which falls within this category) some 135 of the 318 homestead entries made before 1890 had pre-emptions attached (43%)[17]. The highest proportion of pre-emptions to homestead entries was in 1881, when 12 of the 17 entries had these "interim entries" attached; but this ratio steadily declined. By 1885 only 30% of entries were accompanied by pre-emptions and, by 1889, only 18%. This meant, obviously, that by the latter year 82% of those taking

---

[15]Quoted by Chester Martin, Policy, 161-62.

[16]See for example, R. W. Murchie and H. C. Grant, Unused Lands, 60.

[17]The figure given for pre-emptions is in part an estimate (see Appendix B) but is probably close to the actual figure. It is proportionately similar to that given by J. L. Tyman, Section, 143 for all of southwestern Manitoba.

homesteads did not bother with pre-emptions. Since pre-emptions did not necessarily have to be adjacent[18], and since a fair amount of usable land was still available in the R.M. in 1889, this would seem to indicate a pragmatic recognition by actual settlers of the dubious value of the pre-emption right. Moreover, a good part of the pre-emptions which were entered for did not serve the purpose originally intended for them. Of the 135 pre-emption entries 16% were later cancelled (most along with a homestead) and 35% were taken as homesteads; 4% by the original enterer as a second entry homestead[19] and 31% by other parties, often connected with the original enterer[20]. Only 67 of the 135 pre-emptions entered for, in the end, were taken as intended. This means that only 21% of the homestead entries made in Sifton before 1890 (14% overall) were expanded by means of a pre-emption. As will later be seen, the 320-acre farm was an important unit of early settlement in this area: but it would not appear that the pre-emption right greatly contributed to this state of affairs.

---

[18]See J. M. Richtik, "Manitoba Settlement", 181.

[19]41 persons took two or more homesteads in Sifton before 1889, almost all of which made their extra entries in adjacent quarters. Five took ex-preemptions. About 75% of the second entries were made within five years of the first. Two owners took three homesteads each, but the extra entries were all ones with partial acreage on poor terrain. There is no way of telling, of course, how many Sifton homesteaders had extra entries outside of the municipality.

[20]As an example, William Baker (18-9-24) held his pre-emption for his son in England, and when the latter failed to come out, gave it to his son-in-law Henry Stevens. See Baker Correspondence, and particularly the letter of June 16, 1889.

TABLE 1

PRE-EMPTIONS ENTRIES FOR 1881-1889 AND FINAL DISPOSALS

Year	# 160 ac. Hmstds entered	# preempt entered	% Hmstds with preempt	Final disposal of pre-emption entries (%)			
				pre-empt sale	2nd entry Hmstd	other Hmstd	canc.
1881	17	12	71%	75%	-	25%	-
1882	59	38	64	45	3%	29	24%
1883	40	25	63	52	4	32	12
1884	28	12	43	42	25	25	8
1885	23	7	30	43	-	57	-
1886	30	14	47	50	-	36	14
1887	26	9	35	67	-	22	11
1888	55	11	20	27	-	27	46
1889	40	7	18	57	-	43	-
Totals & Averages	318	135	43%	50%	4%	31%	16%

After 1881 the free homestead was the central element in the disposal of Dominion lands, with the various types of unreserved Dominion land sales serving as a supplement in the process of disposing of land to actual settlers as rapidly as possible. By 1921 some 85,050 acres had been sold or granted in Sifton in these two categories; about 41% of the municipality[21]. The first decade of settlement accounted for the greatest part of this, with 81% of the net sales and entries in the study period being made. Thereafter ordinary sales and homestead entries fell off rapidly, probably due to the declining quantities of good land available, but nonetheless maintained a relatively steady pace. In the 1890's 12% of the total was disposed of; from 1901 to 1910, 6%; and from 1911 to 1920, 2%[22].

With a few exceptions arising from terrain and minor grant variations all of the even-numbered sections (less section 8 and three-quarters of 26) were available for homestead entry or sale. Of the land actually patented through homesteading and ordinary sale by 1921, 8% was of the best and 54% of good quality, 28% was sandhill (mostly marginal), and 10% was marsh. This compares quite closely to the range held by the C.P.R., with more good land and less marsh than

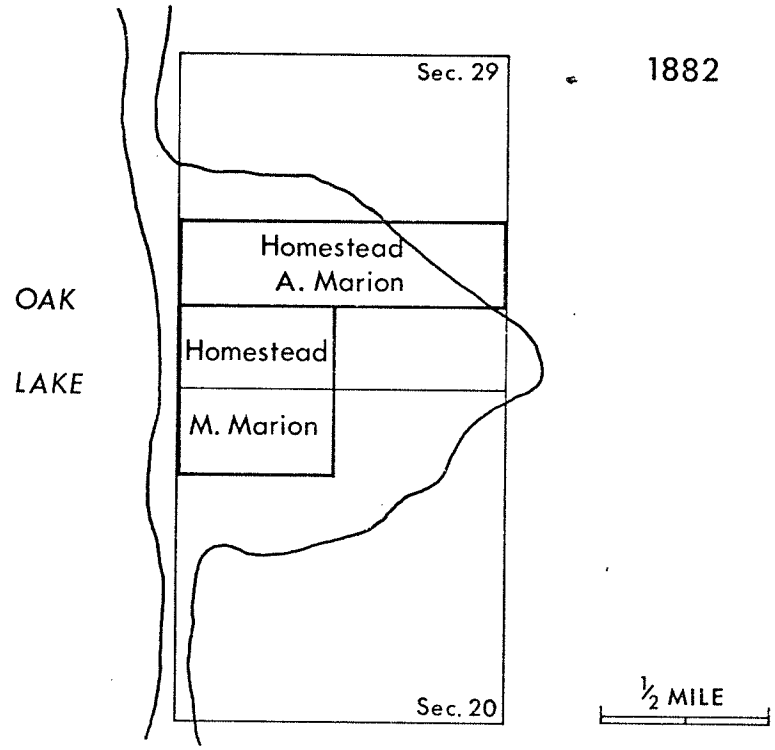
---

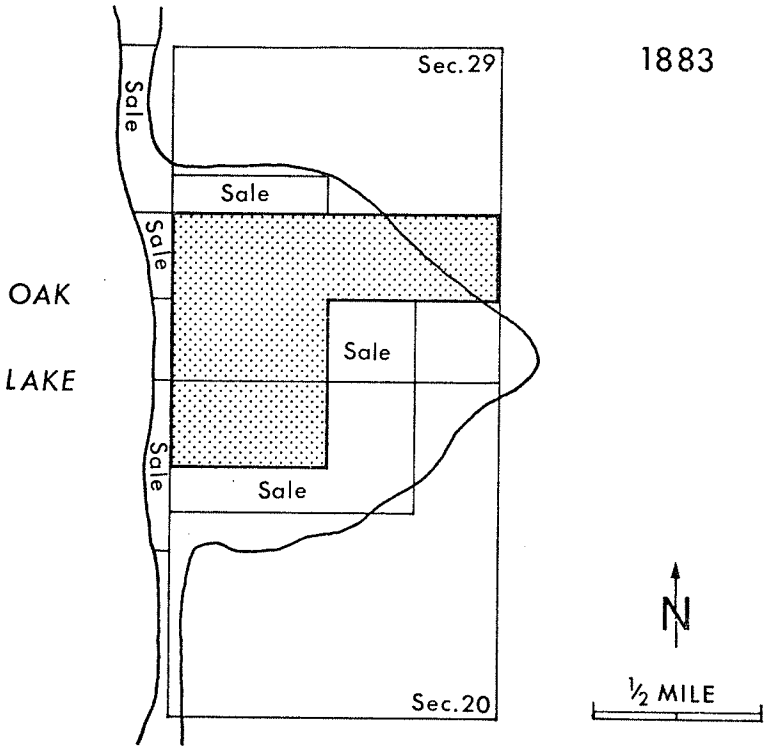
[21]The final homestead and sale acreage figure given here does not include 2360 acres of the provincial Swamp Land grant which, after being revested in the Dominion in 1913, was disposed of as homesteads. This has been left in with the Swamp Land sale figure in order to avoid complete confusion. Actual Dominion disposals in 1881-1920 were therefore 87,410 acres or 42.1% of the total area.

[22]See above note. Including these 2360 acres total disposals for 1911-20 were 4% of the new Dominion total.

FIGURE 5

LAND DISPOSALS ON 'THE ISLAND': 1882, 1883





the area as a whole. Just as the C.P.R. had selected its lands on a "fairly fit for settlement" basis, so did the settlers select Dominion lands. The C.P.R.'s rationale (to put it kindly) was legalistic, while the settlers' was practical, but both had the same result in the long run. The C.P.R. land selectors and the settlers alike left unsuitable lands to the Dominion. This can readily be seen in the total numbers of quarter-sections taken by homestead and ordinary sale in the various townships, since 8-25 (mostly lake and marsh) had the lowest number (45) and 9-23 (with most of the best land) the highest (67).

As has already been noted, all of the settlers who arrived in advance of the survey were allowed to acquire the land on which they had "squatted". It appears that several of these entered their original holding as a homestead, and purchased extra land with métis scrip. The Island offers the best example of this and, as well, a good illustration of an attempt to adapt the sectional survey system to an irregular piece of terrain. In 1882 Maxime and Amable Marion, who had settled on the Island in the mid-1870's, both took up homesteads; one overlapping two sections in the centre, and one in a rectangular strip crossing two quarters on the north end. Then, in seven small sales in 1883 they filled in the gaps to include the balance of the Island, the foreshore, and the peninsula leading to the northeast shore of the Lake. These purchases ranged from four to 49 acres in size, and took in all but the marshy margins to the south

and east. It is possible that these purchases were made with métis scrip[23].

In 1881 some 29 quarter-sections were taken up in the R.M. of Sifton, comprising 17 homestead entries and 12 pre-emptions[24]. Most of these enterers had been squatters. In the next two years, during the Boom, settlers arriving on or with the new railway entered for a total of 193 quarters. Of these, about 23% (20 homesteads and 25 assorted sales) were later cancelled. This cancellation rate was similar to the regional one[25]. Records for Sifton, though, may be incomplete. From 1884 to 1886 entries fell by at least one-half. Only 110 quarters altogether were disposed of in these

---

[23]This could not be confirmed. The original titles show the transactions simply as Dominion Land Sales, without identifying the means of purchase. However, the Marions were métis and arrived from the Red River in the mid-1870's, an unsubstantiated local story suggests it (see Watson, "Oak Lake", notes). Furthermore, all of the sales contracts were made and patents issued in the same year, which is very unusual if they were pre-emptions or ordinary sales.

[24]Pre-emptions have been counted as 'off the market' from the date of the related homestead entry even though none, of course, were officially entered for sale until the homestead was patented. This greatly simplified handling the type, and reflects the actual situation more accurately than do the official records.

[25]See J. L. Tyman, Section, Ch. V & XV. Records of cancellations are hard to come by. Homestead records, for example, deal only with homesteads successfully patented (see Appendix B). In theory, cancellation of a homestead entry would automatically follow either a six-month absence or non-compliance with cultivation regulations by the enterer, or "evident abandonment". But since failed homesteaders naturally had little interest in sorting out the legal situation left behind them, it was usually up to the person wishing to take up the land to initiate cancellation procedures. These, including a 30-day waiting period while the Land Department tried to notify the original enterer of the situation, were rather cumbersome, and led to a certain amount of dissatisfaction on the part of settlers. See E.A. Mitchner, "Pearce", 53.

three years (of which 13 were later cancelled) due to the collapse of the Boom, drought, and early frosts[26].

One interesting element of the homestead entries in this period was the 80-acre homestead[27]. These were the result of new entries on land which had previously been entered for and then cancelled. The new settler paid an extra five dollar fee on his entry and received one-half of the quarter-section as a homestead and one-half as a pre-emption. Any improvements which had already been made (such as cultivated land or a house) were thus obtained for only five dollars. Nonetheless, the arrangement was not a popular one. For one thing, such an entry exhausted the settler's initial homestead and pre-emption right in return for only 160 acres. Still, about two-thirds of the entries made on cancelled lands in southwestern Manitoba between 1883 and 1886 took this form. In Sifton 16 were made; nine in 1884, six in 1885 and one in 1886. This accounted for about 9% of total homesteaded acreage in these years[28].

---

[26]One reason for the Boom's collapse was the large areas of land which became available in Saskatchewan (the Territories) in 1882-83, thus flooding the land market. See J.L. Tyman, Section, 49. International conditions, however, were the main cause. The period 1878-83 was merely a brief recovery in the Great Depression of 1873-96.

[27]Not to be confused with the standard 80-acre homestead which was offered for a short period in 1879. See above.

[28]See J.L. Tyman, Section, 151. The 80-acre pre-emption was occasionally commuted to a free grant at a later date (two in Sifton), thus making a 160-acre homestead. Other homesteads smaller than 160 acres were entered for, but this was due to the nature of the land; e.g. NW 34-7-23, where the homestead was only 100 acres due to the presence of Lizard Lake, with the balance being sold in 1964 when the Lake was drained. Persons entering for a normal homestead on previously-cancelled land had to pay for existing improvements.

In 1886 another form of "scrip" for the purchase of Dominion lands came into use. This created the so-called "military homesteads". For their services in the Rebellion of 1885 volunteers were given scrip exchangeable for 320 acres of Dominion land. This was negotiable as cash, in that it was transferable: a given piece of scrip was not tied to a specific person or piece of land. Six of these "homesteads" were taken up in Sifton, including four half-section units and two of only 160 acres. All but one were entered for in 1886. The two 160-acre enterers probably sold half of their scrip. Rather ironically, the most prominent local veteran of the Rebellion, Captain Perry Fall, sold all of his. It seems that he wished to buy H.B. Co. land (which could not be had for scrip) and so sold his to a local merchant for $75. The merchant, John Horsman, then used it to acquire a homestead on SE 12-9-24[29].

These activities were indicative of the renewed interest in land in the last half of the 1880's. Although 1886 was a dry year, and crops suffered further from an early frost, conditions improved thereafter. Between 1887 and 1890 some 171 quarter-sections were disposed of, of which only 22 were later cancelled (13%). In 1888 alone the net disposal of

---

[29]See F. E. Watson, "Oak Lake", Fall interview notes; and Baker Correspondence, various letters. J. L. Tyman, Section, 134 gives the background of the military grants. Veterans had a choice of $80 in cash or a warrant for 320 acres. In the latter case the entry deadline for land was August, 1886; since S½ 20-9-24 was not entered for until 1887 this probably means that Reverend Charles Quinney had a special deferment made. Cultivation and residential conditions were the same as for regular homesteads but no fees were paid and, of course, the veteran had double the usual amount of land.

homesteads and sales (i.e. entries and sales which were later patented) was 51 quarters. A severe drought in 1890 then caused entries to decline sharply, for a net disposal of only 24 quarters in that year.

The first decade of settlement, despite slowdowns in the middle and at the end, was undoubtedly the most important in the operation of the free homestead policy in Sifton. By 1890 almost four-fifths of the homestead entries and ordinary sales in the study period had been made, including 73% of the former and 94% of the latter. Moreover, the land taken was of the best quality available. In 1891 only 5% of the best Dominion land and 13% of the good quality Dominion land remained open, whereas one-fourth of the sandhill and two-fifths of the marsh was still available[30A]. Taken together, the volume and quality of the Dominion land disposals for 1881-1890 meant that the opportunities for late-coming settlers were greatly constricted.

Between 1891 and 1906 a total of 108.5 quarter-sections were disposed of as homesteads and ordinary sales, of which more than half were taken in the period 1891-95. Most of the activity during these fifteen years was in filling in the odd spaces left during the rush of 1881-90 and through subsequent cancellations. Some 32 quarters which had been taken up during the first decade returned to the market, and

---

[30A]Note that the 'marsh' figure here does not include some 14,866 acres of Swamp land which was ordinary Dominion land at this time. The ratio of poor to good land on hand in 1890 was therefore actually much higher than the figures here indicate. See above note regarding the dates of disposition used in this study.

most were reentered for or resold before the end of the study period. Development was more deliberate. Over the entire period only eight of the quarters entered for (all homesteads) were later cancelled. But despite such encouraging signs, the pace was slow. The gross entries for 1901-05, for example, together amounted to only 5% of the homestead and sale total for the study period. Most of these were entries for homesteads in the western third of the R.M., and the lands were generally of a lower than average quality.

In 1906 there was not a single entry for a free homestead made in Sifton, the first time that this occured. This development coincided with the phenomenal rise in corporate land prices in the west: a time when the popularity of 'free' land might reasonably be expected to have sharply increased. It is apparent that the momentum of new settlement in Sifton was almost gone. The few attractive pieces of Dominion land remaining were widely scattered, offering few chances for a new settler to assemble an economically viable farm unit with a low initial investment[30B]. Opportunities remained but,

---

[30B] As noted above, the 160-acre homestead was an administrative unit. It was not intended or expected to be a viable farm all by itself. Rather, it was intended to give a new settler something to get started on (after having attracted him!). As the provisions made for pre-emptions and inexpensive sales (both Dominion and C.P.R.) show, larger farm units were seen to be necessary (see J. Stahl, "Prairie Agriculture: A Prognosis," in Prairie Perspectives ed. D. Gagan, Toronto and Montreal: c. 1970, p. 65. It may also be noted, for instance, that 320-acre grants were made to veterans in 1886. The inadequacy of the quarter-section homestead as a farm unit became increasingly evident as settlement moved west over the Escarpment. In terrain such as Sifton's a quarter with 160 acres of arable land was unusual. On the open plains the same acreage was not as productive as its eastern counterpart. Then, as dry-land farming techniques were developed for these semi-arid areas, it was found necessary to leave a sizeable portion

for the most part, they were of the sort best suited to the resources and needs of established operators desiring to expand. The legislative provisions for homesteading then in effect--essentially those of 1884--were no longer suited to the conditions existing in such established areas as Sifton. The steps taken by the Dominion in these circumstances said a great deal about the nature of the "Dominion Lands" policy as a whole.

Near the end of the first decade of the twentieth century two moves were made by the Dominion government which had the effect of spurring homestead acquisition. The first was a new Dominion Land Act passed in 1908. This Act[31] was intended mainly to promote settlement in the dry area of Palliser's Triangle to the west, by allowing larger individual holdings, and to release Dominion lands previously reserved for railway subsidies into the hands of settlers. Pre-emptions were revived and so-called "purchased homesteads" were allowed to established settlers. Neither of these measures, however, affected Sifton since they were restricted to townships with less than eight sections of railway land. The main impact of the new Act on the R.M. was to loosen the

---

of the land fallow and, so, out of production each year to ensure long-term fertility. Each farmer thus required more land. This tendency towards larger individual units--which ran contrary to the 'official' pattern of settlement--was furthered by the technological revolution in farming practices. Mechanical aids greatly increased individual productivity. Greater production, however, meant lower grain prices, which made the position of many small producers untenable (see J. Stahl, "Prognosis", 65).

[31] 7-8 Ed. VII, 1908, c. 20.

cultivation and residential requirements for a homestead and to extend the allowed time to patent to six years[32]. The second step was the transfer of the unsold provincial Swamp Lands back to the Dominion. This grant is covered in detail below. Suffice to say here that in Sifton some 3,320 acres (about two-thirds of which was usable) were made available for homestead entry in 1913[33].

These new factors soon made their presence felt in Dominion land disposals. In 1908 alone seven new homestead entries were made in Sifton, the largest number for a single year since 1898. In all the total homestead acreage (plus one quarter sold) for 1906-10 came to 2,080 acres, a mixture of good land and marginal sandhill. This amount was quite respectable, considering the low quantities of usable Dominion land available in the R.M. That for the three years following (1911-13) was also quite good, with 1,120 acres being taken as homesteads. All of this land, however, was of relatively low quality. Even the modest 'rush' of 1907-10 sufficed to exhaust the stocks of usable Dominion lands on hand. The Swamp Lands reversion provided a much-needed reinforcement, at a time when demand was rising.

---

[32]See C. Martin, Policy, 162-64. The new terms were 50 acres broken within six years, with at least half of this time spent in residence.

[33]In fact, transfers seem to have begun as early as 1907. However none of the lands were taken up until after 1913 and therefore the official date has been regularly applied. J. L. Tyman, Section, 141, identifies the release of the Swamp Land grant as one of the central elements in the minor homestead rush which occurred in western Manitoba in 1915-17.

In 1914, once again, there were no homestead entries. As with the disappearance of corporate sales in the same year, this can probably be attributed to a combination of pre-war depression and wartime uncertainty. In 1915, however, there was a major recovery in homestead entries, with 2000 acres being entered for. This was the largest total for a single year since 1893. Significantly, 76% of the land taken consisted of transferred Swamp Land acreage. Moreover, those three homesteads taken on "original" Dominion land were the last in Sifton. Although 840 acres more were entered for by 1921, all was on revested Swamp Land.

The last land homesteaded in Sifton during the study period introduced yet another new element into the process of disposal. Three of the homesteads included in the above total were lands granted to veterans of the First World War. An Act in 1917 provided for Soldier Grant Homesteads of 160 acres to returning veterans, with assistance loans being provided. A Soldier Settlement Board was established to reserve lands and to screen individuals desiring to take them. Conditions were to be drawn up such as were "necessary to secure the use of the land for the purpose for which it is granted"[34]. In 1918 all vacant Dominion land quarters within fifteen miles of a railway were reserved, and in 1919 provision was made for loans to veterans to buy improved farms and for the Board itself to buy land for distribution; including School Land. The scheme did not work very well. Costs were

---

[34] 7-8 Geo. V 1917 c. 21.

high, loans were inadequate and, as Tyman puts it, "Those who obtained free homesteads in Manitoba... received less than the best". Of the 3707 individuals who received assistance from the Board up to 1926, 1603 (43%) had already given up by the latter date[35].

In Sifton only 400 acres were successfully homesteaded under these provisions. All of the lands concerned were entered for in 1920. Another two quarters were entered for in 1921, on School land, but were cancelled shortly thereafter. The known failure rate was therefore about 45%; almost exactly the provincial rate. But this is not the whole story. The Minutes of the Municipal Council for April 9, 1929 contain a list of eight quarter-sections and one partial one under the heading of "abandoned" S.S.B. lands. The records concerning the Board's activities in Sifton are obviously incomplete: but it is equally clear that the record of this last project to promote settlement on Dominion lands in Manitoba was something less than impressive.

Overall, the new elements in the disposal of Dominion lands after 1906 had only a marginal impact in Sifton. In essence the government was trying to force the pace of a movement which was already obsolescent, if not dead, in the area. By 1906 Sifton was no longer a frontier community. It was a mature entity based on a permanent core of established farm units, with administrative and commercial services geared to the needs and resources of such units. By making

---

[35]See J. L. Tyman, Section, 135-37.

such of its land as remained more-readily available to new settlers, in order to realize its ideal of "total settlement", the Dominion may not have been doing anyone much of a favour.

The significance of the free homestead system and its supplements in the development of the west can hardly be underestimated. In western Manitoba its greatest impact was felt during the first decade of settlement, after 1881. Chester Martin has proposed that free homesteads served two major purposes; they "overcame the initial inertia towards settlement, and contributed the earliest traffic for the railways and the readiest sale for railway lands"[36]. In short, they imparted the initial impetus to western development by drawing settlers in large numbers. This was certainly the case in Sifton. In ten short years a completely new community arose in the municipality. Where, in 1880, there may have been thirty or forty permanent residents in the area, by 1891 there were 1504[37]. In the first decade alone some 358 pieces of land were taken up as free or military homesteads. If each enterer brought only three people to the area, this would have accounted for the presence of two-thirds of the 1891 population. Indirectly, including family, friends, and those serving and supplying these settlers, the figure would be much higher. Nor was the increase solely a quantitative one. The homesteaders of 1881-90--and particularly the successful

---

[36] C. Martin, Policy, 168.

[37] Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Census of Canada, 1890-91: the population in 1885 was about 500. Censuses will hereafter be cited as Census of (date).

ones--formed the nucleus of new cultural, social, and institutional developments which have left an indelible mark on the area.

The free homestead system abetted this "march of progress" without putting any great strain on the Dominion government. The land itself had, of course, cost the Dominion very little. The method of distribution was, from the latter's point of view, a relatively efficient and inexpensive one. As John Stahl has noted, much of the burden fell on the settler. It was up to him or her to find, enter for and develop the land, fulfill the conditions of entry or sale, and then to set the machinery in motion to acquire the patent[38]. While the government wished to put productive farmers on the land, a system for screening applicants and fully supervising homesteads would have been ruinously expensive and, more importantly, time-consuming. As was the case in deciding to give large grants of land to private companies, speed of development was the criterion on which the free homestead system of distribution was chosen. Thus the identification of capable settlers was largely left to the process of natural attrition. Those who survived the climatic and economic conditions and fulfilled the legal conditions were, by definition, fit to have the land. Judged from the perspective of all but those who failed to make the grade, the free homestead policy was enormously successful. The question which

---

[38]J. Stahl, "Prognosis", p. 64.

replacements were made in the township. It appears that these were found in 7-25, where three extra quarters were taken as School land ($W\frac{1}{2}$ 20 and NW 16) for a total of eleven. Section 11 of 8-25 was all marsh and water, and only one whole quarter and the dryer parts of two other were taken, giving the township a total of only 5.75 quarters. In all, though, the School land grant in Sifton contained a good selection of lands. Some 3% were of the best and 64% were of good quality, 25% were marginal sandhill, and only 8% were marsh.

School lands were administered by the Dominion, with the proviso that any revenue from their sale or rent would be used for the purpose of education: which meant that the funds had to go to the provinces, since education is a provincial responsibility. In 1879 guidelines for this were established under which School lands would be held back from sale "until neighbouring sections were settled in order to command the maximum price". Also, sales would be "carefully timed... to follow good harvests, and to avoid recurring periods of depression"[3]. Some were rented before sale for grazing or cultivation (on short lease), but great care was taken to ensure that the value of the land would not be impaired by such use. Sales were to be made at public auction, with prices being fixed at an upset price "based on the value of unoccupied lands nearby"[4] as fixed by inspectors. The profit

---

[3]The 1879 provisions were contained in 42 Vic. 1879 c. 31 s. 22 & 23 (Consolidated Dominion Land Act).

[4]J. L. Tyman, Section, 190; see also C. Martin, Policy, 106.

from the sales was placed in a trust fund, the interest from which was passed on to the province involved.

This last condition caused a certain amount of friction with provincial governments. Since School lands were reserved from sale until the optimum price could be gotten--until the area was well-settled--this meant that the settlers themselves, and the province, had to bear the entire cost of starting up and running the school system. Since, under the existing survey and disposal system, settlement was necessarily scattered, this meant that a large number of small schools had to be established; an expensive proposition[5]. In the 1894 budget estimates for Sifton, for example, it was proposed to levy $12,370.88 in taxes for the year. Of this a total of $5,959.10 (48%) consisted of General School Taxes and the Special School Levy. Since there were eleven School Districts at that time, this averaged out to $541.74 a piece. The minimum allotment was to Arsenault at $171.41, and the maximum to Oakwood (which included the Oak Lake high school) at $2,080. As there were about five hundred school-aged children in the R.M. this puts the tax burden at about $6 per child. However, since half of the population was concentrated in Oak Lake and Griswold, this meant that the

---

[5]Ibid, 190-92. New School Districts were formed on petition by settlers, and were run by a locally-elected Board. Settlers could decide to which S.D. their school taxes should go. The boards submitted annual estimates to the R.M. Council, which set the rates for regular and special levies for each S.D. and collected the taxes along with their own. By the end of the study period the consolidation of S.D.'s into larger units was just beginning.

rural School Divisions averaged less than thirty pupils each and, so, that the tax burden was proportionately higher[6]. The desire of the municipalities and the provincial government to sell the School lands for a quick return at the time of greatest need can thus be understood, even if the Dominion policy may have been more productive in the long run.

Auctions of School lands in Western Manitoba were not begun until the 1890's. The first affecting Sifton was held in 1892 in Brandon, with five quarter-sections being sold. Oddly enough, considering the above-mentioned policies, all of those sold were in the three southern townships of the municipality; the least developed at that time. Specific prices for Sifton are not available, but the average at this auction was only $6.71 per acre. If, as would seem to be the case, the prices received for the Sifton sales were disappointingly low, this may explain why Sifton School land was not again offered for sale until 1900. At that time an auction was held in Oak Lake itself, and five quarters were sold, the average price for southwest Manitoba being $7.83. By 1901, then, only 15% of the School land in Sifton had been disposed of. By 1910, however, 53% had been sold.

This increase was largely accounted for by one year's sales. At an auction held in Virden in 1906 25 quarter-sections were sold at one blow. This represented 43% of the School land

---

[6]See R.M. of Sifton "Minutes of Council", Estimates for 1894; and Census of 1890-91. Figures for school-aged children are estimates.

then available in the R.M. and comprised 61% of total sales. This was also the year of the largest School land sales for southwest Manitoba as a whole, with an average price of $12.36 an acre being realized[7]. By comparison, the average price received for C.P.R. lands sold in Sifton in 1906 was only $4.86, while the H.B. Co. had gotten $6.67 and the C.N.W.L. Co. $6.60 in 1905. The last auction of School land in Sifton during the study period took place in Virden in 1912. Four quarters were sold at this time, the average price at the sale being $9.77 per acre. For the first time, School land prices were the same as, or lower than, those in other grants, with C.P.R. lands going for an average of $11.50 that year, C.N.W.L. Co. lands for $9.00 in 1911, and H.B. Co. lands for $12 per acre in 1909. Overall it can be said that the School land sales made in Sifton followed the pattern for southwestern Manitoba quite closely[8].

Sifton School lands were purchased by 25 different persons. Of these, 16 bought one quarter only, five bought half-sections, two purchased three quarter-sections, and two a whole section. Of the 25, 11 bought only School land, while the remainder purchased other types as well or had homesteaded. It would appear that all of the buyers were local residents,

---

[7]For auction dates, locations and average prices see J. L. Tyman, Section, pp. 192-93.

[8]For example, Sifton School land sales records do not list any cancellations. At first this was thought to be a matter of missing records, as with the Swamp Land grant. However, J. L. Tyman, Section, 195 notes that School land sale cancellations were very rare, in the order of less than 2% of the acreage sold in southwestern Manitoba up to 1901 (the only date given). The information for Sifton may therefore be complete.

and that most of those who bought only School land were related to local farmers; probably close family members adding to the initial holding.

The School land reserves in Sifton were unusual (by comparison with other grants in the area) in that a high proportion of the acreage on hand in 1921 (71%) was of good quality. This was the result of the selective sales policy, whereby only certain sections were offered for sale at any given time[9]; of which, naturally, not all were sold. In Sifton 59% of the land had been sold by 1921. Sales per township were remarkably even, such that from two to four unsold quarters remained on hand in each. Township 9-23 was the only exception to this, all of the land having been disposed of due to its excellent quality and location.

The sales strategy employed for the School lands, of not selling all of the land in a given area at once in hopes that the value of the balance would increase significantly, was also used for the H.B. Co. after 1906. The effect was much the same for both reserves. Starting with roughly the same amount of land (11,000 acres for School and 10,080 for the H.B. Co.), both grants disposed of about the same proportion. By 1921 about 41% of the School lands and 27% of the H.B. Co. grant were still available, the latter's twenty-year lead in sales having been largely balanced out by major sales of the former in the early 1900's. By 1930 both still had a

---

[9]See J. L. Tyman, Section, 192 for a "case study" of the 1900 auctions. Units were opened for sale on a quarter-sectional basis.

similar amount left (School, 24 quarters; H.B. Co. 17 quarters, two having been returned to the Crown in the 1920's). Both also served the original purpose of the grant, taking in relatively high prices until the end of the settlement period. Their common policy, however, also caused serious problems. In the case of the H.B. Co. high prices constantly caused a high rate of cancellations, and withholding land from sale (regardless of quality) during the settlement period left large amounts of virtually unsellable land on hand thereafter. Although School land sales were virtually free of the first problem, due to a different sales procedure, it was definitely subject to the second. As Tyman notes, "In many cases the government held out too long and so lost the chance of disposing of poorer sections at a time when farmers were less discriminating"[10]. In Sifton this was also the case with good land. The wisdom of the government in not selling School lands during the war, for example, is somewhat questionable[11]. In any case, both of the block reserves were left with relatively large amounts of land which sold at a very slow pace. The bulk of the remaining School lands in Sifton, for instance, were not sold until 1951 (16 of 28 quarters).

---

[10] J. L. Tyman, Section, 195.

[11] The only "transaction" involving School land recorded between 1912 and 1951 was the S.S.B. homesteading of W½ 11-9-25 in the 1920's. The S.S.B. may have bought the land, as it was permitted to do under the Act. In any case, the homesteader failed and the land was apparently returned to the School grant, since it was sold as such in 1951.

Ch. II Part 8: Provincial Land Grants

Two variant types of Dominion lands remain to be considered: the Manitoba University Grant and the Swamp Land Grant. Both of these were made up of Dominion lands transferred to the Province of Manitoba as part of the "Better Terms" Act of 1885. This Act was intended to relieve some of the province's financial problems: problems, it should be pointed out, resulting principally from the fact that Manitoba was the only province which did not have control of the Crown lands within its borders[1]. For this purpose the province was given a subsidy, plus University and Swamp lands which could be sold.

The title of the Manitoba University Grant largely explains its function, which was "an endowment... for its maintenance as a University capable of giving training in the higher branches of education"[2]. The grant consisted of about 150,000 acres, of which 107,840 acres (more than 70%) were located in western Manitoba. This regional concentration was due to the fact that, according to the Act, the lands reserved were to be of a "fair average quality" (Sec. 2) relative to the Dominion lands open at the time. By the time

---

[1]See C. Martin, Policy, p. 176 & 208; and Canada, Statutes 1885, 48-49 Vic. c. 50 ("Better Terms" Act).

[2]The idea, of course, was for the land to be sold. In this light it is interesting to note that at one stage the University negotiators considered asking for $150,000 cash instead. The idea was soon dropped in favour of land. Given the climate of opinion in Ottawa in 1884, that western lands (not eastern taxpayers) should pay for western development, this was probably the only way of getting anything at all. See J. L. Tyman, Section, 198, who cites the 1910 Royal Commission on the University of Manitoba regarding this brief digression.

MAP 6

Swamp land

Manitoba University grant

PROVINCIAL LAND IN SIFTON:
Swamp land and Manitoba University grants

the grant lands were selected in the late 1880's most of the "fair average" undisposed Dominion lands were located in the western part of the province. At first, the University was not allowed to choose more than two sections in any given township, but this was increased to three sections in 1890[3]. Apparently the Dominion Land office later complained that the University surveyors had helped themselves to a better selection of lands than a strict interpretation of the Act would have warranted: that is, to lands of a higher quality than that of the average for Dominion lands on hand in 1889-91. Although it is difficult to judge, given the small amount of land involved, this would seem to have been the case in Sifton. Of the five quarters selected in the R.M., four were of good quality and one was partly marsh.

The selection in Sifton was probably done in 1889 and was certainly completed by 1890[4]. The legal descriptions of selected lands were then forwarded to the Dominion Land office for approval. Except in the case of conflicts, this was usually forthcoming. A major problem then emerged, however, which kept the University from selling or reaping any benefit whatsoever from its grant for a decade. This arose from a combination of the University's own internal

---

[3]J. L. Tyman, Section, 199.

[4]See W. J. Spence, comp., The University of Manitoba: Historical Notes, 1877-1917 (Winnipeg: 1918), p. 18 and J. L. Tyman, Section, 199. See also J. L. Tyman, "The Disposition of Farm Lands in Western Manitoba: 1870-1930" (D. Phil. Thesis, Oxford University, 1970), Vol. II Fig. 93 which provides a photocopy of the surveyors' report on an M.U.G. quarter in township 11-25 (just north of Sifton) which was selected in 1889.

problems (deriving from its attempt to become a teaching as well as a degree-granting institution), and Federal inaction. These questions are too complex to go into in depth here[5]. Suffice it to say that the Dominion did not issue patents to the University for its lands until 1898. Unlike the pampered C.P.R., the University was not allowed to sell land until it had title, and it had to borrow funds from the Province to meet its expenses. While it may have been a coincidence, it is interesting to note that the lands were finally handed over during the brief interlude when Manitoba and Ottawa had the same party in power for one of the few times in this period; and, also, that the transfer took place just before a critical provincial election. In any case, the University received title to its lands in Sifton in 1898. The pattern of selection in the municipality was, like that of the grant as a whole, irregular. In this it reflected principally "the distribution of... Dominion lands south and west of the woodland fringe which were still available in 1888"[6]. Three of the quarters selected were in township 8-25, while two other townships had one quarter each.

M.U.G. sales were handled by the Provincial Land Department, which fixed an upset price for each quarter. Where only one application was made, the land was sold at this price. With more than one, sales were by tender, subject to the same upset price. In the 1890's prices ran from $4 to $6 an acre,

---

[5]See W. J. Spence, University, 18-19 for a discussion of these problems.

[6]See J. L. Tyman, Section, 199.

but later rose considerably in the "seller's market" of the early 1900's. In Sifton, four quarters were sold between 1905 and 1910 at prices ranging from $5 an acre for the worst quarter to $7.05 for the best; the average being $6.61. This was $2.10 an acre lower than the provincial average up to 1910, and from three to four dollars an acre less than the going rate for most other sale lands in the area during the same period[7]. It would appear that M.U.G. land was something of a bargain. The remaining quarter-section was sold in 1916 for $8 per acre, but this sale was later cancelled. The land was finally resold in 1944.

The University Grant of 1885 was a stopgap measure, a means of relieving the Province of one of its financial burdens pending the eventual return of all Crown lands to Provincial control. The latter, however, was some time in the future. After Alberta and Saskatchewan were admitted as provinces in 1905, Manitoba's terms were renegotiated. In 1912, like the other two, it began to receive a cash compensation subsidy from the Dominion, based on population and Dominion land acreage in the province. Manitoba's University and Swamp Land grants constituted an anomaly, which Ottawa dealt with rather arbitrarily. The Province ended up having to pay the Dominion back for the M.U.G. lands at a rate of $2 per acre (double the valuation at the time of endowment); sold or unsold. This amounted to $300,000. Interest at 5% per annum--$15,000 a year--was deducted from the subsidy, as

---

[7]Ibid, 198-201 for general M.U.G. sales data.

was a much larger amount in repayment of Swamp Land revenue. In all, the "Better Terms" of 1885 cost the Province $150,000 per year from 1912 to 1930, when Crown lands reverted to the Province and a new subsidy structure came into effect. After all the expense and frustration involved in setting up the M.U.G. in the first place, it turned out in the long run to have been as much a loan as a grant. This result can largely be ascribed to the Dominion government's fixation on "national" purposes in disposing of its lands[8].

The second land grant under the "Better Terms" Act involved the Swamp Lands. In Sifton's case, and most others, these were actually marsh lands. The Act provided that "all crown lands in Manitoba which may be shown to the satisfaction of the Dominion Government to be swamp lands, shall be transferred to the Province and enure wholly to its benefits and uses"[9]. Sifton, naturally, had a considerable acreage of lands which easily fell within the definition; although, in fact, a little more fell within it than was intended. An examination of the lands designated as 'swamp' in Sifton reveals that almost 18% of the approximately 93 quarter-sections taken were not 'swamp' or marsh, but perfectly good agricultural lands[10]. Apparently the two

---

[8] See C. Martin, Policy, 210-213 for a history of the Manitoba subsidy problem with particular emphasis on the role of the land grants.

[9] 48-49 Vic. 1885 c. 50 ("Better Terms" Act).

[10] See Appendix C regarding Agricultural Capability Ratings. While most of the Swamp lands were selected in 160 acre units several partial quarters were taken. The figure given means that 18% of the grant acreage was in units with enough good land (about two-thirds) to be classified other than as marsh (i.e. as class 4 or 5). The figure is probably close to being correct overall, when the good land in predominantly marshy areas is also considered.

Dominion commissioners who selected the lands did so in the early summer (when the water was highest) and "selected land in a wholesale manner, without giving the matter very close inspection"[11]. Because of this, the Province received some inundated lands which for the better part of the year were quite usable, and others which were surrounded by marsh. The Province was not shy about exploiting this fact. In 1889, for example, an official pamphlet pointed out to prospective buyers that in many cases "what are known as 'swamp lands'... are not swamp lands at all, but are valuable for farming purposes"[12]. More than two million acres of Swamp lands were claimed in Manitoba, of which about half were sold by 1912. Different sources give different sales figures ranging from 42 to 55% of (different) totals[13]. In Sifton, 14,866 acres were claimed. Most of this, including 400 ex-C.P.R. acres, was transferred in 1891. By the end of 1911, 11,546 acres (78%) had been sold. The higher proportion of sales in Sifton, as compared with the total, is probably explained, first, by the high quality of Sifton's Swamp lands and, second, by the fact that the bulk of the Swamp lands were in the somewhat isolated Interlake district. Those in Sifton were close enough to an established farming and ranching area

---

[11] Quoted by J. L. Tyman, Section, 195 (a Dominion official in 1900); see also C. Martin, Policy, 177.

[12] Ibid, 195.

[13] Tyman gives 2,131,000 acres claimed and 1,164,412 acres sold; Martin gives 2,012,416 and 850,064. They cite different sources; Tyman's in 1913 and Martin's in 1929. Since Tyman worked with the original sales records his figures are probably more reliable.

to be useful for auxiliary purposes; not to mention the possibility of draining and improving them.

Although reserved in 1891 the Swamp lands in Sifton did not begin to sell well until 1906. From 1906 until 1911 some 58 quarter-sections were disposed of, constituting 80% of all sales. Specific prices for Sifton are not available but, according to Martin, Swamp lands were selling at about $3 an acre before 1900, and the price rose to about $6 by 1911, with an overall average of about $3.75[14]. In Sifton, however, the prices may have been markedly higher due to the above-mentioned factors.

Swamp land sales from 1896 to 1911 amounted to 11,546 acres, involving 71 quarter-sections and three smaller units. Twenty-four persons purchased these, of which only thirteen can be identified as local residents. The remaining eleven together bought 51 quarters (70% of the total sales in the R.M.). Almost all of the larger purchases were made by non-residents. One, a Brandon merchant named A. P. Jeffrey, bought 26 quarters altogether (37% of sales). He appears to have been representing a syndicate, as do most of the other non-resident purchasers. Six men, for example, from both Oak Lake and Brandon, bought NE 27-8-25 in 1908. Some of these purchases were made for shooting and recreational clubs. Some, however, were almost certainly made by speculators. Definite evidence regarding Sifton is lacking, but Swamp lands in Manitoba are known to have been a favourite

---

[14]See C. Martin, Policy, 177.

target of speculators[15]. It would appear that as much as one-fourth of the Swamp land in Sifton may have gone to such purchasers. If complete records were available, and especially those for cancelled sales, this figure would probably be much higher[16].

In 1912, 3,320 acres of the Swamp Land grant in Sifton (22.3%) remained unsold. These lands reverted to the Dominion in 1912[17]. The lands thus turned over were of a quality belying the title of the grant. Of the 3,320 acres 39% were good quality lands, 43% were marginal sandhill and marsh, and only 28% were permanent marsh and open water. Not surprisingly, they were snapped up by homesteaders. By 1921 70% of the revested Swamp lands had been taken: all but the quarters which might fairly be labelled "swamp".

The 1912 agreement which returned unsold Swamp land to the Dominion was something less than perfect, from the provincial perspective. The new subsidy arrangement was deemed

---

[15]See J. L. Tyman, Section, 198 and C. Martin, Policy, 177 regarding speculation in Provincial lands.

[16]There were at least some cancelled Swamp Land sales in Sifton. The Minutes of the Municipal Council for Sept. 24, 1906 show ten quarter-sections being struck off the tax rolls on their reversion to the Provincial government, costing the R.M. $544.05 in taxes due. These were all Swamp land sales. This means that the overall cancellation rate for Swamp land sales was at least 12.3% (10 of 81 quarters sold), and probably higher. If for example, a further ten quarters were sold and cancelled, without the transactions having been recorded, the rate would be 22%. It seems very likely that the Swamp land grant can be ranked with the H.B. Co. and C.N.W.L. Co. grants in terms of cancellation rates.

[17]Lands still under contract for sale remained in the jurisdiction of the Province.

retroactive to 1885, and the net proceeds from Swamp sales ($2,769,856) had to be repaid. The interest on this sum, plus that for the M.U.G. debt, amounted to a $150,000 annual reduction in the subsidy. As Martin puts it, "in effect this proved to be a confiscation of more than half the 'better terms' of 1885." To add insult to injury, the lands of the northern areas attached to the Province of Manitoba by the same Act were to be "administered by the Government of Canada for the purposes of Canada"[18]. Once again regional resources were withheld from use for the fulfillment of national needs. Manitoba did not gain complete control over her natural resources until 1930.

Ch. II Part 9: "Dominion Lands" Policy

The basic premise of the "Dominion Lands" policy was that western land should pay for western development. It is evident that this philosophy in turn permeated the land policies of the grants and reserves brought into being to distribute the land. While three private companies and two levels of government controlled these different grants, in a functional sense there were only three categories of disposal policies, each having both a public and a corporate element. The three include "settlement" lands, "block reserves" and "selected reserves".

In Sifton, homestead, ordinary sale and railway lands comprised 78% of the total area. By 1921 they accounted for

---

[18] C. Martin, Policy, 212-13 has the best discussion of the 1912 settlement. Tyman's is a synopsis of his.

79% of the net disposals made, almost two-thirds of which were good agricultural lands. Both the Dominion and the C.P.R. wished to promote rapid, intensive and productive settlement; the former in order to confirm its control of the region and to create an effective new unit in a national economy, and the latter in order to offset its construction costs and create traffic for its line. Both offered their lands at a low cost and in large quantities to attract large numbers of settlers, while cultivation and residential conditions were imposed on most disposals to force production.

The emphasis in these disposal policies was placed on total settlement; on putting as many people as possible on the land. This was particularly evident in the operations of the free homestead system, which was entirely concerned with new settlement. Although 85% of the homestead entries in Sifton were made before 1896, incentives were offered and land was made available to new settlers throughout the study period; even when the community was no longer needed or was able to absorb them. In the case of the C.P.R. land sales, new settlement was also very important; as can be seen in the fact that 60% of its sales were made before 1896. Thereafter, prices were kept artificially low[1] for a decade to promote new development. After about 1906, however, the C.P.R. responded to new market conditions in which its original sales policy was no longer operable, and its land prices were

---

[1]As witness, the price increases about 1907. Other companies' prices increased by about 50 to 70%. C.P.R. land prices had to double to reach the current market price of around $10 an acre.

TABLE 2

FINAL DISPOSITIONS AND DISPOSALS BY GRANT CATEGORY
(to 1921)

Cat.	Type of Disposal	Type: total acreage	% total area	Net sales & entries	% of grant area	on hand 1921	OH '21 as % of grant
Crown	Dominion (unres.)	91605	44.11	85050	92.84	6555[a]	7.16
	School	11000	5.30	6520	59.27	4480	40.73
	M.U.G.	800	0.39	640	80.00	160	20.0
	Swamp	14866	7.16	13906[b]	93.54	960	6.46
Total Crown		118271	56.95	106116	89.72	12155	10.28
Corp.	C.P.R.	70209[c]	33.81	52729	75.10	17480[d]	24.90
	CNWLCo.	9120	4.39	8160	89.47	960	10.53
	H.B.Co.	10080	4.85	6720	66.67	3360	33.33
Total Corp.		89409	43.05	67609	75.61	21800	24.38
Grand Totals		207680[e]	-	173725	83.65	33955	16.35

Notes:

[a]Unres. DL OH '21 consists of a) Reserve, Ind 160 ac.
b) Lake 4655
c) Other 1740
6550

[b](3320 ac. Swamp handed over to Dom. Govt. 1913)
-2360 ac. of this disposed as homesteads 1915-20
-960 ac. OH 21 (800 ac. lake, 160 pasture)

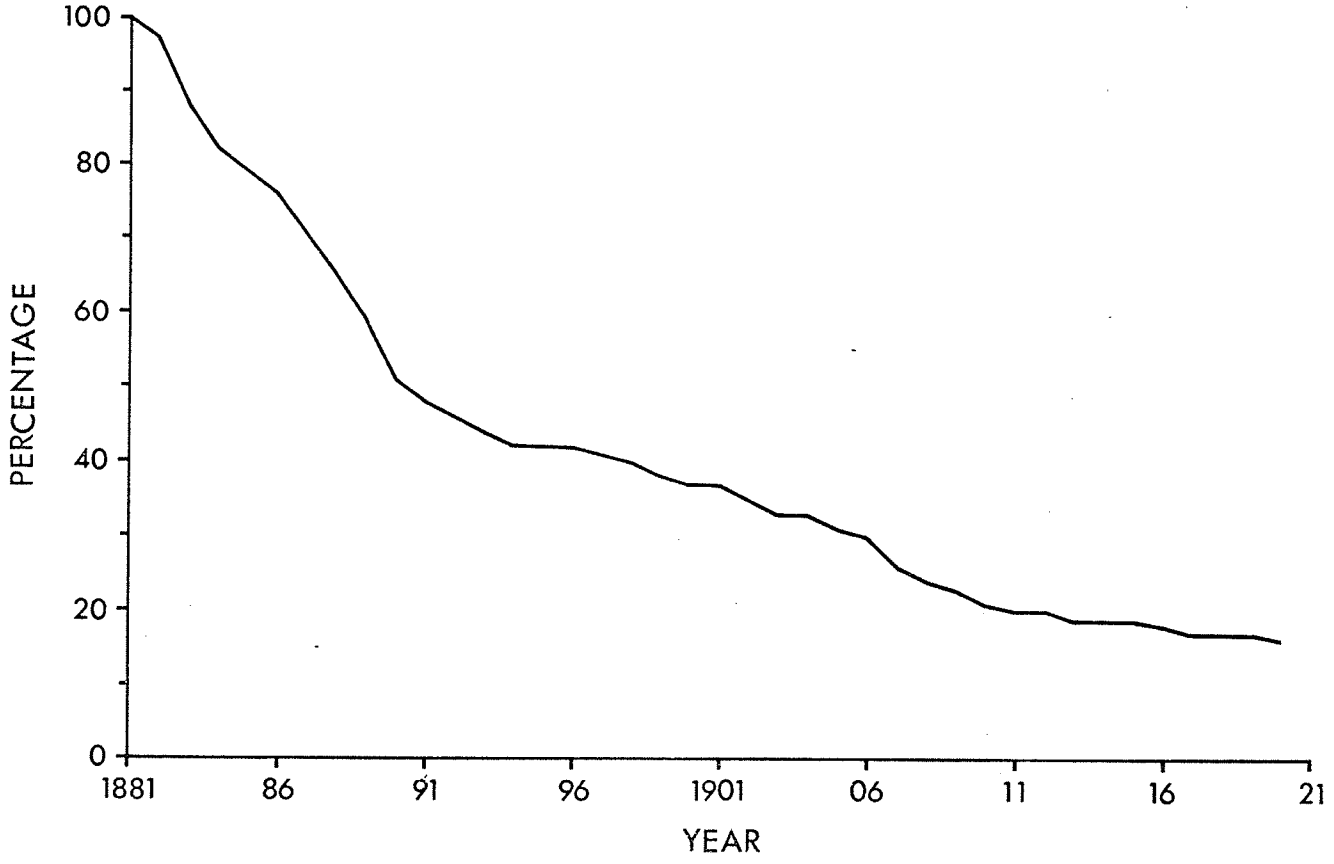
[c]70609 less 400 revested to Prov. (Swamp) 1891
(70609 is C.P.R. working total)

[d]C.P.R. OH 21 consists of a) stations 1280 ac.
b) other 16200
17480

[e]See Appendix "A"
"Accuracy"

FIGURE 6

LANDS AVAILABLE ANNUALLY IN SIFTON AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL AREA



raised considerably. By this stage the better part of its original grant had already been disposed of. Chronologically, the disposal of C.P.R. and unreserved Dominion lands was a complementary process[2]. A certain amount of inexpensive land was made available for new settlement at every stage in the study period.

The disposal policies of the "settlement" lands involved a mixture of short and long-term goals which, at first glance, is a confusing one. The primary emphasis was placed on the speed and volume of disposals, generally, and on new settlement specifically. The result was a high rate of attrition among settlers. The size of the grants alone ensured that a certain portion would fall into the hands of speculators (of all varieties) and fly-by-night 'settlers'[3]. And, by the same token, the easy terms ensured that a further portion would go to persons whose expectations surpassed either their abilities or their luck. Aside from this, though, the emphasis of these major landholders on rapid and intensive settlement imposed restrictions on the majority of settlers. The policies lent themselves directly to overcrowding on the best lands and to small farm units. This was a poor combination for future development; particularly when the most advantageous disposal conditions were offered to new, rather than established settlers. Despite the apparent problems caused by these short-term policies, however, the Dominion

---

[2]J. L. Tyman, Section, 61 also notes the rising importance of C.P.R. sales in southwestern Manitoba in the 1890's.

[3]Ibid, pp. 141 and 172-73 gives some interesting examples of this.

and the C.P.R. also had a vested interest in promoting effective settlement in the long term; and succeeded in doing so.

By 1921 the bulk of the arable "settlement" lands were, in Sifton at least, in the hands of local operators and the area as a whole can fairly be described as prosperous and well-developed. Much of the credit for this must be assigned to the disposal policies of the "settlement" lands; on a quantitative basis at least. Qualitatively their role was somewhat less than creditable. It would appear that the gap between the "settlement" land disposal policies' actual effect and direction--inhibiting effective settlement--and their final effect, was bridged by means of a high rate of attrition among settlers. The theory and practice of "settlement" land disposal was that the bare essentials of a farm should be provided to anyone desiring one. Moreover, it was made fairly easy for the settler to acquire title to this basic holding. At this point, however, the benevolence of Company and Government alike came to a sudden end. Once past the artificially low criteria of success set by these agencies, the settler was faced with the high practical criteria of actual conditions, and had to deal with them on his own. Many were not able to do so, and it was these failures which provided the survivors with the means of development. In their predilection for new and total settlement the Dominion and the C.P.R. promoted effective settlement, but did so in a most indirect fashion. The burden and cost of actual development was placed directly on the settlers themselves.

The second category of disposal, the "block reserves", was made up of the School and H.B. Co. land grants. These lands were assigned for the purpose of paying national debts. That to the H.B. Co. constituted compensation for past possession, while School lands were set aside to meet future expenses of a specific nature. Both consisted of regular areas within the sectional grid, being so reserved to provide a specific amount of land overall. In Sifton this made up 10% of the total area, and included a fairly representative sample of the lands in the municipality: although the H.B. Co.'s grant was of a slightly lower quality than the average. Except insofar as it affected their ability to sell land, settlement was not a consideration in the disposal of these grants.

The object of the "block reserve" grantees was to make money by the sale of the lands. The land was treated as a capital reserve which, once sold, provided no further benefit. This meant that optimum prices had to be realized, while 'settlement' conditions on sales could be dispensed with. Two different sales-strategies were thus possible: either to sell as much land as possible whenever possible, or to sell only when demand was heaviest and hold back in times of depression.

Since its unsold lands were subject to taxation, and internal pressures required that annual dividends be maintained, the H.B. Co. chose the first course. The initial results were somewhat unsatisfactory. Due to the high prices, speculation, and the competition of "settlement" lands many sales were later cancelled. The Company then turned to the

second approach; at first informally and, later, officially[4]. Results were somewhat better. However, the selective policy imposed in 1906 was poorly considered, and left the Company with a sizeable portion of its grant which it was unable to sell. While its management had sufficient flexibility to take advantage of the "seller's market" during the war, overall the H.B. Co.'s disposals were poorly managed.

The School land grant was, by law, forced to take the second approach throughout its existence and, by law once again, was able to do so since its unsold lands were not subject to taxation. School lands were not released for sale until near the end of the settlement period, when good land was scarce and prices were high. Also, its lands were released selectively, in reaction to specific local conditions down to the level of individual quarter-sections. As the high prices received and the high rate of disposal show, this strategy was successful. The School land sales policy, however, was not without pitfalls. As with the H.B. Co. a selective approach tended to become a restrictive one. After the brief rush in the early 1900's disposals were stopped altogether; presumably to resume in the next Boom. The last chance for major sales, during the war, was scorned. As a result, a sizeable proportion of the grant remained on hand for another forty years.

---

[4]It may be noted here that in 1882 Sanford Fleming, sent to investigate H.B. Co. sales in Manitoba during the Boom, recommended a selective sales policy for the Company which was almost identical to that for School lands. The idea was rejected at the time. See J. S. Galbraith, "Company", 9.

Up to 1913 H.B. Co. and School lands in Sifton showed much the same record of disposals. By this time 59% of the School and 52% of the Company lands had been sold. By 1921 the difference was somewhat greater, with 67% of the latter gone and the School figure remaining the same. The H.B. Co., though, had taken twenty extra years of sales and suffered the cancellation of 3,200 acres of sales to reach this level, and had exhausted its store of good land. Some good School land remained unsold, while no sales at all had been cancelled. Most School lands in Sifton went directly to local farmers, while the route of the H.B. Co. lands was often an indirect one. On the whole, however, the differences between these two grants tend to emphasize their essential similarity.

In creating the "block reserves" the Dominion handed over one-tenth of the land to agencies with no direct interest in promoting or assisting settlement. It did so to avoid placing the burden of certain capital expenditures for western development on its general (i.e. eastern) tax base. In effect the H.B. Co., and the School trustees, were made agents of the Dominion for the extraction of capital from the West to pay for its own acquisition and improvement. The selective sales policies employed in the disposal of these lands could only be successful in an environment of established settlement, when the settlers needed and could pay for extra land. This, in the end, meant that the Dominion was actively encouraging a form of landlock. The fact that most of the good "block reserve" lands in Sifton were in the hands of local farmers by 1921 was as much a matter of accident

as of design. Once again, the Dominion's disposition of lands only contributed to effective settlement through the medium of the settlers' own efforts. While someone, sometime had to pay for the national debts represented by the "block reserve" lands, the policy of placing what amounted to a special surcharge on many successful settlers may not have been the most equitable way of doing so.

The third category comprises the C.N.W.L. Co. lands and the Swamp Land grant, which may be described as "selected reserves". The validity of combining these under one heading might, at first glance, seem questionable. However, there was an underlying unity in the reasons for their creation, and in the pattern of their disposal, which justifies this approach. Both grants were carved out of "settlement" category lands at a second stage of disposition. In each case, the lands were intended to solve financial demands made on the parent landholder: the C.P.R. being in need of an immediate cash transfusion, and the Dominion requiring funds to placate Manitoba. In the end, the balance of lands remaining in the "selected reserves" were returned to the jurisdiction of the original holder. Also, the lands for both reserves were selected specifically for their quality. For the C.N.W.L. Co. the criterion was a high rating, while for the Swamp lands the opposite was (theoretically) the case.

Taken together the "selected reserve" lands totalled 11% of the municipality, with Swamp lands comprising about three-fifths of this. As with the "block reserves", the promotion of settlement was not a consideration in their disposal.

For the "selected reserves", however, the search for profit took a different path. "Block" and "selected reserves" might be compared to 'bonds' and 'futures' respectively. While the "block reserve" lands were treated as a capital reserve, those in the "selected reserves" were considered as a commodity of variable value. The goal was to dispose of this commodity at the peak of its market value, whatever that might be. This made "selective reserve" disposals very responsive to changing market conditions: a natural trait of any speculative enterprise.

The C.N.W.L. Co. received its land in the first decade of the study period, and immediately proceeded to sell as much of it as fast as was possible. The first ten years of sales in Sifton (1883-1893) alone accounted for 64% of gross sales; and at relatively high prices. The original set of speculators then sold out, leaving the inevitable results of this sort of indiscriminate sales policy to be dealt with by a new board of directors. Under the C.P.R. the disposal of C.N.W.L. Co. lands was only slightly more conservative. Striking while the iron was hot, the balance of lands on hand were almost completely disposed of in three periods of heavy sales in 1900-06, 1911-13 and 1917-18. The history of the Swamp land sales is similar. The grant was allocated in 1891, but the lands did not begin to sell well until 1901. By the end of 1912, however, 96% of the total sales had been made, comprising 73.4% of the grant. The lands remaining after this whirlwind campaign then reverted to the Dominion, which opened them to new settlers.

The market-oriented sales policies of the "selected reserve" lands had one major, and revealing, drawback. The necessary pace could not be maintained for any length of time without turning back on itself. It is significant that, in Sifton, the "selected reserves" had the two highest incidences of non-local buyers and of cancellations[5]. While the better part of the lands concerned were in the hands of local operators by the end of the study period the process of putting them there was a long and involved one. The "selected reserves" were essentially an expedient resorted to by the Dominion and the C.P.R. to meet financial needs not previously allowed for. As usual, settlers ended up paying the actual bill, in both cash and inconvenience. The fact that this category of disposals appeared in both the public and corporate components of the land grant mosaic suggests that it answered a specific need. It may be that the "selected reserves" acted as a 'safety valve' for pressures within the scheme of settlement actuated by the "Dominion Lands" policy. That is, they may have provided a necessary element of flexibility; a field for disruptive activities which were bound to occur in any event. If this was the case, the remedy was little improvement over the original disease.

Assessing the general impact of the "Dominion Lands" policy on western settlement presents something of a problem. There are two distinct ways of going about it; and, to a

---

[5]As has been noted above, exact Swamp sale cancellation figures are not available for Sifton, but were probably about 13%, and perhaps more.

TABLE 3

COMPARATIVE DISPOSITION OF LAND
IN SIFTON, WESTERN MANITOBA, AND THE PRAIRIE PROVINCES

Type of Grant	Area		
	Sifton	Western Manitoba	Prairie Provinces
Homesteads[1]	30.1%	36.2%	36.2%
Dom. Land Sales	10.8	11.8	9.8
School Lands	5.3	5.5	6.0
M.U.G.	.4	.9	.1
Swamp & Irrigation	7.2	1.7	1.4
Crown (unsold)[2]	3.2	14.0	21.6
Railway Lands	38.2	28.4	20.4
H.B. Co.	4.7	5.1	4.5
Totals	99.9	100.0	100.0

Note:

[1]Includes Military Homesteads.

[2]Figure for Sifton is for 1921. In the other cases it is for 1930.

Source:

The data for Western Manitoba and the Prairie Provinces is adapted from J. L. Tyman, By Section, Township and Range (Brandon: 1972), Table 25 p. 203

certain extent, they are mutually exclusive. One is to examine the policy in terms of its success in fulfilling the goals which were set for it. This involves an evaluation of its success in dealing with the problems encountered in promoting rapid and effective settlement. The other approach is to examine it from the perspective of the settlers involved. This requires an evaluation of the efficiency of the policy--the amount and degree of wastage of human and natural resources which it entailed. A value-judgement concerning the result is usually involved here: but no more of one than is implicit in the first approach, which assumes the interests of the settlers to be either identical with those of the Dominion, or immaterial in any case. For the most part general histories of the policy, and of the roles of its component parts, have taken the first approach. This is probably because, first, the settlers lacked a public relations machine such as both the Dominion and the C.P.R. maintained; and, second, because the settlers' situation is more difficult to categorize and, so, to deal with in general terms.

Grounds for praising the men who planned and operated the "Dominion Lands" policy after 1881 are fairly easy to come by. Their aim was to promote rapid and effective settlement in the west, with little direct expenditure by the Dominion. They were successful on all counts. Settlement was undeniably rapid. Within ten years half of the land in Sifton was in private hands, and several promising service centres were underway. Within thirty years 80% of the land, including the

better part of the good land, was so placed and a half-dozen prosperous towns and villages existed.

The process was also effective, in the pragmatic sense that by 1921 Sifton was a reasonably prosperous and productive farming and ranching area. The continuing demand for land after 1907, and particularly during the war, is one indication of this. For that matter, it can be argued that the policy was "effective" throughout the process of settlement, in that a certain quantity of good land was always available. The unreserved Dominion and C.P.R. grants provided land for the first, massive rush of settlers; the Dominion reserves and provincial lands opened up just as these were "mined out"; and the other corporate lands were available throughout for those willing and able to pay the price. Also, land prices remained relatively low and within the reach of the average settler until about 1906. In terms of assisting new settlers and, consequently, rapid settlement, this functional arrangement was effective.

The "Dominion Lands" policy achieved these results without imposing a large financial burden on the government. This was accomplished by paying for major developments and debts--such as the railway, the H.B. Co.'s rights, and compensation to the Province--with allocations of Dominion land. Not only did this obviate the need for cash surrenders, but it passed the burden of administering half the western land onto other agencies. In any case, the task of distributing western lands was probably more than the Dominion could have handled by itself; especially when speed of development was

considered to be a crucial factor, and where the land had to serve a number of different and specialized purposes. If nothing else, the "Dominion Lands" policy was an amazing administrative accomplishment. As Chester Martin notes, "It would be hard to imagine four more unruly policies to be harnessed and coordinated to the purposes of federal administration than the Hudson's Bay lands, school lands, railway land grants, and free homesteads"[6]. When these major elements, the 'spin-off' and special grants and sales, the constant changes in policy and practice in the operation of all the grants, the wild fluctuations in the western economy and immigration, and the sheer physical size of the area involved are taken into consideration the dimensions of the achievement become very impressive indeed. Contemporaries, and later commentators, who have exhausted their store of superlatives in trying to convey it cannot be dismissed lightly.

The "Dominion Lands" policy, then, was very successful within its own parameters. This success can be demonstrated at both local (as the case of Sifton shows) and regional levels. This conclusion, however, says little about anything but the policy itself. Because its effectiveness in implementing certain "purposes of the Dominion" in the west can be proven, it does not follow from this that the policy was equally efficient in terms of the process of settlement as a whole. This process was made up of settlers, individually and as a group, moving into and attempting to establish

---

[6]C. Martin, Policy, 174.

themselves in a specific locale. Obviously the "Dominion Lands" policy played an important role in this process, through its affect on the availability of land. To judge the nature and actual dimensions of these affects, however, it is necessary to examine the policy in a different context.

CHAPTER III

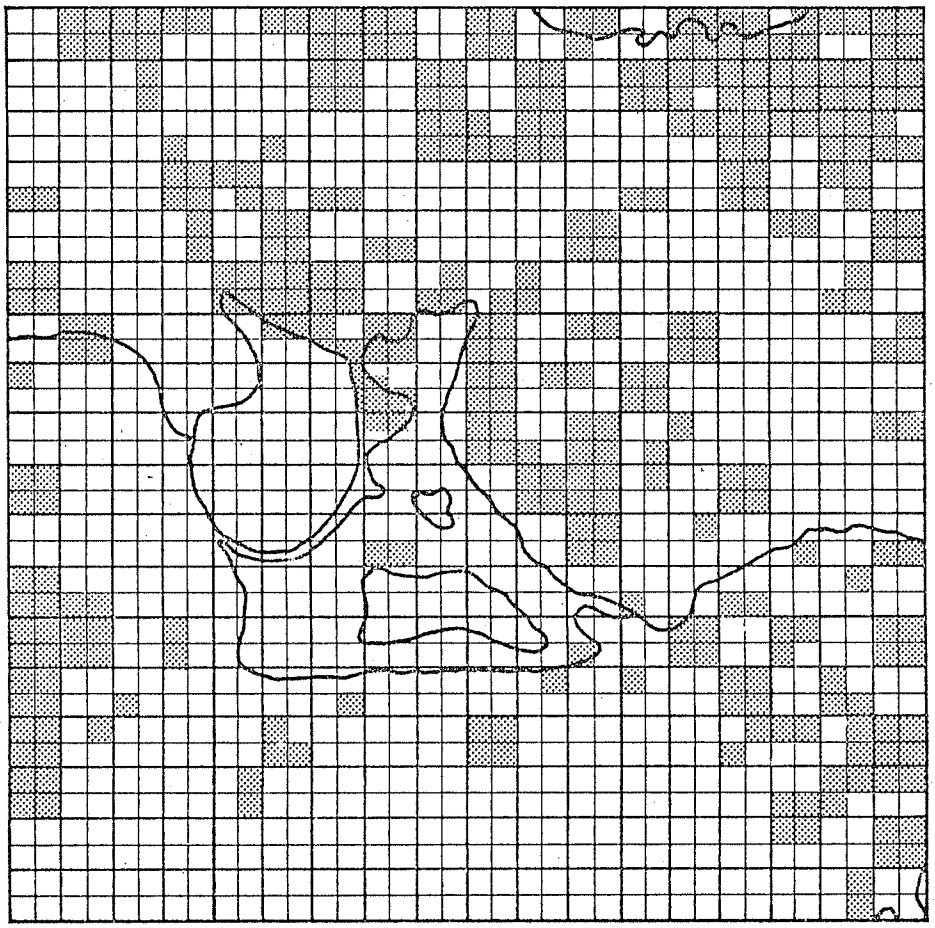
PATTERNS OF SETTLEMENT

Ch. III

The various types and categories of land grants in Sifton were discrete elements in the process of disposal, but not in the process of settlement as a whole. The component quarter-sections were physically intermingled, and all disposals took place within a common time-frame. Moreover, these lands were merely factors of different relative values from the settlers' point of view; elements to be manipulated as and if possible in terms of individual resources and expectations. The value of a C.P.R., H.B. Co. or Dominion quarter in the same area and on the same kind of land was all the same to a settler, except insofar as the cost of acquisition related to potential productivity. It is necessary to reconstruct the process of settlement from this "operational" perspective, in order to arrive at an appreciation of the actual course of development. In the following discussion arbitrary five-year periods have been employed to provide a consistent analytic and comparative framework.

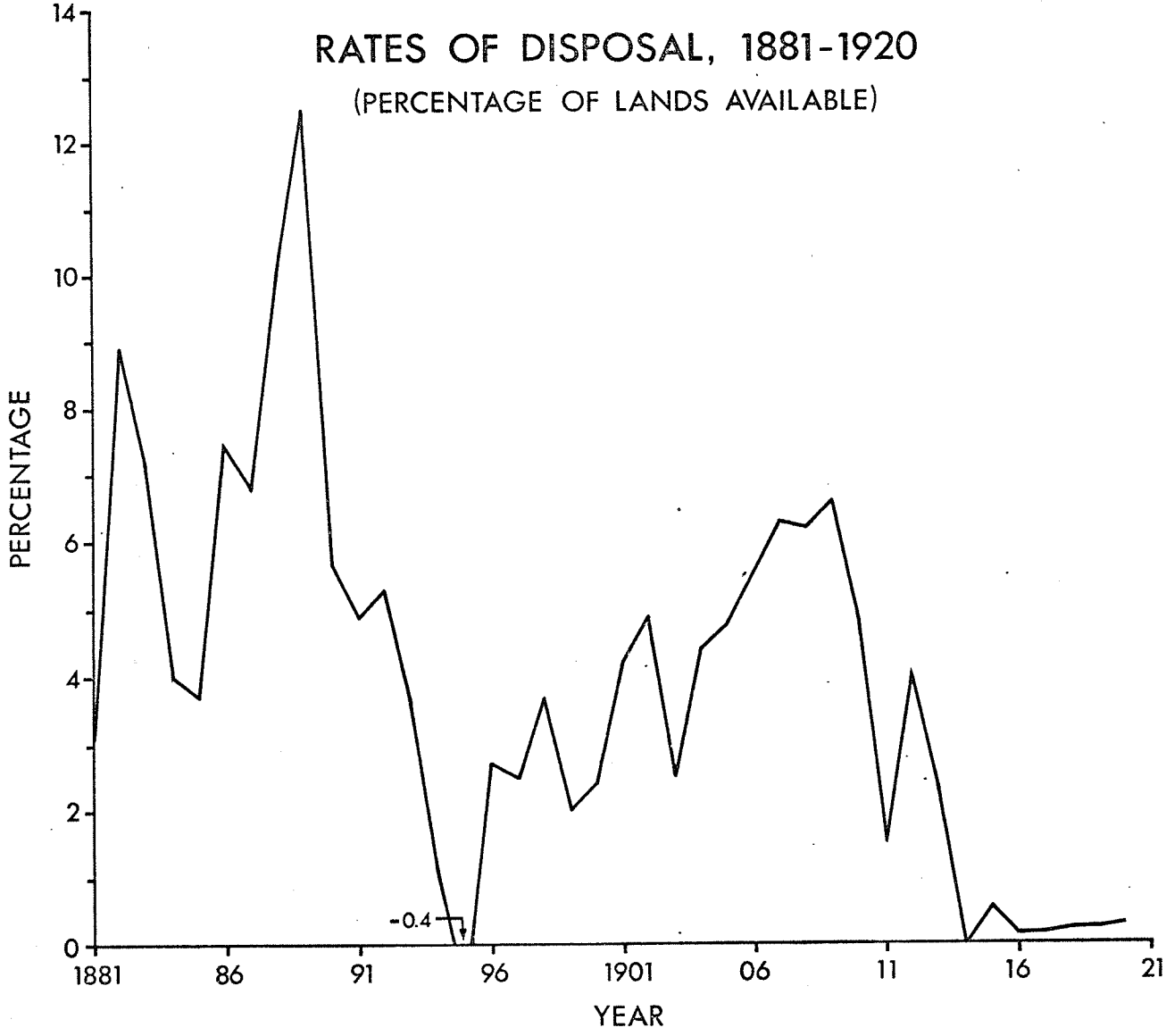
The arrival of the railway in Sifton in 1881 opened the area to rapid and intensive settlement. By 1885 some 362 quarter-sections of land had been purchased or entered for. This represented 28.2% of the total acreage of the R.M.

MAP 7



DISPOSED LANDS, 1881-85

FIGURE 7


RATES OF DISPOSAL, 1881-1920
(PERCENTAGE OF LANDS AVAILABLE)
PERCENTAGE
14
12
10
8
6
4
2
0
-0.4
1881
86
91
96
1901
06
11
16
21
YEAR

Although the entries or sales on 36 quarters (9.9%) were later cancelled this was a very strong beginning, with 25.2% of the municipality being permanently transferred. Of the total disposals 74.6% (270) were Dominion lands, all being homesteads and related sales. This represented 35.3% of gross Dominion disposals during the entire study-period. Some 25.4% (92) were from the corporate grants. In five years the C.P.R. disposed of 22.7% of its total acreage; despite the fact that its net acreage on hand actually increased by a quarter-section in 1884, when cancellations outpaced sales. The C.N.W.L. Co. and the H.B. Co. reduced their inventories by 22.8% and 20.6%, respectively.

The largest annual disposals were in 1882, when 18,560 acres were sold or entered for (the highest annual total in the entire study-period), and 1883, when 13,690 acres were taken. In each of the remaining three years between six and seven thousand acres were transferred. The annual rate of disposal (the proportion of the lands available at the start of the year which had been taken by the end) averaged 5.4% per year in 1881-85. The highest rates were in 1882 (8.9%), and 1883 (7.2%). In 1881 the rate was only 3.1%. Most entries in this year involved squatters verifying their claims. The intensity of activity decreased by about half after the Boom, the annual rates of disposal falling to 4.0% in 1884 and 3.7% in 1885. This slowdown in acquisition is somewhat less spectacular than contemporary impressions, and later accounts, of the aftermath of the Boom might lead one to expect. Records for this period, however, are less accurate than those for

the following ones. In the Boom of 1882-83 a great deal of land was taken up in southwestern Manitoba and cancelled shortly thereafter. The records of some of these transactions have not been preserved. While it is possible in certain cases to reconstruct them[1], an unknown number are still missing. It is therefore certain that the acreage figures given for 1882-83 are too low; just how low cannot be precisely determined. Since corporate records are fairly reliable, however, and since a substantial number of "indirectly recorded" homestead and preemption entries have been recovered, it is probably safe to say that the proportionate rates of disposal given constitute an accurate reflection of the actual situation.

The initial impetus for settlement in Sifton was provided by the arrival of the C.P.R. in the area. To a certain extent, the line itself served as a focus of activity. Of the nine townships in the R.M. the three in the northern tier had the highest proportions of disposed lands in 1881-85[2]. In township 9-23 some 47.6% of the land had been taken up by the end of 1885. In township 9-24 37.1% was gone, and in 9-25, 30.6%. However, most of the large-unit purchases of corporate lands which mark this period were in these three townships. If such are discounted, then the incidence of actual settlement was almost as high in townships 7-23

---

[1]See Appendix B; 80-acre homesteads are particularly useful in this.

[2]Note that these were the first in which the C.P.R. finished its selection of lands, and that all eligible lands were taken. They also contained the better part of the C.N.W.L. Co.'s lands.

(30.6% disposed), 8-24 (28.7%), 7-25 (20.1%) and 8-23 (19.4%), as in the northern townships. In other words, the degree of settlement activity was much the same in seven of the nine townships in the municipality. Since easy access to a railway service centre would have been an important asset for a settler, this dispersion away from the north is somewhat surprising. It is apparent, however, that this pattern of settlement was not haphazard.

An examination of the physical pattern of disposals for the period quickly reveals one striking characteristic: the early settlers went immediately for the best land available, and took as much of it as was possible. In Sifton, 7% of the land was of the best quality and 50% was of good quality, with 43% being sandhill or marsh. In the period 1881-85, though, 81.8% of the lands disposed were of the best or good quality; 20.4% comprising the former, and 61.4% the latter. Only 15.6% was sandhill (mostly of the better variety) and 2.6% marsh. The Britons and Anglo-Canadians who made up the majority of settlers in this period obviously wanted land which did not have to be cleared or improved before it could be used; and knew what they were looking for[3]. This preference shows clearly in the map of disposals, in that settlement was concentrated on the best lands (in townships 7-25 and 9-23), and in a corridor running across the municipality from

---

[3]T. R. Weir, "Settlement", 59-60 has noted that an early preference for wooded land by such settlers "began to fade rapidly when it was fully realized that wheat land was the prime objective in the search for a homestead". He dates this changeover in the mid- or late 1880's, which may be later than it actually occurred.

north-west to south-east. It will be noted that this closely follows the natural contours of the open, well-drained, light sandy soil which lies between the sandhills and the marshes in the centre of the R.M. These lands had a particular attraction in that they generally dried earlier in the spring, and therefore offered a longer growing period for spring wheat: a crucial consideration in the days before Marquis, and other faster-maturing strains, were available. Generally speaking, the quantity of good land available was limited. In order to get their share many settlers had to move out from the rail line. As a result, local concentrations of settlement were to be found in several different parts of the municipality by the end of 1885.

The way in which the majority acquired their land also affected the distribution of settlers. In 1881-85 most settlers took up free homesteads and the attached pre-emptions (although many did not follow through with the latter). Such acquisitions accounted for 74.6% of the lands disposed. This meant that settlement activity would automatically be fragmented. There were, of course, only eighteen even-numbered sections in each township. Of these, about one and three-quarters belonged to the H.B. Co.; leaving sixteen and a quarter open for homesteads. Allowing for squatters, pre-emptions, variations in disposition, and the ever-present proportion of poor land, perhaps ten or eleven suitable sections were actually available in each township during the first five years of settlement. Each of these could be occupied by a maximum of four homesteads; but two was a

more common number. As time went on, settlers were therefore forced to move further from the railway in order to find good land. Mitchner has suggested that speculation reinforced this trend. As he puts it, the result of the 1882-83 rush was that "the great volume of land [along the C.P.R. line] remained vacant and under developed while settlement was dispersed away from the choice lands near townsites and along the route"[4]. It is difficult to measure the actual affect of this in Sifton but, judging by certain large, early purchases, it apparently was a factor. Another was the initial confusion as to the location of service centres and a degree of uncertainty as to the facilities which would eventually become available[5]. This made it more difficult for settlers to decide on a good location. Overall, the settlers' freedom of action in acquiring good land was restricted by the quantity and location of that available, and by the land disposal system. Choices were further limited by the need to compete with other settlers and with speculators, and by the confusion

---

[4] E. A. Mitchner, "Pearce", 52.

[5] J. M. Richtik, "Manitoba Settlement", 545-46 has commented on the early rivalry among Oak Lake, Virden, and Griswold for economic leadership in the district. Griswold was at a constant disadvantage due to its proximity to Brandon, but there was not much to choose between the first two until the end of the 1880's, when Virden moved ahead. The main reason for the relative decline in importance of Sifton's two centres may lie in the problems, noted earlier, in finding townsites. Both may thereby have missed part of the Boom activity, and the "initial capital equipment of a new community...warehouses, hotels, etc." which came with this (W. L. Morton, "Site", 101). Virden was firmly established in 1882 and, moreover, had some unusually well-to-do settlers, including several members of the British aristocracy (Watson, "Oak Lake", Ms. and Moody interview notes).

inherent in the rush of settlement. In many cases settlers seem to have simply opted for the best Dominion land which they could lay their hands on, disregarding other factors.

By the end of 1885 the development of the newly-established municipality was well underway. The population had increased from about fifty in 1881 to 562 in 1885[6], of which about 450 seem to have been on farms. Some 151 farms were in operation, occupying 41,626 acres. Of these 151, 135 (89.4%) were a half-section or less in size; the mean being 249.3 acres. This statistic, in company with the figures showing the type of Dominion land disposals during the period, underlines the central importance of the homestead in the early pattern of settlement in the R.M.

It is apparent that few of the actual settlers were able to furnish themselves with more than a homestead and, perhaps, one other quarter-section. This means that the local concentrations of settlement on the larger areas of good land, noted above, consisted of many small holdings crowded together; a poor basis for future development. The emphasis on small holdings also serves to explain the immediate importance of wheat in the local economy. Some 7,631 acres were under cultivation in 1885, with crops being taken off 5,825 acres. Of these, 4,126 acres (70.8%) were devoted to spring wheat. About 86,335 bushels were produced on this land;

---

[6] Census of 1885-86; Sifton data was apparently gathered in 1885.

an average of 20.9 bushels per acre[7]. The average settler was operating on a shoestring budget. Diversification was impossible for most, since it required a substantial capital investment for livestock, specialized implements and processing facilities. In order to survive, a cash crop had to be produced as soon as possible. This, given the market situation, meant wheat; even though this was not the best way of utilizing the varied natural resources of the R.M. It is significant that the first major capital projects undertaken in the R.M., the construction of an elevator and a rolling mill at Oak Lake in 1885, were semi-cooperative ventures and involved wheat handling and processing facilities[8].

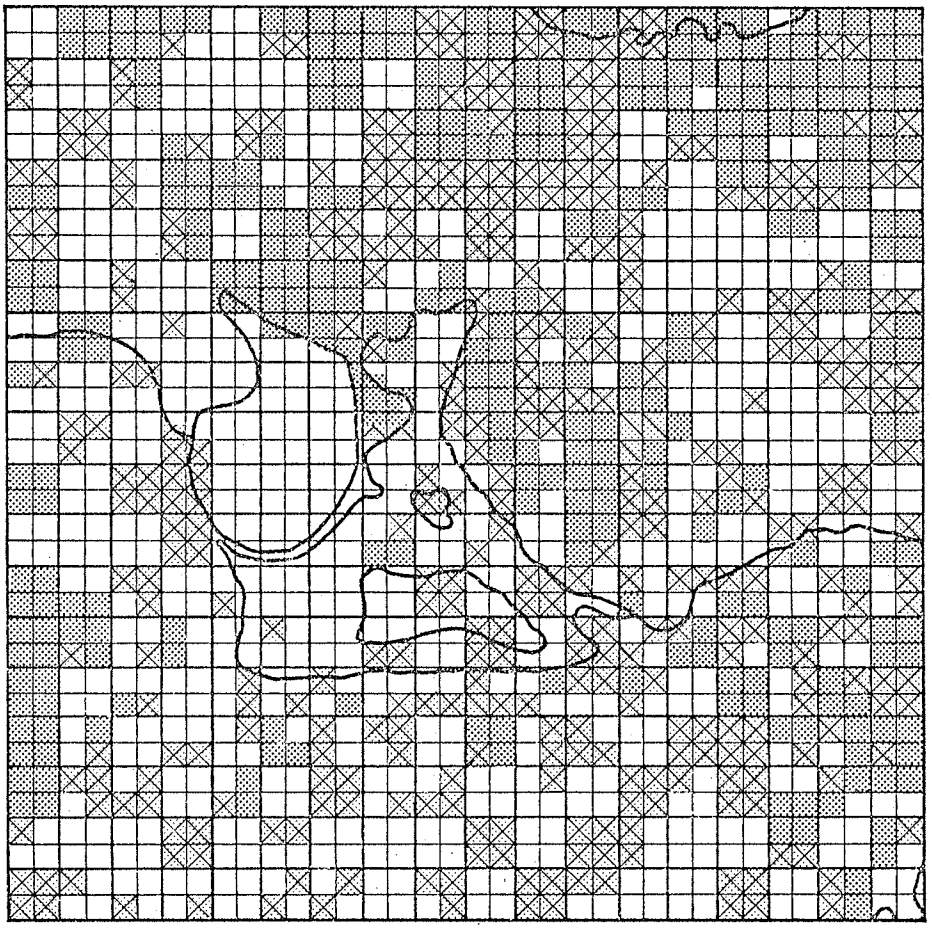
In the next five years new settlement continued to fill the R.M. By the end of 1890 some 391 more quarter-sections had been taken up, of which only 26 (6.7%) were later cancelled. The net disposals for the period comprised 28.1% of the total area. However, only 75.6% of the area was still open at the start of 1886, and so the disposals made by the end of 1890 actually amounted to 37.6% of the lands available at the start; the highest proportion in the study-period. Of

---

[7] Census of 1885-86. J. L. Tyman, Section, Append. 2 p. 225 and J. H. Ellis, Manitoba Agriculture (Winnipeg: 1944), p. 40 provide tables of wheat production, prices and yields for southwestern Manitoba. These are used hereafter, unless otherwise noted. Buyers in Oak Lake were paying 44¢ per bushel for #1 hard in 1884 (20¢ for frozen), and 40¢ (25¢) in 1885. See Watson, "Oak Lake", T. J. Smith interview notes.

[8] See Watson, "Oak Lake", Wright interview notes. The builder, D. Moore, is recorded as having canvassed local farmers for donations, and apparently was successful. The first mill was destroyed by fire in 1887, but another was built immediately by the four Leitch brothers; two of whom had homesteaded in the area in 1881 and 1884.

MAP 8



Earlier disposal

New disposal

DISPOSED LANDS, 1886-90

the 391 quarters disposed of, 60.6% (237) were Dominion lands. These constituted 31.0% of gross Dominion disposals and, once again, almost all were homesteads and Dominion Land sales. Some 39.4% (154) of the period total was from the corporate grants, and included 31.4% of total corporate disposals (gross). The C.P.R. was able to sell 31.9% of its available lands, the C.N.W.L. Co. 36.3%, and the H.B. Co. 20.0%. These represented 27.9%, 22.8% and 15.9%, respectively, of total grant disposals. Corporate land sales were becoming more important as the quantity of good, "free" Dominion lands available declined.

Disposals were uniformly high throughout the period, although a slight decline took place in the last year. The annual average disposal was 11,677 acres per year, with highs of 15,785 acres in 1889 and 13,920 acres in 1888; and a low of 6,280 in 1890. The best year for homesteads and sales was 1888, with 10,560 acres being so disposed, while the best for corporate lands was 1889, with 8,480 acres. The average annual rate of disposal was an impressive 8.5% of lands available, with peaks of 12.5% in 1889 and 10.0% in 1888. In 1890 the rate was only 5.7%; but it should be noted that this figure was not surpassed until the large Swamp and School land sales were made in 1906, when the quantity of land available was only three-fifths that of 1890.

On the whole, the best lands remaining were taken up between 1886 and 1890; 61.7% of total disposals being of better quality, and 38.3% being poorer land. By the end of the period only 24.7% of the best land and 39.3% of the good land remained

undisposed; together comprising 44.3% of the lands available. Some 58.5% of the sandhill and 76.2% of the marsh, on the other hand, remained available. Settlement was uniformly heavy across the municipality, with an average of 39.5% of the lands available in each township being taken up. In township 9-24 fully 68.2% of the available land was taken; but the three western townships (in Range 25) had a slightly lower incidence of activity. In 8-25 just 24.8% was taken. Townships 7-23 and 7-24 had the second and third highest proportions, respectively, at 45.3% and 44.0%; this despite the low quality of the land in 7-24, where only 4.9% of the land had been disposed in 1881-85. This activity can be explained by the approach of the Pipestone Extension of the C.P.R.'s Souris Branch. Although the line was not completed through Sifton until 1892, plans were announced earlier, and new settlers moved in in large numbers. The construction of this line, with its stations and elevators, soon brought all parts of the municipality within ten miles of a service centre, and most within five.

In 1891 Sifton had a population of 1504; triple that of 1885 and about thirty times that of 1881. Approximately 1300 of these people were on farms[9]. The total amount of land in farms had doubled since 1885, but the acreage under cultivation had tripled in size to 20,913 acres as established

---

[9] Census of 1891. The number of farms in Sifton was not recorded in this census but must have been at least 250, judging by earlier and later totals.

settlers increased their cultivated acreage[10]. Statistics for the average size of holdings are not available[11]. However, given the continued influx of new settlers, and the fact that those already in place no longer had access to free and cheap Dominion lands, the average size of holdings must have been similar to that in 1885. This would mean that about 80% of the farms were a half-section or less in size.

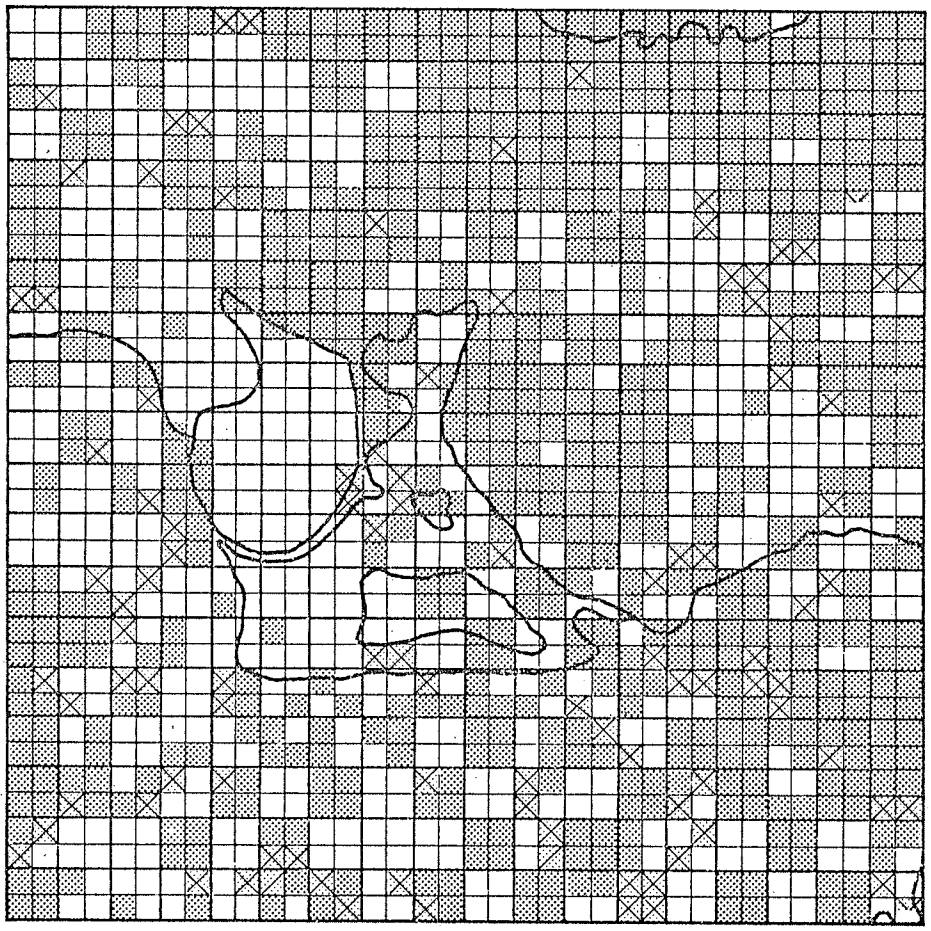
The pattern of development in the late 1880's constituted an extension of that for 1881-85. Large numbers of small holdings were the central element in settlement. Most farms seem, from the start, to have been single-family operations, based on a homestead and a second quarter acquired by other means. Both immediate survival and long-term prospects for improvement depended exclusively on wheat. As one local historian has noted in reference to the late 1880's, "when a crop failed there was little to fall back on as wheat

---

[10]See R. W. Murchie et al, Agricultural Progress on the Prairie Frontier (Toronto: 1936), p. 38 regarding farm size and cultivated acreage in a pioneer situation.

[11]Data regarding the size of farms, the area occupied by farms, the area under and the nature of cultivation in Sifton is inadequate throughout the study-period. Where it is available, it tends to be unenlightening. The Dominion censuses for 1891, 1901, 1905-06 and 1911 used the Brandon electoral district (i.e. west-central Manitoba) as the database for agricultural statistics. In other years (1885-86, 1916, 1921) municipal figures are given, or those for townships; but different criteria of collection and inclusion were used at different times. In 1916, for example, no statistics for the size of holdings were given. The Manitoba Municipal Commissioners' Reports (1905, 1907, 1910-11, 1913-15) used the municipality, thus partly filling the gap in Dominion material. The information from this source, however, is occasionally suspect, and in any case its categories are not compatible with the Dominion's. By using these materials selectively and by consulting other, fragmentary, sources a picture of agricultural development in Sifton can be drawn up; but it is by no means complete.

MAP 9



Earlier disposal

New disposal

DISPOSED LANDS, 1891-95

growing was the farmer's principal source of income, and very little, if any, mixed farming was done"[12]. By 1891 the proportion of land sown in wheat had increased to 82.2% (17,184 ac.), from 71% in 1885. This not only means that new settlers continued to go into wheat, but also that "veteran" settlers were expanding their production of the crop. Some 359,633 bushels were produced; an average of 20.9 bushels per acre. At 87¢ per bushel, most farmers could expect sizeable returns that year. This however, was one of the better harvests for both yields and prices. When one, the other, or both decreased in a given year serious repercussions could be, and were, felt.

The period 1891-95 marked a sharp transition in the development of the R.M. of Sifton. The speculative atmosphere of the 1880's gave way to a more conservative climate. In just ten years half of the land in the R.M., including almost two-thirds of the better land, had been disposed of by the Dominion and the corporations. In the case of the corporations--and two of them in particular--the hidden costs of indiscriminate sales were beginning to appear. In the case of the Dominion the supply of good, unreserved land was almost exhausted. In the late 1880's and early 1890's, as has been seen, all of these parties reappraised and adjusted their land disposal policies. These measures coincided with a sharp decline in immigration to Manitoba, falling wheat prices, and

---

[12]E. G. Bulloch, "Pioneers", 22. This history is largely based on interviews with the original pioneers.

the beginning of a dry period[13]. The rapid and intensive settlement of the 1880's was based on the availability of an abundance of good land and large numbers of people willing to make use of it, and upon favourable market and weather conditions. The former disappeared and the latter changed. A period of consolidation and adjustment followed.

From 1891 to 1895 only 103 quarters in all were disposed of in Sifton, and net disposals amounted to just 89 quarter-sections; less than the figure for 1889 alone. This comprised 6.9% of the total area and only 14.7% of the lands available at the start of 1891. Some 52.9% of the disposals were Dominion lands (almost all homesteads) while 47.1% were corporate. Major sales were confined to the first half of the period, but homesteads were taken at a relatively high and even rate: until 1895, when only two quarters were entered for. Some 9% of the C.P.R. lands available were taken, as were 12.5% of the C.N.W.L. Co.'s and 7.5% of the H.B. Co.'s. While corporate sales were not large in absolute terms, it will be noted that their relative importance in period disposals was steadily increasing.

In 1890, as has been noted, the rate of disposal was 5.7% of the lands available; down from 12.5% in the previous year. This marked the beginning of a rapid decline in the rate and volume of disposals. The nadir was reached in 1895, when the net acreage available in Sifton actually increased by 320 acres, due to the return of six C.N.W.L. Co. quarters

---

[13] W. L. Morton, Manitoba: A History (Toronto: 1967), p. 251-255.

to the market through cancellations. In all, the annual average rate was only 2.9% (barely a third of that for the previous five years), ranging from 5.3% in 1892 to a deficit of 0.4% in 1895. Buyers were being selective. Although only 37.4% of the better lands were still available, 48.5% of those disposed fell within this category. Townships 7-23 and 7-25 together accounted for 42.1% of net disposals, reflecting the attraction of the new rail line. Some 36.6% of the land available in the former, and 20.7% of that in the latter, was taken up. In six other townships, however, the figure was less than 10%; including townships 8-25 and 9-25 where the amount of land on hand actually increased between the end of 1890 and the start of 1896.

It can be seen that new land was not in very great demand in Sifton in this period. Yet, at the community level, growth did not stop altogether. For one thing, services and utilities were greatly expanded and improved at this time. The C.P.R.'s Pipestone Extension was finished in 1892, and two new service centres (Deleau and Findlay) appeared along its route. In the north, Oak Lake and Griswold continued to grow and develop. In 1890 an important step was taken as work on a municipal road network was begun. This was, partly, to provide farmers suffering from that year's severe drought with a way to work off their taxes. Although the product was not overly sophisticated, consisting as it did of a furrow plowed for each wheel track with the centre

left unbroken[14], it was an improvement over the randomly-located tracks previously in vogue.

The 1890 drought was partially compensated for by the fact that farmers were able to get a good price for what little they could grow, and could sell the bumper crop of 1891 at similar rates. Thereafter, however, a discouraging combination of low prices and low yields set in; the latter arising mainly from the below-average rainfall of 1892-94. Unfortunately, exact crop figures are not available for Sifton itself, but those for southwestern Manitoba provide some idea of the local situation. In 1892 the average yield for wheat was 14.5 bushels per acre, with a Lakehead price of 75¢ per bushel. In 1893 these fell to 9.1 bushels per acre and 66¢. By 1895 the average yield was up to 27.3 bushels per acre, but the price had fallen to 61¢ per bushel. Overall, it was a difficult period for small farmers: for many, too difficult.

The process of consolidation and adjustment continued to the end of the 1890's. The rate of growth in the period 1896-1900 was even slower than that in the previous years, but it was somewhat more consistent. From 1896 to 1900 a total of 94 quarters were disposed of, and the net disposal was just 74 quarters. This represented only 13.5% of the lands available during the period. For the first time, corporate disposals were greater than those of Dominion lands: 57.4% as opposed to 42.7%. This was despite the fact that

---

[14]See Watson, "Oak Lake", Black interview notes.

the H.B. Co. had as much land on hand at the end of the period as it had had at the beginning; even though six quarters were sold. The C.P.R. and C.N.W.L. Co. disposed of 15.1% and 12.2%, respectively, of their lands on hand. Homesteads remained the most important element in Dominion disposals, but 1,280 acres of Swamp and School land provided a major supplement.

The rate of disposals remained low and steady throughout the period. It ranged from 2.0% in 1899 to 3.7% in 1898, for an annual average of 2.7%. The highest volume for a single year was in 1898 when, on the heels of the extraordinary crop of 1897, 3,120 acres were taken. Disposals were fairly even throughout the municipality, with an average of 15% of the land available in each township being taken up. In actual numbers this amounted to about eight or nine quarters in each of the nine. As before, buyers and enterers took good land whenever possible. Although only a third of the better land was still available this comprised 60.9% of disposals in the period.

By 1900 Sifton's population had increased to 2,100, including 480 "resident farmers" on about 275 farms[15]. A government pamphleteer enthusiastically described it, at this time, as "rolling prairie, not what might be called a wheat-growing district, but eminently suited for stock raising or

---

[15]Manitoba Department of Agriculture and Immigration, Canada's Centre is Manitoba, etc. (Winnipeg: 1901?), p. 30; this pamphlet is an invaluable reference for the period, since the census is virtually useless.

mixed farming, as the pasturage is generally plentiful"[16]. As evidence of this he cited the profitable creamery at Oak Lake, the cheese factory at Findlay, and the 2,547 head of cattle, 1,178 horses, 710 pigs and 14 lonely sheep in the R.M. It is apparent, however, that wheat was still the dominant element of the local economy. In 1897 the elevators and mill at Oak Lake alone had handled a record one million bushels of wheat[17]; an event made doubly welcome by the fact that the going price that year was 99¢ per bushel, the highest point reached before 1907. In 1900--probably a more representative year--28,000 acres produced 420,000 bushels. Although the amount of land in private hands had increased by 23% since 1891, the acreage devoted to wheat had increased by fully a third.

The 1890's, in Sifton, were a time of consolidation and slow growth. Most of the new settlement and acquisition took place in the south, after the arrival of the Pipestone Extension, but the degree of activity was not high even here. Judging from the small average size of transactions, and the lack of any discernible physical pattern to the disposals, it would appear that most were small acquisitions by established farmers close to their original holdings. New homesteads were important in the first few years, but corporate sales dominated disposals for the better part of the decade.

---

[16] Ibid, 33.

[17] Watson, "Oak Lake", Black interview notes. Indian Head was the only delivery point which handled more grain in this year than Oak Lake.

Overall, the development of services and institutions, and the improvement of individual farms, seems to have been the main concern. In the absence of reliable statistics, developments in the pattern of land tenure are not easy to determine; but from the other evidence available, it would seem that little had changed in a qualitative sense. The number of farms increased slightly, and the acreage in wheat rose significantly, but it appears that the structure of the farm community and the type of farming carried out remained substantially the same at the end as at the beginning.

Manitoba entered the Twentieth century on the wings of a new Boom. While few of the 'men in sheepskin coats' came to the municipality named for their patron[18], the R.M. of Sifton shared fully in this. At the start of 1901, 36.5% of the land in the R.M. remained available; and by the end of 1905 20.8% of this had been taken. Net disposals amounted to 93 quarter-sections, or 7.1% of total disposals. Once again, corporate sales accounted for the better part of the lands taken, involving 66.8% of period disposals. This comprised 14.6% of corporate disposals. The C.N.W.L. Co. did particularly well, selling 42.9% of its available land; although this amounted to only 1,840 acres (of which 480 were later cancelled). The C.P.R. disposed of 24.0% of its lands on hand. These sales (49.5 quarters) alone accounted for almost half of period disposals. In 1902 C.P.R. sales reached their highest point since 1889, with 2,400 acres being

---

[18] Census of 1921 shows only 11 of the 1569 people then in the R.M. to be of East European origin.

sold. As a result of continuing cancellations on earlier sales, the H.B. Co. was only able to dispose of 13.5% of its available lands. Dominion Lands provided 33.2% of period disposals. Homesteads comprised two-thirds of this, and Swamp lands a third; but homesteads continued their decline in both absolute numbers and in relative importance.

The rate of disposal in 1901-05 was remarkably even. The annual average rate was 4.1%, and fell below 4% in only one year of the five. This occurred in 1903, when 2.5% of the lands available were taken. Gross sales and entries amounted to 4,320 acres (of which 3600 were C.P.R. and C.N.W.L. Co. lands). The net figure was 3,680 acres. Overall, this constituted a significant recovery from the doldrums of the mid-1890's. The rate of disposal was particularly heavy in the southwest. In townships 7-25 and 8-25, 56.1% and 36.1% of the lands available were taken up, respectively. Significant disposals were also made in 8-23 and 7-24, with about 20% of the available land being taken in each case. It will be noted that all of these townships had major concentrations of marsh, water and/or sandhill; and as a result had been more-or-less neglected earlier. This decline in standards of selection was reflected in the figures for the quality of the land disposed. In 1901, 26.2% of the better land and 52.4% of the poor land remained on hand. Some 39.7% of the period disposals involved the former, and 60.3% the latter. The situation had reached a point where the choice was very limited. Overall, the pattern of disposals suggests that established farmers were beginning major enlargements of their

holdings[19]. Disposals were scattered and generally in small units, but on the whole more blocks of a half section or more in size were taken than had been the case in the previous decade.

It appears that the population of the R.M. and the number of farms operating remained nearly stable from 1901 to 1905, with about 1,650 people and 250 farms. The acreage in crop, however, seems to have increased significantly, from 28,000 to about 34,000 acres[20]: an increment of about 20%. The 1901 crop year marked the beginning of a series of excellent returns in southwestern Manitoba. The average yields for the region (for wheat) were 25.0 bushels per acre in 1901 and 25.9 in 1902. Prices were in the region of 75¢ a bushel. The average yield dropped in 1903 and 1904 to between sixteen and eighteen bushels per acre, but this was offset by higher prices (86-97¢); and, in any case, rose again in 1905 to 21.1 bushels per acre.

Given the unusually consistent spring rains which marked the first seven years of the decade, Sifton was probably producing about three-quarters of a million bushels of wheat per year in this period, plus other grains. This factor largely explains the increased interest in new lands. However, certain changes which were appearing on the agricultural scene at this time also had an affect. The first steam

---

[19]See J. L. Tyman, Section, 65.

[20]The 34,000 figure is an estimate based on 70% of the Census of 1905 total for "cultivated" land. This is the average ratio of lands in crop to cultivated acreage in years where both are known.

tractor had been used for threshing as early as 1891[21], and they seem to have become fairly common by the turn of the century. In 1904, for example, the Municipal Council considered it necessary to order operators of engines and separators to take special precautions before crossing bridges and culverts in the municipality[22]. While substantial farm mechanization did not take place in Manitoba until after World War One such activities at this time indicate both the increased prosperity of farmers, and their need for labour-saving devices to work larger holdings more efficiently.

The Council was also beginning to concern itself with drainage; a reflection of the rapidly decreasing amount of usable lands available at a time when demand was sharply up. In 1901 the Provincial government was requested to clean out the channel of Plum Creek, since

> a great many acres of hay lands in the vicinity of Oak Lake are flooded with water which makes them useless to the settler and... if the water course was cleaned out it would have the effect of lowering the water so as these lands would become valuable. [sic] [23]

Since the Province owned the Swamp lands this was not felt to be a municipal responsibility. Also, in 1904, the Public Works Department was asked to study the possibility of draining lands in the northern part of the R.M. into the Assiniboine, by way of Flat Creek. Negotiations for these projects continued until 1907, and some work was done, but it appears

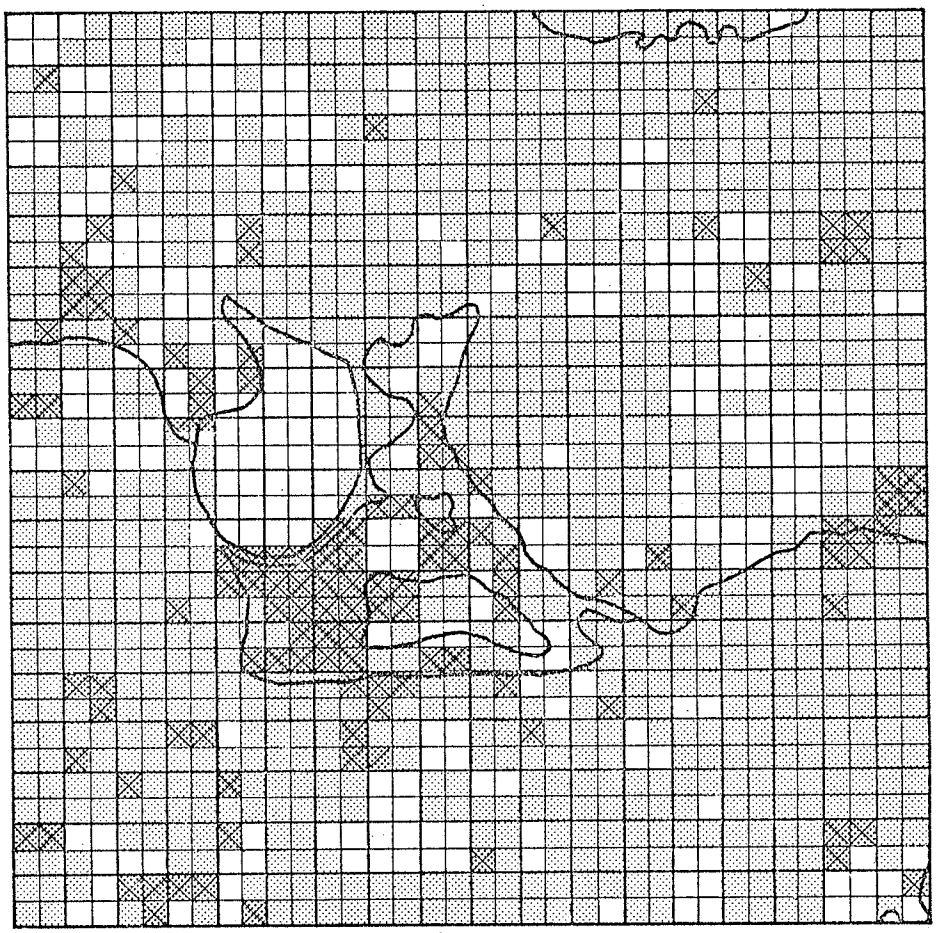
---

[21]Watson, "Oak Lake", Black interview notes.

[22]R.M. of Sifton, Minutes of Council, 6 Sept., 1904.

[23]Ibid, 2 Jan., 1901.

MAP 10



Earlier disposal

New disposal

DISPOSED LANDS, 1906-10

that they were finally dropped. By this time it had begun to look as if "the expense would be too large in proportion to the amount of land benefited"[24].

The period 1906-10 marked yet another transition in the pattern of development in the R.M. In the first place, there was a further increase in the demand for land. The 126 quarter-sections taken comprised 35.6% of the lands available: virtually the same proportion as was taken in 1886-90, when a far better selection had been available. Dominion lands provided 76.2% of the total, most of which came from the School and Swamp land grants which disposed, respectively, of 4,280 and 8,746 acres. While supplemented by a few homesteads (but none in 1906, for the first time) and five M.U.G. quarters, these two grants alone accounted for 64% of period disposals. The 23.8% of disposals made up of corporate sales came almost entirely from the C.P.R. grant.

The rate of disposal in 1906-10 was almost double that for the previous period, the annual average being 7.3%. In 1906 12.8% of the lands available were taken up; the highest annual rate in the study-period, and the seventh highest in terms of actual acreage (8,160 acres). The importance of the School lands as a last reserve of good lands for farmers can readily be gauged. The rate remained above 6% until 1910, when it dropped to 4.8%. The large Swamp land sales served to fill up the "gap" in disposals around Oak Lake. The four southwestern townships (townships

---

[24]Ibid, 28 Aug., 1907; see also 30 May, 1904 and 29 June, 1906.

7 and 8, ranges 24 and 25) had the highest rates of disposal, with between 34.7% and 48.1% of the lands available being taken up during the period. School land and C.P.R. sales, however, were more widely distributed, and average rate for all townships together was 25.7%. The only anomaly here was township 9-25, where the acreage on hand had increased by the end of 1910, due to cancellations. Thanks to the large amounts of Swamp lands sold, fully 60.3% of disposals were of poor quality. Overall, it would appear that the opening of the government land reserves served to reinforce the trend in disposals noted for 1901-05. After several good crop-years, established farmers were in a position to buy. School lands, especially, offered a worthwhile investment opportunity. More of the land sold in this period, however, probably went to speculators and to non-residents generally, than had been the case since the 1880's.

The land under crop in Sifton in 1910 seems to have been in the region of 38,500 acres[25], an increase of about 13% since 1905. Yields and prices were about average in southwestern Manitoba throughout the period; except 1907, when the average yield dropped to 12.9 bushels per acre and the price rose to $1.05 a bushel. Thanks to the decision made by Census officials that, as one put it in 1911, "the geographical township... is too small a unit for which to

---

[25]The 38,500 figure is an estimate, based on 70% of the total for "cultivated" land given in Man. Dept. of Municipal Commissioners, Annual Report for 1910. See above.

publish, in detail, the various tables of statistics"[26], it is very difficult to measure actual development in this period. An indication of what may have occurred, however, can be found in the municipal assessment and taxation figures. In 1905 the total assessed value of land and non-exempt property in Sifton was $610,023, and taxes of $10,212 were levied. By 1910 the assessed value had increased to $934,030, and the tax figure was $21,004[27]; this despite the separation of the town of Oak Lake as a new municipality in 1907, which removed it from Sifton's tax base[28]. Since new settlement was not a significant factor, it must be assumed that these changes represent major expansion and improvements by established farmers.

By 1910, at the latest, the "settlement" phase of Sifton's development was over. This is not to say that a

---

[26] Census of 1911, Vol. II p. v; a companion note on the problems of classifying various types of land for census purposes is also enlightening, if not particularly helpful.

[27] Manitoba Department of Municipal Commissioners, Annual Reports, 1905 and 1910.

[28] Judging by a comment from the local newspaper editor the good citizens of the town did an excellent job of hiding their sorrow at the separation. The Feb. 4, 1907 issue of the Oak Lake News remarked that "no more will the people of the town have to pay taxes for the building up of districts from which they get no benefit". This probably refers to the southern area of the R.M. which naturally took most of its business to Souris and Pipestone. Local rumour has it, and Census figures appear to confirm, that Oak Lake's incorporation had a shady side to it. Among other things, a population of 500 hundred was necessary, yet the town was credited with only 311 souls in 1901 and 449 in 1911. Oak Lake today is the smallest incorporated town in the province. One wonders if the town fathers found it useful to have a future premier (T. C. Norris) as their M.L.A., and a cabinet minister (Clifford Sifton) as their M.P.

definitive shape had been attained in the R.M. However, local conditions no longer favored new settlement of the kind that had been possible before this date. In particular, good land of any kind was hard to come by, and demanded a good price when it could be found. The period 1906-10 saw the disposal of the better part of the Dominion land reserves, the end of the C.P.R.'s settlement-oriented disposal policy and the sudden rise in corporate land prices, and the inauguration of a new homestead policy of dubious value. It also saw the construction of two new rail lines by the Canadian Northern Railway; one angling across 7-25, in 1905, and one paralleling the C.P.R. main line, in 1907. The degree to which the R.M. was already developed can be seen in the fact that, with one partial exception, no new service centres appeared along these routes. Belleview, where an elevator was constructed, was already an established community.

By 1911 it appeared that the "Great Boom" was over. In the normal course of events, it is probable that Sifton would have moved into another period of consolidation, adjustment, and slow development; one similar to that which had followed the first decade of expansion. A great deal had taken place in Manitoba between 1901 and 1910, not least in the rural areas. Time was needed to identify and absorb new elements. In the event, however, this time was not provided. The recession which began to appear at the start of the period had disappeared by the end, under the influence of "the war to end all wars".

From 1911 to 1915, 37.5 quarters of land were taken up in Sifton, with net disposals amounting to 35 quarters. These involved 15.1% of the land available. Some 68.0% of the disposals were Dominion lands, of which fully three-fourths were homesteads. Of the 24.5 quarter-sections disposed, nine were normal homesteads and 9.5 were homesteads taken on revested Swamp land in 1915. The latter have a suspiciously speculative cast to them. The balance of the Dominion disposals were provided by the last of the School and Swamp land sales in 1912. Corporate lands provided 32.0% of disposals, almost all from the C.P.R. grant. The H.B. Co. was unable to sell a single acre in this period.

The unusual combination of events which affected the period 1911-1915 showed directly in the rate of disposal. The annual average rate was 2.7%; barely more than a third of the average for the preceding period. But an 'average' is almost meaningless in the context of exceptional events. In 1911 the rate of disposal fell to 1.5% of the lands available, but climbed sharply to 4.1% in 1912, when a variety of small purchases from different grants and one homestead entry were made. It began to fall off again in 1913, when 2.3% of the lands available were taken. To this point, the pattern was a fairly regular one, analagous to that of 1891-95. In 1914, however, something very unusual took place. No land whatsoever was taken. This was not a case of cancellations outweighing disposals, as had occurred in 1895, but one of no activity whatsoever. It appears that

the major depression which began in earnest in 1912-13[29] peaked in early 1914. Then the events of August caused prospective buyers and enterers to hold back; or to pack up their troubles and depart. The situation evidently had cleared up by 1915, when the rate of disposal rose to 5.4% of the lands available. This involved 13.5 quarter-sections, of which all but one (a C.P.R. sale) were new homesteads. The rising demand for produce engendered by the war created a market, and the availability of ex-Swamp lands provided the means for new settlement; on a very marginal basis. Disposals were fairly evenly distributed throughout the R.M., it being simply a case of taking what was available. By 1911 only 13.0% of the better lands were still on hand but, nonetheless, 41.0% of those taken came from this category.

In 1916 the population of the R.M. had declined by about 200 from the 1911 figure, to 1,451[30]. Most of this can probably be accounted for by the absence of people involved in various types of war work, including military service. Other changes were taking place in Sifton, of greater consequence. In 1916 some 43,096 acres were devoted to field crops in the municipality. This was an increase of about 4,500 acres (12%) over 1911, with the additional land having been brought into production between 1914 and 1916[31].

---

[29] See W. L. Morton, Manitoba, 328.

[30] Census of 1916.

[31] The field crop acreage given in the Department of Municipal Commissioners' Annual Report for 1914 is the same as that given in the Census of 1911, while the Census of 1916 shows a marked increase.

In itself, this increase was not unusual, but surprising changes had taken place in the proportions of the cultivated land being used for various crops.

The evidence available, slim as it is, suggests that Sifton was primarily a wheat-producing area as late as 1906. It is apparent, however, that the emphasis began to shift shortly thereafter. By 1913 a government pamphleteer, in describing the R.M., was giving equal weight to livestock and wheat. While he noted that "a great deal of wheat is grown", such that "half a million bushels... are marketed annually", he also pointed out Sifton's natural advantages as a livestock-raising area and indicated that they were being extensively exploited. The presence of stockyards in all centres in the R.M., and the willingness of the Council to allow large blocks of land to be fenced in (cutting off road allowances) were cited in support of his assertion that Sifton was generally "a good cattle market"[32]. This evident shift away from monocultural wheat production is confirmed by the 1916 crop statistics, which show that only 55.5% of the crop acreage (23,907 acres) was devoted to spring wheat. The emphasis on oats, barley and other crops had increased enormously, as had the importance of livestock. In 1916 5,553 cattle, 2,009 sheep and 3,000 pigs were being raised.

---

[32]Manitoba Department of Agriculture and Immigration, Greater Manitoba: The Home of Mixed Farming (Winnipeg: 1913), p. 34-35. This pamphlet was written to promote mixed farming, so some exaggeration is to be expected. The writer, however, obviously considered Sifton an excellent example of diversification.

With the sharp increase in wheat prices during the war[33], wheat remained an important cash crop. The development of a mixed-farming economy, however, was clearly underway; which suggests that related changes had also occurred. These can best be dealt with in the context of the last of the periods under study.

Disposals from 1916 to 1921 were the lowest in all of the study-period, in all aspects. Some 35 quarter-sections were taken up, of which 9 (25.7%) were later cancelled, for a net disposal of 12.4% of the lands available. Only 17.9% of this involved Dominion lands: 6.25 quarters of ex-Swamp homesteads (some taken by veterans), and one M.U.G. quarter. The balance (82.1%) were corporate lands. The C.P.R. disposed of 12.2% (net) of its available lands, the C.N.W.L. Co. 25.0%, and the H.B. Co. 30.0%. These figures would have been considerably higher for the first two, were it not for their high rates of cancellation; which amounted to 33.9% and 75.0%, respectively. Once again, the speculative nature of some wartime activity, at least, is evident.

The rate of disposal was uniformly low, the annual average being 2.1%. This ranged from 1.4% in 1916 to 2.9% in 1920, with a small but steady increase in each year in between. The greatest activity was in townships 7-24, 8-25 and 9-25. Significantly, these contain the highest proportions of sandhill; a type of land suitable for grazing range, but little else. Attention was also paid, however, to the

---

[33]In 1916 the price was $1.23 per bushel; in 1917, $2.05.

very small stocks of good land remaining. These accounted for 42.3% of net disposals. Overall, disposals were of a marginal nature. Both homesteads and purchases appear to have been motivated by the booming wartime demand. As a result, their prospects were as unstable as that demand; and particularly since poor weather greatly reduced the possibility of exploiting it[34].

In 1921, for the first time since the early 1900's, fairly comprehensive agricultural statistics were compiled for the municipal level, including Sifton. These show that striking changes had taken place in the R.M. since the turn of the century. In the first place the decline in the importance of wheat, noted in 1916, continued apace. In 1921 only 32.1% (16,041) of the 50,036 acres in crop was devoted to wheat. Oats alone accounted for 35.6% and barley 15.8%. A further 16.5% was being used for rye and miscellaneous crops. While the acreage in field crops had been increased by about 7,000 acres (16.3%) since 1916 to meet wartime demand[35], the proportion devoted to wheat had fallen by almost two-fifths[36]. It appears that many farmers diversified their operations during the war, taking advantage of the wider market possibilities of the time.

---

[34]Rainfall in southwest Manitoba was well below average in 1918-20, and average yields were down. Prices, however, averaged $1.91 per bushel for the years 1916-20.

[35]Field crop acreage in Sifton increased by 29.9% between 1914 (Dept. of Municipal Commissioners' Annual Report) and 1921 (Census of 1921).

[36]R. W. Murchie and H. C. Grant, Unused Lands, 44 made special reference to the importance of oats and barley in the Sifton area (1926) as both cash crops and a source of feed.

The second major change involved the average size of farms in Sifton. Of the 310 in operation in 1921[37], 19.0% (59) are listed as "0-200" acres in size, 1.3% (4) as "201-299" acres, and 79.7% (247) as being larger than 300 acres. With adjustments to remove farms of exactly a half-section from the last category[38], this means that approximately 30% (ca. 93) of the farms in Sifton were a half-section or less, and 70% (ca. 217) were larger. Judging, once again, by the figures given in the 1926 Census, it would appear that about half of the latter were larger than a section in size[39]. These figures constitute a complete reversal of those for 1885-86, when 89.4% of the farms were made up of a half-section or less. Given that thirty-five years had elapsed, changes were to be expected; although their nature and degree are somewhat surprising. The problem is to determine when they took place. While definitive data is in short supply, certain trends and patterns in the process of settlement can be drawn upon to answer the question.

---

[37]This figure seems dubious, since 204 farms were listed in 1916, and 231 in 1926. Also, the proportions of different types of operators (i.e. owner, tenant) in 1921 are very similar to those for 1926; which militates against the idea that tenancy was unusually important during the war. An arithmatic error--not uncommon in the early censuses--may be at fault.

[38]Judging by the 1926 census (which uses a more-compatible set of categories), in which 35.9% of the farms are given as a half-section or less in size, about 30 of the "300+" category for 1921 would have fallen in this range.

[39]Census of 1926 puts 29.5% of the farms at more than a section in size, and 10.0% at more than a section and a half.

TABLE 4

SUMMARY OF DISPOSAL STATISTICS
BY FIVE-YEAR PERIODS
(1881-1920)

Period	% Total lands avail. (start of period)	Net Disposals			Avge. ann. rate of disp.	Quality		Type of Disposal	
		ac.	% start	% total		% good	% poor	% Crown	% Corp.
1881-85	100.0	52235	25.2	25.2	5.4	81.8	18.2	74.6	25.4
1886-90	75.6	58385	37.6	28.1	8.5	61.7	38.3	60.6	39.4
1891-95	48.4	14240	14.7	6.9	2.9	48.5	51.5	52.9	47.1
1896-00	41.8	11200	13.5	5.4	2.7	60.9	39.1	42.6	57.4
1901-05	36.5	14824	20.8	7.1	4.1	59.0	41.0	33.2	66.8
1906-10	29.6	20226	35.6	9.7	7.3	39.7	60.3	76.2	23.8
1911-15	20.2	5520	15.1	2.7	2.7	41.0	59.0	68.0	32.0
1916-20	17.6	3840	12.4	1.9	2.1	42.3	57.7	17.9	82.1

Three distinct phases can be discerned in the settlement and development of Sifton between 1881 and 1920. The first was that of initial settlement, lasting from 1881 to about 1895. The second phase was one of secondary expansion and development, encompassing the period 1895-1906. The third may be termed the "post-settlement" phase, which began about 1907, and ran through to the end of the study-period. Each of these stages comprised an important component in the general development of the municipality.

In the first fifteen years the free homestead set the pace for land disposal in Sifton. Some 81.6% of the 160- and 80-acre homesteads entered for during the study-period were taken at this time. These alone accounted for more than half of the land disposed of in the period; and the supplementary land picked up by many homesteaders accounted for the better part of the Dominion and corporate sales. Throughout this period, small farms specializing in wheat production were the order of the day. The majority of settlers were operating on marginal resources, and immediate cash returns were necessary. A considerable amount of good land was available throughout, and even at the end of, the period. But, once the majority of settlers had exhausted their "free" land privileges, few could afford to acquire extra land, which could only be gotten by purchase from the corporate grants or private owners[40]. On the whole, the

---

[40]C. M. Studness, "Economic Opportunities and the Westward Migration of Canadians During the Late Nineteenth Century" Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science Nov., 1964 has argued that, if more land had been set aside for free

the opportunity for individual expansion was there but the means of exploiting it were scarce. It seems probable that the drought and depression of the mid-1890's caused many of the original homesteaders to leave the area.

In the next ten years, from 1896 to 1906, new settlement continued to be an important factor. Some 10.4% of all homesteads were taken in this period. The expansion of existing farms, however, was clearly the dominant trend; as the high proportion of corporate sales in total disposals, and the heavy demand for Dominion and Provincial reserve lands (when released) shows. It is also very likely that large numbers of private sales were transacted, as owners of small, marginally-productive farms took advantage of the

---

homestead disposal in southwestern Manitoba in the initial settlement period, "There is little reason to believe that development before the turn of the century would not have been more extensive" (p. 583 ff. 21). In terms of simple quantity, he is probably correct. In terms of the individual settler, however, this would not have had much effect unless the homestead regulations had been substantially altered so as to allow each settler to take a larger amount of land; such, for example, as a basic 320-acre homestead. This would have required a complete reversal of the philosophy behind the system. In any case, had the Dominion opted for direct payments to corporations rather than land grants, it would almost certainly have decided to sell the same land itself (as was planned in 1879). This would have cut out the "middle-man" but would not have done the settler much good. K. H. Norrie, "The Rate of Settlement of the Canadian Prairies, 1870-1911" Journal of Economic History June, 1975, pp. 410-427 has argued convincingly that the type of land available--that which could best be used by existing agricultural methods and technology--was the most important factor influencing the spread of settlement on the Northern Great Plains. He concluded that new settlement ground to a halt in western Manitoba after about 1890 because the desired type of land was available in the U.S. in greater quantities. This hypothesis, however, does not help to explain variations in the density and patterns of settlement at a local level. In this instance it does not explain why Sifton was only partially filled by settlers in 1881-1895. The complexity of the process of settlement at a local level makes such generalizations rather tenuous.

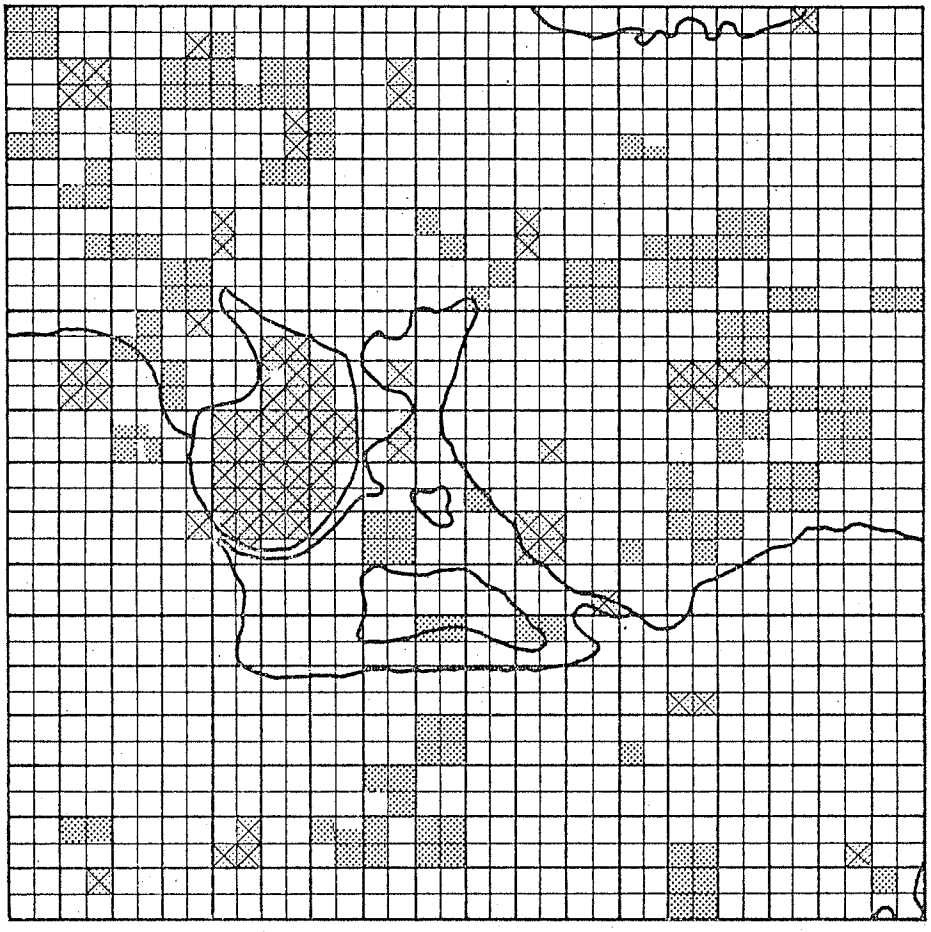
seller's market in land and moved on. The relatively high annual rates of disposal in the first decade of the new century were evidently generated by the purchases of established farmers, and were supplemented by the acquisition of complete "improved farms" by well-heeled new settlers. This activity was made possible by a long series of excellent crops and consistently good wheat prices. But, while wheat provided the means of, and reason for, such new development, it appears that this involved a movement away from wheat specialization.

In 1906 the School land auctions provided one of the last opportunities for Sifton's farmers to acquire fertile, well-situated agricultural lands in large quantities, at affordable prices. Thereafter, a farmer desiring to expand his operations had two choices: to pay a premium price for good private or corporate land to increase his wheat acreage; or to pay a lower price for poorer land which was suitable for coarse grains or pasturage, and diversify his operations. The rising proportion of poorer lands taken after 1906 seems to show that many opted for the second alternative. It appears, however, that mixed farming remained a sideline, rather than becoming a primary activity, for most farmers in the R.M. The good prices being paid for wheat, the difficulties and expense of conversion, the perennial shortage of farm labour, and the low capacity of domestic markets militated against such a shift[41].

---

[41]See W. L. Morton, Manitoba, 297 and 330.

MAP 11



Unreserved Dominion and school lands Corporate lands

UNDISPOSED LANDS, 1921

When the war began in 1914, the majority of Sifton's farms seem to have been a section or more in size. While a fair number of smaller farms remained, and more appeared during and after the war, this scale of operation lacked the flexibility necessary to cope with the frequent fluctuations in climatic and market conditions which plagued prairie agriculture. The war created a seller's market for farmers. Virtually anything that could be produced could be sold at a good price. While wheat prices were high, however, crops were generally poor. It appears that many Sifton farmers took the opportunity to diversify on a major scale. By the end of the decade, large farms and mixed farming formed the basis of the local economy.

From 1881 to 1920 83.7% of the land in Sifton had been sold or granted to individuals by the Dominion, the Province and the corporations. At the end, the School and H.B. Co. grants had the highest proportions of lands unsold, with 40.7% and 33.3%, respectively, remaining on hand in 1921. Only 7.2% of the unreserved Dominion land remained available; the better part because the "land" was under several feet of water, rendering cultivation difficult. To this should be added the 6.5% of the Swamp land grant which was not sold before 1912 or homesteaded after. With 24.9% of its original grant unsold, the C.P.R. held about half of the total acreage available. Some 10.5% of the C.N.W.L. Co. grant remained on hand; the lowest proportion for a corporation. So, after forty years of settlement and development, 16.4% of the land

in the R.M. remained in the hands of the original grant-holders, including 10.3% of the various Dominion grants, and 24.4% of the three corporate ones.

The general quality of the lands on hand in 1921 was low. Due to the criteria of disposal used, some problems arise here. Some 9.4% of the better land was theoretically undisposed in 1921. However, this figure includes an Indian Reserve quarter-section, and two full sections around the towns of Oak Lake and Griswold, so it is actually lower. None of the best land was actually available. Most of the good land on hand was to be found in the unsold balance of the School reserve, and scattered throughout the C.P.R.'s holdings. Three-quarters of the sandhill had been taken, including 78% of the marginal variety and half of the worst. Of the marsh and water, slightly less than three-quarters had been taken. Due to its usefulness for hay and other purposes, the marsh land had sold well, with 85% of the seasonally-dry and 91% of the permanent type being taken up at one time or other[42]. The main concentrations of undisposed lands were to be found in the worst sandhill areas in townships 8- and 9-23, 7-24 and 9-25, with a patch of fairly good land remaining

---

[42] A sizeable part of the permanent marsh area was used for non-agricultural purposes, including recreation and fur-farming. An anonymous local historian, in History of Oak Lake: 1882-1900 (n.p.: ca. 1907), notes that "In 1900... a Toronto firm of fur dealers... bought a section of marsh land near the lake, which they financed for a muskrat farm. Another firm from Winnipeg bought and financed another block for the same purpose. Approximately three years later, a carload of these live muskrats were shipped to Germany". These operations came to an end in the 1930's.

northwest of the Lake. The highest proportion of unsold lands was in township 9-25, where 29.9% of the area was undisposed.

In his history of Manitoba, W. L. Morton entitled a chapter on the 1920's "The End of Farm Pioneering". This is especially appropriate in Sifton's case. As of the end of 1920, some 1,086 quarter-sections of Dominion and corporate land had been alienated in the R.M., or were still under contract for disposal. By the spring of 1930, ten years later, the total number of quarters in private hands had risen by only 19, to 1,105[43]. The post-war depression which set in in 1920-21 brought the development of the municipality to a complete standstill. While the municipality had had its share of ups and downs since 1881, this was the first time that a point of equilibrium had been reached. For better or worse, 1921 marked the beginning of a new era in Sifton's history.

Between the arrival of the C.P.R. in 1881, and the end of the First World War the Sifton area was transformed from an all-but-empty wilderness into a mature agricultural community. This process involved not one, but a long series of changes. The type of settlement effected in the 1880's was not that which dominated in the early 1900's; and this in turn had been transmuted by the early 1920's. The impetus for this development came from many different sources, both external and internal; but always it continued. The dynamic

---

[43] R.M. of Sifton, Assessment Roll, 1930-33.

properties of the history of the rural sector of the province are not always fully appreciated or understood. In part this arises from the fact that many of the most striking changes have been veiled by the monolithic facade presented by the land itself. The timeless qualities of the natural environment have entered into the image of its contemporary inhabitants. In a commercial-agricultural economy, however, land is as much a tool as the plough that breaks it. To bring the full panorama of rural change into perspective, attention must be given to the part played by the men behind said ploughs.

CHAPTER IV

SETTLERS AND SETTLEMENT

Ch. IV Part 1: Factors in Settlement

The foregoing examinations of settlement--conducted through studies of the mechanics of land distribution, on the one hand, and chronological patterns of development, on the other--share a common deficiency. They show how, when and where settlement and development took place. However, they do not adequately explore the specific composition and dynamic interrelationships of the basic elements of the process. A given area at a given time offered a different set of alternatives to the prospective settler; and yet another set to established ones, once this sector of the community appeared. These individuals had to make certain decisions, selecting those opportunities which they could and would take advantage of. The nature of these decisions was affected by several factors: the general conditions of the time, the extent of individual resources, and by the final goals which settlers had in mind[1]. The aggregate of

[1]See John W. Bennett and S. B. Kohl, "Characterological, Strategic, and Institutional Interpretations of Prairie Settlement," in Western Canada Past and Present, ed. A. W. Rasporich (Calgary: c. 1975), p. 20 for an excellent discussion of 'strategies' of settlement. The comments on the nature of 'individualism' in the pioneer period are particularly interesting.

individual adaptive strategies formed the general process of settlement and development. In order to understand its historical dynamics, it is necessary to examine the nature of the basic alternatives and the response of settlers.

The decision to move to Sifton, rather than some other area, was the first made by the settler. For the first ten or fifteen years the presence of the C.P.R. main line, and later of the Pipestone Extension, was probably a decisive element in their choice. The early availability of these lines radically altered the relative value of all of the other resources in close proximity to them. Had the route of the C.P.R. not been changed in 1881 the history of the area would have been substantially different. Many settlers seem to have chosen the Sifton area for the practical reason that they could get to it quickly and easily.

As one historian has noted, "although the upland between the Pipestone Creek and the Assiniboine was not very attractive for grain farming, the railway ran through the centre of it", and so it was filled earlier than better-endowed areas which lacked the all-important line. For the same reason, "The sandy lands south of Oak Lake were taken up earlier than those to the west"[2], due to the construction of the Pipestone Extension. Sifton's natural deficiencies were offset by the premium placed on access to a rail line. As W. L. Morton

---

[2]T. R. Weir, "Settlement", p. 64. It was noted in 1901 that the southern townships of Sifton were settled later than those in the north because they had "suffered for the want of railway facilities" (Manitoba Dept. of Agriculture and Immigration, "Canada's Centre", 30).

puts it, "The old control of settlement by river front site was replaced by the control of the limit of the grain haul to the railway"[3].

Even rumours of new construction could attract settlers, as was the case in the southern townships before 1892. Railways were automatically equated with prosperity and progress; apparently without much concern for redundancy. In 1888 a new line was projected, which was to run from Brandon, through Oak Lake, to Estevan; paralleling the C.P.R. through Sifton. One settler wrote home to England that "it will be the making of Oak Lake, there is not much doubt about that, and will make land more valuable"[4]. Only the Canadian Northern lines, built at a fairly late date, failed to have a significant affect on settlement in Sifton.

Another important consideration in the choice of Sifton by settlers was the presence of friends and family, and of compatible neighbours generally[5]. The attachment was much more than a sentimental one for, as one homesteader complained

---

[3] W. L. Morton, "Site", 100.

[4] Baker Correspondence, Letter of Feb. 19, 1888. According to Baker the line (which never got off the drawing boards) was to go to "Cofield". An 1888 map shows this as the "Emerson, Brandon and Souris Railroad". The planning done was obviously tentative, since the line shown passes directly through the centre of the Lake (See J. L. Tyman, Section, p. 215).

[5] J. M. Richtik, "Manitoba Settlement", 558 calls this the most important consideration. While this may well have been true--and probably was--it is also very difficult to demonstrate conclusively; as witness, Richtik's failure to do so. However, it is certainly safe to say, as he does earlier, that most settlers "felt the need for a certain number of neighbours to guarantee satisfactory economic and social development".

in 1889, "it is not possible for one man to manage 320 acres, and I cannot afford to hire labour"[6]. Mutual aid was indispensable at a time when most settlers' capital was tied up in land and equipment. By sharing the heavy and time-consuming jobs with two or three others in the same situation a farmer doubled or tripled his own chances of surviving[7]. Such was the advantage imparted by this assistance that it appears that many settlers "were willing to accept less desirable land in order to be able to remain near their friends"[8]. In Sifton, due to the limited quantities and irregular distribution of the better land, a considerable number of settlers were probably faced with this decision.

In his study of early Manitoban settlement, J. M. Richtik utilizes an interesting concept in the analysis of patterns of settlement. He calls this the "primary decision maker"; meaning a person who came first to an area and then persuaded or attracted a significant number of others ("dependent decision makers") to join him. There are several examples of this in the Sifton area. The Marion holdings on the Island, for example, seem to have formed the nucleus of the métis community. The Berards, the Lafournaises and several

---

[6]Baker Correspondence, Letter of April 6, 1889. Baker was trying to convince his son Will to come out from England and take up his pre-emption.

[7]See J. W. Bennett, "Interpretations", 24-25 for examples of this and comments.

[8]J. M. Richtik, "Manitoba Settlement", 561. W. A. Mackintosh, Prairie Settlement, 59 notes that "Settlement attracts settlement, and the location of a few people in a district brings others in their train, even though the desirable land may have been already occupied".

other families appear to have settled nearby because the Marions were there; not to mention a homesteading priest by the name of Father Bernier, and Ambroise Lepine of 1870 fame (who purchased land on the Island in the early 1890's).

W. G. Knight, who settled north of the Lake in the late 1870's, also appears to have been a "primary decision maker". To give just one instance of his influence, it was his presence that brought William Baker to Oak Lake in 1886. Baker brought his wife, one son, three daughters and two of the latter's fiances with him. All stayed in the Oak Lake area (the third daughter marrying a local farmer), while another son came out later with his family, as did a previously-married daughter with hers[9]. Thus Knight can be credited with drawing some twenty people to the area in one family alone[10]. Another important settler was Robert Lang.

---

[9]Baker Correspondence, passim; and interview with Mrs. B. Parsons conducted by the author in Dec., 1975.

[10]Walter G. Knight was a very interesting individual. He settled in the Oak Lake area in 1878-79 with a large dairy herd and was the Dominion weather observer for the region. In 1882 he was the first Secretary-Treasurer for Dennis County, and in 1884 the first for Sifton. In 1885 he was elected Captain of the local Home Guard (Man. Free Press March 23, 1885). In the same year he moved west to Swift Current, where he apparently repeated his role as a "primary decision maker". He was given a homestead under special conditions to show other settlers that trees and wheat could be grown there; continued as a meteorological reporter; and became, successively, a mail contractor, Notary Public, Justice of the Peace, Stipendary Magistrate and Inspector of Fisheries. Some of his success can be attributed to the fact that he often "demonstrated...his loyalty to the Conservative party". See D. C. McGowan, Grassland Settlers (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1975), pp. 82, 132-33 for Knight's activities in Swift Current, and Watson, "Oak Lake", Knight, Lang, Parsons and Fall interview notes, Edwin Baker Letter (1946), and Notes for his stay in Sifton.

Coming out from southern Ontario in 1881 (obviously with some money), he had 500 acres ready for seeding by 1882[11]. His wife or daughter later purchased most of the Island from the Marions. Lang was probably responsible for the presence of many of the settlers in Sifton who came from the Niagara Peninsula; including the Scotts (via Colorado), and the Macfarlanes. Yet another example of a "primary decision maker" was the prosperous settler who came early and brought others into the area by offering employment. J. D. McGregor--later a Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba--was one of these. McGregor hired William Henderson as his foreman. Henderson later bought the Island from the Langs (1901), and his family holds it to this day.

Richtik identifies one other type of "decision maker"; the "secondary" variety. This referred to persons who moved into an area without having been influenced in their choice by the settlers already there. As he notes, however, the distinction between "secondary" and "dependent decision makers" is a somewhat arbitrary one[12]. Most settlers had at least some notion of the type of area they were going into; and it is very difficult to separate one who came because he found the British or Ontario-Canadian component of the community (for example) to be congenial company from one who came because he already knew a few of the resident

---

[11] Manitoba Free Press, March 4, 1883. Lang continued to be an agricultural pace-setter in the district. An article in the Aug. 14, 1901 issue of the Oak Lake News compares his farm to the Brandon Experimental Station.

[12] J. M. Richtik, "Manitoba Settlement", 558.

settlers. The distinction, in any case, does not seem to be too useful. Another type of "decision maker", which Richtik does not distinguish, should be noted. These were recruiting agents chosen from among local farmers by the government and sent out to find new settlers for their area. Two examples of this appear in Sifton. In the 1890's, a local historian has noted,

> Two of the early settlers, Sebastian Deleau and Ed. Colleaux were immigration agents, their job being to return to Belgium for immigrants, all expenses being paid by the government. Among the first immigrants to arrive [as a result of this] at Oak Lake were the Perlot family.[13]

At about the same time R. K. Smith, from north of the Assiniboine, "was chosen to go with 13 others to England to try to win new immigrants for the prairies"[14]. The first influx of Belgians, in fact, was the result of the Government acting as a "decision maker" itself, without resorting to local middlemen.

Ethnic relationships were also an important factor in the choice of Sifton by settlers. Several distinct groups appeared in the area. The Counties of Bruce and Huron in southwestern Ontario, for instance, supplied the largest group of settlers in the R.M. Most arrived in the early 1880's. In 1907, the Carman Standard reviewed a new book, The Camerons of Bruce. In this the reviewer noted:

---

[13] I. Robson, Deleau-Bethel, 2.

[14] D. Vipond, Proudly We Speak (Kenton, Man.: 1967), 72.

> Around Oak Lake they [men from Bruce County] practically own several townships and a few years ago up there the stereotyped question asked of each newcomer was "What part of Bruce did you come from".[15]

The question was not an idle one. The local histories of Oak Lake and Griswold fairly bristle with references to families from Seaforth, Wroxeter, Henstall, Walkerton and Owen Sound; with a few 'outsiders' from Guelph and Brampton thrown in for good measure. Some of the most familiar names in the area are linked to these hometowns; including the Langs, Blacks, Macfarlanes, Speers', McGregors, Chisholms and any number of others. This group dominated the area through sheer force of numbers, and had the political and economic influence to match.

The Truro area of Nova Scotia also supplied a significant number of settlers. These were to be found south and west of the Lake, around Findlay (named after one of these settlers) and Belleview. Several came to Sifton after a short stopover in the Brandon Hills, and chose the new area "because the soil, being light and sandy, help [sic] quicken grain maturity. There was less danger of frost, a bugaboo in the early days. [and also] Fuel and water were plentiful"[16]. English immigrants also made up an important element of the community. The Sandhurst district north of the Lake was so named "because of the large number of people coming there who

---

[15]Reprinted in the Oak Lake News, Jan. 10, 1907.

[16]Mrs. L. Chambers, "End of an Era for the Findlay Community" Reston Recorder Oct. 1, 1970. The early Nova Scotian presence was also noted in the Manitoba Free Press of March 4, 1883.

had been connected in one way or other with the British Military College at Sandhurst"[17]. These included a General Douglas Grant (who bought a C.P.R. section in 1890, and then had someone else look after it while he went to South Africa for three years[18]), plus a British Colonel and two Captains. A fairly large number of "remittance men"--scions of the British upper classes who had made a nuisance of themselves at home--also came to the area. One later moved to South Africa, where he had the dubious distinction of dying for Queen and Empire in the Jameson Raid of 1895[19]. The Protestant, "English" majority was rounded out by other Englishmen (such as the Bakers), Scots (the Gillespies), and a few Americans (the Hoods). By and large these groups were soon indistinguishable from their Ontario neighbours.

Although the majority of the settlers in Sifton were Anglophones, there was also a significant French-speaking element. This was made up of a mixture of French-Canadian, French, Franco-Belgian and Manitoba métis settlers (listed roughly by the size of the group). The métis, an important part of early settlement, have already been discussed. The French-Canadians appear to have come in with the general rush of 1881-90; such prominent families as the Massons and

---

[17]Watson, "Oak Lake", Ms. p. 16. One also suspects a pun, given the nature of the terrain in the district.

[18]C.P.R. Co., "Sales Records"; see NW 5-9-24. It is not recorded if he ever returned to the area.

[19]See Watson, "Oak Lake", Lang and Macfarlane Interview Notes.

the Marcottes having taken homesteads as early as 1882. Most came straight out from Quebec[20], and settled east and south of the Lake. This was near to the métis community, which they seem to have assimilated very quickly. The French and Franco-Belgians were a special case. The settlements around Grande Clariére and Deleau were established in 1888, with Government encouragement. Large numbers of settlers were brought over from France and Belgium, and probably were assisted in establishing themselves. Some French families moved into the area east of the Lake, but most were in the south. In fact, the nucleus of the French community was outside of Sifton, at Grande Clariére. Most of the Belgians, however, settled around Deleau. Sebastian Deleau, one of the Belgian community's leaders, arrived in 1889. New immigration continued until after the turn of the century. Late arrivals included Ivan Decock in 1902, who quickly started a very large dairy farm; and Jules Marcq in 1904, who also became a large land-owner[21].

A list compiled in 1893 by the Dominion government credits the Grande Clariére-Deleau settlement with 180 "settlers", 500 "souls", and 9,000 acres under cultivation. This was the largest "foreign settlement" in Manitoba and the North-West Territories at that time in terms of the first and last categories; but not, oddly enough, in "total souls". This may indicate that many men came over alone, to start

---

[20]I. Robson, Deleau Bethel, 25-26; Section by A. R. Guild, "My Memories".

[21]Ibid, 1-3.

with, to begin a farm[22]. Sam Breen Q.C. of Winnipeg, who was raised in the area, has made some interesting comments about the relations between the Belgians and the English-Canadian elements of the Deleau community. There was, apparently, very little mixing between the two groups to begin with, due to the "difference in cultural and educational levels and habits more than by difference in religion". By the 1930's, however, the assimilation of the Belgians was well underway; largely due to the influence of the Consolidated School District[23].

It is apparent that these group connections had an important affect on the pattern of settlement in Sifton. The terrain features of the municipality naturally divide it into three distinct areas: one in the north and east around Oak Lake and Griswold; one to the southeast around Deleau; and the last in the south and west around Belleview and Findlay. Except in regard to municipal affairs there was little interaction between the three. Certain ethnic concentrations were associated with these different areas. The settlers in the north were mostly from Ontario, with a strong British element. The southwest was, again, primarily Ontario-Canadian, but also had sizeable Scottish and Nova Scotian contingents. Until 1888, the southeast had a mixture of British and Ontario settlers, but after this date French

---

[22]Canada, Sessional Papers, 57 Vic. (1894) n. 13 pt. 1 Sched. D. p. 3 "Foreign Settlements in Manitoba and the North-West Territories".

[23]I. Robson, Deleau-Bethel, 26; Section by S. Breen, "A Jewish Boy Remembers Deleau".

and Franco-Belgian settlers became an important factor. Generally speaking, new arrivals tended to gravitate towards their established compatriots.

In 1885 some 55% of the 562 residents in Sifton were Anglo-Canadians and 23% were British, for a total of 78% of the population. Quebec supplied 17%, while only 3% were from the United States and 2% from Europe[24]. In 1891 there were 1,504 persons in the R.M. Unfortunately, the Census that year did not include a breakdown of the population by national origin: but it can be noted that 33% were Roman Catholic, while only 19% were French-Canadian[25]. While a crude yardstick, this difference serves to indicate the presence of the new French and Belgian community. It does not appear that the ethnic composition of the municipality changed substantially after about 1895. In 1921 some 72% of the 1,569 people in the R.M. were listed as being of "British" extraction, 22.9% as "French" and Belgian, and 5.8% as other Europeans[26].

Within this ethnic mosaic, family ties were an important element in forming patterns of settlement. Settling with or near one's close relatives enabled the pooling of labour and resources. In Sifton 42 family groups took a section of land or more, each, from the Dominion and/or the corporations. Each of these groups included two or more purchasers or

---

[24] Census of 1885-86.

[25] Census of 1891.

[26] Census of 1921.

enterers, for a total of 132 people, and "family" holdings ranged in size from four to seventeen quarter-sections, for a total of 343.5. These major families included 21% of all the people acquiring land in Sifton from 1881 to 1920, and took 28% of the land disposed. The proportions taken from each grant were very similar to those for the general disposition of lands, with slightly more homesteads and Dominion land sales, and relatively fewer from the "selected reserves".

The holdings of most families tended to be concentrated in one area. The four Irelands, for example, had ten quarters between them. All of these lay in the northern tiers of township 7-23 and the southern part of 8-23. The two Gabrielles had eight quarters, all to be found in 8-25, while the four Banisters' ten quarters were close together in 9-23. The same tendencies can be seen in the cases of the thirteen family groups which held more than ten quarters each. The Marions and the Marcottes tied for the lead at seventeen quarters each: the first, with seven owner-members, concentrating on and around the Lake; and the second, with eight, being found in township 8-23. The two Langs had thirteen quarters along the northeast shore of the Lake, while the four Speers acquired 14.5 quarters in the Griswold area. The instances of two or three members of the same family taking two or three quarters in the same, or adjacent sections are simply too numerous to detail. In fact, a settler on his own, without family members acquiring land nearby, seems to have been a rarity in Sifton. It would appear from

this that "decision makers", and ethnic attraction, operated mainly in a familial context. That is, family ties provided the concentrations of settlers which made these factors significant. As the Knight-Baker case demonstrates, a "decision maker" did not have to attract twenty or thirty individual settlers to an area to make his mark. Three or four would suffice, if they were the heads of large families. Similarly, noticeable ethnic concentrations could result from the decisions of a half-dozen or so key family heads to settle in a given area. Overall, it would be fair to say that the decisions of just fifty or sixty individuals to settle in Sifton had an enormous impact on the course of settlement in the municipality.

The majority of settlers, then, seem to have chosen Sifton in order to be near friends, family and compatriots. Once their decision had been made, however, an entirely new set of problems and possibilities appeared. The prospective settler had to decide exactly where and how he was going to take up land in the R.M., and what characteristics he desired in his selection. The later that these decisions were made, the fewer the alternatives that were open.

The first settlers in the Sifton area had virtually an unlimited choice in the type of land which they would take--within the limits of the natural resources of the area--and where they would settle. Given the single-minded results of the first five years of settlement, there was obviously little doubt in anyone's mind as to the priorities involved. Early settlement focused on the best lands available for wheat

farming; the river and stream bottoms, the open areas of light, sandy soils. There is a recurring argument in the literature on western settlement as to the type of land which settlers--and especially those from Ontario--preferred; whether a mixture of wood, water and prairie, or open prairie alone was preferred[27]. In Sifton's case the extensive availability of wood and water may have exercised a general attraction for settlers, but it does not appear to have been a major factor in their choice of specific locations.

The earliest settlers do not appear to have worried a great deal about being close to service facilities on the rail line. While there was a general concentration in the north and west near the C.P.R. to begin with, it was not an overpowering one. Settlers went for the best land regardless of its location. It may be that those who took land furthest away did not consider the distance significant in the long term. At an early stage the settlers were busy setting themselves up, and most had little to market and little to buy with. Service centres were not strictly necessary. Rather than make a sacrifice in quality, or pay high prices for their land, they may simply have taken the chance that proper facilities would be made available by the time that they needed them. If this was the case, then the gamble was a successful one. Many settlers preferred not to take such risks, as is shown by the influx to the south after 1890: but, overall, service centres do not

---

[27]See J. M. Richtik, "Manitoba Settlement", 561 and T. Weir, "Settlement", 59-60.

appear to have exercised as great an influence on the choice of specific locations by settlers in Sifton as might have been expected. After 1892, of course, most parts of the R.M. were within five miles of a centre anyway, and the question disappeared.

In the first fifteen years of settlement, the quality of the land was the most important factor in the settlers' choice of specific locations. This was both directly, and indirectly, the case. The first settlers--including most of the key ones, noted above--took the best available. Those that followed them took the best remaining, generally, or took the best that was left close by. After 1895 quality remained a consideration, of course, and especially for such new settlers as appeared. The proximity of the land to existing holdings, however, was also a major consideration, as established operators began to expand. It appears that people were more willing to take poor land, or lands which were only partially cultivable, if they were conveniently situated. This was particularly the case as diversification got underway after the turn of the century; and during the war, when even marginal lands offered potentially high returns.

The preference for the specific type of land selected by these settlers had an excellent rationale. At the time of initial settlement, and for a considerable period thereafter, wheat was virtually the only crop which could be converted into the hard cash necessary to pay for land, equipment and other expenses. At least, it was the only one which a settler lacking capital to invest in development (the

majority), or without extensive farming experience (apparently a sizeable minority) could produce. The natural result of this predilection, however, in combination with that for family and ethnic concentration, was that the better lands available in Sifton were filled to overflowing in very short order. Further, they were mostly filled by large numbers of small holdings. This pattern, intensified by the system of land acquisition and tenure being promoted, injected a dangerous element of inflexibility into the situation.

Once a settler had selected the specific area in which he desired to settle, the next step was to actually acquire the land. In theory, the settler had a very wide range of options from which to select in doing so; albeit the number open would vary directly with the size of his bank account. In practice, however, the intrinsic nature of the system of land distribution--designed to facilitate a specific kind of settlement--considerably limited the alternatives available.

With few exceptions, the main unit in land distribution in Sifton was the quarter-section. Smaller disposals were rare, and larger ones were multiples of the quarter. One hundred and sixty acres was not necessarily the optimum size of a prairie farm. The sectional survey system was designed and applied with only one consideration in mind. This was "the rapid and accurate division of the prairie region into farm holdings"[28]. In other words, the quarter-section was an administrative convenience; the more so in an area of a

---

[28]See Department of Interior Annual Report for 1882; Canada, Sessional Papers 45 Vic. (1882) c. 25 n. 13.

mixed nature such as Sifton. With a few fortuitous exceptions, component quarters bore no relationship to the physical character of the land. As one commentator has noted

> Under the block survey system no attempt is made to utilize the available fertile land in an area in the most economical fashion. In sections of the country where there is considerable local variation in soil productivity, this system has frequently resulted in the splitting-up of restricted areas of good land among several quarter-sections in such a way as to result in none of them proving a profitable holding to acquire.[29]

Murchie could have been writing specifically about Sifton, so accurate is the description. The close relationship between the "Dominion lands" policy and the sectional survey system can readily be seen. In both cases speed and volume were the chief criteria. Qualitative development--the efficient use of resources--was another matter altogether.

In itself, there was nothing wrong with subdividing the prairie land in this manner. For one thing, it greatly simplified the problems of acquiring land. There are, for instance, many cases of settlers simply selecting a homestead sight unseen from the register in the Lands office[30]. Also, as later developments showed, there were ways of getting around the problems posed by the sectional survey. In the beginning, however, the type of settlement which the Dominion imposed

---

[29]R. W. Murchie et al, Agricultural Progress on the Prairie Frontier (Toronto: 1936), p. 126.

[30]For an example see E. G. Bulloch, Pioneers, 10. Surveyors' descriptions were kept on hand. This system was also a convenience for less-eager settlers. By perusing the books beforehand traveling and inspection time could be greatly reduced. Baker used this method of homestead-hunting in 1886, although he ended up moving in next to his friend Knight.

tended to bring out the worst features of this method of survey. The free homestead system was tailor-made to produce a particular form of land tenure. As H. E. Jahn has pointed out, the Canadian acceptance of the basic American system of land disposal "signified the Canadian government's adoption of the American interest to preserve the West for individual rather than for group settlement"[31]. In short, the prairies were to be (and were) settled by "a class of independent proprietors"[32].

In the climate of opinion which held sway in the late nineteenth century, this basic format for settlement was to be expected. Indeed, it is highly unlikely that the policy-makers of that Golden Age of private enterprise gave, or could have given, serious consideration to any other approach. The system, in fact, had two advantages as a means of settling Canada's new western frontier. In the first place, it gave a large section of the rural population a permanent stake in western development. This vested interest at the popular level imparted "a measure of permanence and stability" to settlement from the very beginning, and encouraged the development of stable communities and institutions. In the second place, and in particular, it led to rapid development. A premium on individual initiative was built into the system; while safeguards against individual failure were not. The cloud of unrelieved failure looming over the horizon gave each

---

[31] H. E. Jahn, "Immigration", 12.

[32] J. Stahl, "Prognosis", 65.

settler a strong incentive to pay close attention to the maintenance and productivity of his land[33].

At the same time, however, this system of tenure had its drawbacks as a means of prairie settlement. When allowed to run its own course--as it was--it could easily be self-defeating. The idea of unlimited individual opportunity meets problems when the number of individuals wishing to exercise said opportunity outstrips the capacity of the resources to be exploited. The designers of the "Dominion lands" policy had two possible ways of dealing with them in the context of the original design. One was to allow only a selected few to participate. This raised the problem of who those few would be: a not-insoluble, but very explosive question. Moreover, this would have dictated a qualitative approach to settlement, rather than the rapid and intensive type desired, and deemed essential. The second alternative, to give all comers an equal opportunity, was selected; and was applied religiously after 1881. This meant, though, that each portion given away had to be small: smaller, usually, than was best for prairie conditions. The free homestead system's many advantages were counter-weighted by a number of drawbacks, particularly in an area like Sifton.

In discussing the relative merits of free land grants and land sales, Chester Martin argued that "For rapid and permanent settlement... the combination of the two techniques had advantages that neither alone could have supplied". He

---

[33]See R. W. Murchie, Progress, 92-93, where these points are painfully granted and immediately qualified.

proposed that the policy of intermingling free grant and sales lands was beneficial to settlers, as well as to the owners of the latter, for

> Had the whole range of Dominion Lands been open from the beginning to homestead entry, it is possible that... the better lands would have been settled at once in contiguous quarter sections with no latitude for expansion... The even distribution of free homesteads and lands for sale, contiguous at some point to every homestead, afforded room for uniform expansion, and formed the greatest single advantage perhaps, of the Canadian system.[34]

Had the system consistently worked in this manner, these advantages might have accrued. In Sifton, however (and, it must be assumed, in much of the parkland fringe), it did not. Martin's scenario presupposes a particular set of circumstances. The land in the area had to be uniformly good; each settler had to take his alloted homestead and pre-emption, and nothing else; and settlement had to be free of lands withheld for speculative purposes (of all types).

These requirements were not met in Sifton. The amount of good land available was limited and, thanks to the sectional survey, fragmented. Settlers naturally concentrated on that which was available. And, while homesteads were an important factor, pre-emptions were not. Instead, many settlers started off by acquiring contiguous quarters of corporate land to supplement their free grant; as is shown by the fact that nearly half the land taken in the period 1886-95 was purchased from the corporations. These purchased lands were, like the homesteads, of the best quality available.

---

[34] C. Martin, Policy, 232.

Martin's "latitude for expansion" was removed at an early date. Lastly, the incidence of speculative activity in Sifton was not extremely high in the initial settlement period: but that which took place mainly involved the good land, as in the case of the C.N.W.L. Co. grant. Altogether this meant that room for expansion would be at a premium after the initial settlement period, while at the same time such expansion would undoubtedly be necessary.

In Sifton the promotion of rapid settlement and the policy of distribution in effect "made for a degree of uniformity in size of farm which was unsuited to the variety of conditions which prevailed and the types of farming that developed"[35]. Further, the potential for adjustment was greatly limited by the locally-intensive pattern of initial settlement. Murchie has described the result of such circumstances, noting that

> by the time... the settler has improved his original holding to its limit and is ready to extend his operations in order to achieve the advantage of large-scale production, he finds that all the adjacent land has been appropriated by other settlers who are in a like position.[36]

This problem was serious enough in itself, and was compounded by the fact that the need of the individual farmer to expand his operations involved more than just a search for efficiency. As has already been noted, changing conditions made it a necessity rather than a luxury. As well, changes in the requirements of operating a farm of any size took place.

---

[35] R. W. Murchie, Progress, 126.

[36] Ibid, 93.

To a large extent the economic environment created by the free homestead system was an artificial one. The 160-acre homestead for $10 was something of an optical illusion. During the initial stages of settlement it was indeed possible to acquire land for and start up a farm with a very modest capital investment. Thereafter, however, farm ownership demanded either "a considerable and... increasing supply of capital or, the assumption of a corresponding degree of indebtedness"[37]. A farmer who attempted to deal with rising costs and requirements without expanding his revenue base could soon find himself in a precarious situation. This was especially the case when the original holding was not an economical operating unit to start with: a common problem. Those who extended their operations, by reinvesting their profits or by borrowing, had a better chance of surviving a short-term setback. Judging by the increase in the rate of disposal which tended to follow good crop-years, many farmers in Sifton did so when possible. Expansion, however, did not guarantee success. When it meant going into debt, as was often necessary, the original holding usually served as collateral. If the expected increase in revenue did not follow, due to a series of poor crops or other reasons, this could be lost. In township 8-24 alone six homesteads are known to have been lost to mortgage companies. All had been taken up in the 1880's, mortgaged in the early 1890's, and

---

[37]Ibid, 93.

lost shortly thereafter[38]. Given the uncertainties which confronted the farmer at every turn, any land transaction involved a degree of speculation unrelated to the intentions of the purchaser.

Settlers took a considerable risk in expanding their operations. They also entered into something of a vicious circle in doing so. John Stahl notes that

> Because of the historical close settlement pattern, the average prairie farmer can only expand by bidding land away from his neighbour.... this competition for land resources drives up its price, making expansion difficult.[39]

In Sifton the close concentrations of small farms on the best lands created exactly this situation. There were two possible sources for a farmer looking for new land. One was through the aforementioned direct competition for corporate, and for government reserve lands. The jump in prices for these after 1900 testifies to its affect. The other was to pick up lands vacated by settlers who, unable to keep up, sold out. This appears to have been one of the most important sources of land for expansion; for such lands could well be closer to the purchaser's original holding, and of better quality, than the first type. These advantages, however, were offset by a continuing increase in prices for "improved farms" which appears to have been equal to, if not greater,

---

[38]All 2-, NE 4-, SW 34-8-24: If 8-24 provides a fair indication of this for the R.M. as a whole, then as many as 50 of the 400-odd homesteads patented (1881-1920)--more than 10%--may have been lost in this way. The ten year gap between entry and loss in these cases argues against simple profiteering by the homesteader.

[39]J. Stahl, "Prognosis", 69.

than that for corporate and Dominion sales. In 1895 the asking price for several quarters of improved farms in Sifton ranged from $3 to $5 an acre. By 1898 it was being quoted as "$5 an acre and upwards", and by 1913 had increased to "$12-$14 up to $30-$40" an acre[40]. In any case, the appearance of such an offering on the market near to a person looking for land was largely a matter of luck.

This reliance on the failure of others to produce the means of expansion was hardly an efficient process. As R.W. Murchie has noted, "While economic factors may in the end force the issue by the displacement of those around him, such a process takes place slowly and perhaps at considerable cost to those displaced"[41]. Had the Dominion discontinued its emphasis on promoting new settlement in areas such as Sifton, and released the balance of its holdings (both reserved and unreserved) onto the open market for acquisition by established farmers, some of the pressure might have been relieved. But it did not. The adjustment of agriculture in Sifton from a small to a large unit basis was a long and slow process, and the burden fell directly on the settlers. Some individuals carried it very well. Many more fell by the way.

---

[40] All figures refer specifically to Sifton: 1895--H. H. Beck, Improved Farms for Sale (Winnipeg: 1895); 1898--Virden Board of Trade, Manitoba Homesteads, 10; 1913--Man. Dept. of Agriculture and Immigration, Greater Manitoba, 35.

[41] R. W. Murchie, Progress, 93.

Ch. IV Part 2: Ownership and Survival

The human factor in western settlement is, without any doubt, its most complex aspect. It can neither be seen in its entirety within, nor be entirely separated from, the general context of the process of settlement and development. To speak of "settlers" as a collective entity can be misleading. If only because of the system of land tenure involved, settlement was very much an individual problem, and each individual responded differently to the challenge. At the same time, however, settlement was a highly structured process. While in theory the individual enjoyed considerable freedom of action, in practice this freedom was greatly circumscribed by the narrow standard of "success" implicit in the process: the establishment of a viable farm operation. A settler was "free" to reject this, or could fail to fulfill it; but it could not be ignored. In taking part in settlement the settlers tacitly accepted this goal, and most, it must be assumed, attempted to reach it. Their success in doing so, or otherwise, therefore says a great deal about both the system as a whole, and about the settlers themselves.

The price paid by the settlers for the development of the Canadian West has seldom been dealt with in concrete terms. One of the few, and certainly the most influential, of the historians who attempted to do so was Chester Martin. At the conclusion of his examination of the free homestead system he sought to "illustrate something of the wastage of human material that must have attended the... system in Western Canada". To do this he compared the homestead acreage

actually patented or under entry in 1930, with the total acreage entered for overall. Martin found that in the case of more than 41% of the homesteads entered for in the Prairies Provinces between 1870 and 1930 no patent was granted to the enterer. Changing administrative areas and procedures made computation difficult at a provincial level, but he further estimated that the rate of failure was about 46% in Alberta (1905-1930 entries), 57% in Saskatchewan (1911-1931) and 20% in Manitoba (1870-1905)[1]. Pointing out that these figures indicated only the direct and obvious type of failure involved in the settlement process, Martin concluded that "in some respects 'free' homesteads have been costly beyond computation"[2]. V. C. Fowke was less reticent in his assessment of the implications of Martin's arithmetic. Noting that a major discrepancy between entries, and patents issued, over a substantial period indicated "failure in the realization of normal expectations", he stated that "the discrepancy for the seventy years of Dominion lands administration is so pronounced as to indicate a wastefulness little less than shocking"[3].

---

[1] C. Martin, Policy, 169-172. Martin does not explicitly state the figure for Manitoba, but it can be extrapolated from the data given, using his procedures. 62,564 entries were made in the province between 1870 and 1905, involving approximately ten million acres. By 1929 less than eight million acres had been patented by the enterer or remained under entry.

[2] Ibid, 172.

[3] V. C. Fowke, The National Policy and the Wheat Economy (Toronto: 1957), p. 285.

The "discrepancy" in Sifton--the rate of initial failure--was very similar to that given by Martin for Manitoba as a whole. During the forty years studied, some 18.2% of Dominion homestead and sale entries made were not carried through to a patent. When all of the elements of the disposal system are included, the figure is slightly lower. A grand total of 203,270 acres of land in Sifton were entered for or taken under sales contract from 1881 to 1920. By the end of 1920, only 173,725 acres were actually patented or remained under contract for disposal. In other words, approximately 14.5% of the disposals made ended in cancellation, with the land returning to the market. The rate of initial failure varied widely among the individual grants. The two corporate reserve grants had the highest (H.B. Co., 32.8%; C.N.W.L. Co., 31.9%), while the two Crown reserves had the lowest (Swamp land, ca. 13%; School land, none). The rate for settlement lands lay in between (Dominion land homestead and sale, 18.2%; C.P.R., 8.5%)[4A]. Compared to Martin's figures for Saskatchewan and Alberta, those for Manitoba and for Sifton are relatively modest. In absolute terms, however, the wastage was still considerable, with two of every ten homesteaders failing to pass the first test set for them. More importantly, these figures measure only the tip of the proverbial iceberg.

[4A] Ratio of actual to gross disposals. The corporate ratios would be higher if given in terms of sales units. The Swamp figure is estimated (see Ch. 2).

Initial failure, whether for homesteads alone or for all of the elements of the land disposal system, is not overly useful as an indicator of the rate of attrition accompanying settlement. The process of settlement did not end with the acquisition of land, and neither did the wastage which accompanied it. In order to arrive at a true evaluation of the efficiency of the process of settlement, the long-term success of settlers in establishing themselves must be determined. This requires a close examination of the distribution of land among settlers.

In the forty years from 1881 to 1920 some 632 individuals acquired land in Sifton from the Dominion and Provincial governments and the three corporate landholders. In all, 1,216 quarter-sections were involved in their transactions, but net acquisitions totalled only 1,086 quarters[4B]. A number of these 632 persons were certainly speculators. However, it is often difficult to distinguish between actual settlers, non-resident purchasers and the "speculators" in both categories.

Several of the people involved defy simple classification. Richard E. Campion, for instance, bought a C.P.R. section in 1882, giving Ontario as his place of residence. It does not appear that he ever farmed it himself. However, two of his relatives homesteaded in the immediate vicinity

---

[4B]The 1216 figure includes those cancellations for which the names of purchasers or enterers is known, and counts sales and entries for partial quarters as whole ones (e.g. 80-acre homesteads). The 1086 figure is based on net acreage disposed. See Appendix B.

TABLE 5

OWNERS AND ACQUISITIONS
1881-1920

# of quarters held	# of owners	# of owners as % of total	total # of quarters	# of quarters as % of total
1	345	54.6%	345	28.3%
2	176	27.8	352	30.0
3	48	7.6	144	11.8
4	33	5.2	132	10.9
+4	30	4.8	243	20.0
Totals	632	100.0%	1216	101.0%

of his holding, and Campion himself later opened a store in Oak Lake. Such a case presents obvious problems, and there are many more like it where the actual status of the disposal is uncertain. Was, for example, a man who moved in, homesteaded, and then quickly moved on a frustrated small-scale speculator or merely a poor or unlucky farmer? Townspeople who owned farmland, and outside owners who may have commuted to or leased theirs, pose similar problems. As Richtik and others have noted, many tradesmen came west and took up homesteads until an adequate community had grown up to support their trade or business[5]. These 'transient' owners often held on to their land afterwards. Also, of course, there were the families which had both businessmen and farmers who owned land in the same immediate area. The Speers family of Griswold is an excellent example of this. Two brothers, Archibald and Alexander, moved there from Springfield in 1881. The first was a farmer and the second a merchant. Over the next ten years Archibald acquired 5.5 quarters, including two 80-acre homesteads, while Alexander bought a C.P.R. section and an H.B. Co. quarter. These men had five and two sons, respectively; three of whom acquired a total of six quarters[6]. The relationship between the farming and

---

[5]See J. M. Richtik, "Manitoba Settlement", 321 who cites a note in a local history that "There were, in 1879...to 1881, many settlers who could be termed transient owners, inasmuch as they were tradesmen and businessmen who came west with the idea of starting a business of their own, when towns and villages develop (sic). In the meantime they had to survive, consequently they took up homesteads". See also C. Martin, Policy, 241.

[6]Griswold United Church Women, Bridging, 53 for biographical data.

mercantile elements of this family, with regard to the use of the land, is not clear. Most of the people who took up land in the municipality seem to have made use of it, in one way or another, but general statements regarding ownership must be tempered with a recognition of the degree of individual variation underlying them.

The records for Sifton show that the "average" person taking land, over the forty year period under study, acquired 1.92 quarter-sections (about 300 acres) from the original land-holders. While actual acquisitions ranged from one quarter, in 345 cases, to ten or more, in six cases, small combinations completely dominated the picture. Altogether, 95.3% (602) of the owners took a section or less in total. Their acquisitions comprised 80.0% of the lands disposed. Of these, 521 (83.4% of total owners) had a half-section or less, comprising 57.3% of the lands disposed. This broad dispersion of lands was largely due to the free homestead system.

In Sifton 59.8% (378) of the people who acquired land started out with a free homestead. Of these, 58.7% (222)--some 35% of total owners--took nothing but a single homestead. A further 32% (121) took one or two extra quarters to supplement their free grant, and 9.3% (35) added three or more. In all, 224 owners in Sifton acquired a total of either two or three quarter-sections between 1881 and 1920. Of these, some 54.0% (121) thus started out with a homestead; as did 55.6% (35 of 63) of those who ended up with a section or more. The importance of free homesteads in providing the

initial impetus to settlement has been noted earlier. It does not appear, however, that they played an important qualitative role in the long term. The relationship of homestead possession to the total size of holdings, noted above, seems to indicate that a free homestead did not confer any particular advantage on a settler. So too does the fact that almost all of the owners who expanded from their basic homestead began doing so within five years (at the same time, or even before, they actually patented their homestead).

It might be concluded from this that the majority of people took homesteads simply because they were "free" and available. Some had not the intention or means of making this acquisition the core of a larger holding. Some had a larger holding as their goal, but were unable to realize it. To this group the "free" homestead, and its implied promise for the future, were a bitter illusion. Some eventually reached their goal. For this minority, however, the free homestead was a convenience rather than a necessity; as shown by the fact that almost half of those ending up with a half-section or more did not want or require one. It could be argued that, for the half that did start with a homestead, it was a necessity. But this would not explain why, overall, a higher proportion of those who did without a homestead ended up with a half-section or more of land, than was the case among those who had one: 51.6% (131 of 254) versus 41.3% (156 of 378), respectively. In short, it seems that the free homestead simply stimulated a great deal of

marginal settlement, and therefore inhibited the progress of other settlers.

For those who had a homestead and wished to add extra property there were, aside from private sales, three alternative categories of land which could be purchased. The first was the low-priced "settlement" grant land, including Dominion land sales and C.P.R. lands. In Sifton, 88% of those owners who made Dominion land purchases also had homesteads, as did 28.8% (65) of those who took C.P.R. land. The C.P.R. figure may, at first, seem low. However, 62.4% of the buyers of C.P.R. land took two or more quarters (while most Dominion land sales involved only one), and 59.9% of the C.P.R.'s clients took C.P.R. land only. It is apparent that C.P.R. lands served as an alternate form of homestead for many settlers. The second alternative source was the "block reserve" lands. In this category 56.8% of those who bought H.B. Co. land, and 30.8% of those who took School land had homesteads as well. The latter case is rather unusual. For some reason many of the School lands were purchased by relatives of homesteaders, rather than the homestead owners themselves. The relatively late date at which the bulk of the School lands were released may account for this. The lowest figures for homestead-related purchases, as might be expected, were those for the "selected reserves". Here, only 26% of the C.N.W.L. Co.'s buyers, and 17% of the Swamp purchasers, also had homesteads.

A considerable number of owners--some 34.5% (218) bought land exclusively from one grant. The "selected

reserves" had the highest incidence of such 'single-type' buyers; Swamp with 70.8%, and C.N.W.L. Co. lands with 64%. C.P.R. lands were next with 59.7%, while the "block reserves" trailed with 42.3% (School) and 29.7% (H.B. Co.) of their purchasers being of the 'single-type' variety. Dominion land sales came a distant last, with only 11.9% taking this type alone. The proportion of 'single-type' buyers would seem to be a fairly reliable index of the occurence of speculation in a given category of grant (with the exception of the C.P.R.); probably because few actual farmers would be so selective as to the origin of their new land.

Of the 632 owners, then, 378 had homestead-based holdings, and 218 had holdings (of various sizes) built on one type of purchase only. This left a balance of 36 owners who acquired a mixture of non-homestead lands. Of these, the majority were a combination of C.P.R. purchases with other types. While, in total, 40.2% of the owners did without a homestead, this figure is deceiving. The "settlement" role played by C.P.R. lands must also be taken into consideration. The majority of owners in Sifton based their holdings on the initial acquisition of either a free homestead or cheap C.P.R. land. Some 59.8% of the owners had homesteads, while 25.5% (161) acquired C.P.R. land without taking a homestead. For 49.5% (313) one quarter-section of one of these types was as far as they got. It has been commented that "For some, a quarter section of land was an enormous grant; for others with greater resources (and perhaps vision), it was

not"[7]. In any case, only half of the owners went on to acquire other land. Of these 287, some 61.3% (176) took only one more quarter. Most of these were contiguous with the original holding, and the majority were C.P.R. purchases.

The remaining group of 111 owners, those who acquired more than a half-section, comprised 17.6% of the total. They can be divided into two fairly-distinct categories. The first of these appears to have consisted of farmers who slowly built up their holdings as their growing resources and the availability of suitable land permitted. These dominate among the owners holding between three and nine quarters, and are characterized usually by the mixture of a homestead, a C.P.R. quarter, and one or more quarters of land from other grants acquired at a later date than the first two. The majority of the 3-4 quarter owners and about half of the 5-9 quarter owners can be included in this category. The additional lands were usually close, if not adjacent, to the homestead, with block reserve lands being disproportionately prominent among the total holdings of the group.

The second category consisted of individuals who acquired their holdings in Sifton en bloc. That is, of persons who bought entire half or whole sections of land (usually C.P.R.) all at once. Many did so at the same time as, or shortly after, entering for a homestead. These people obviously arrived in Sifton well-equipped to face the rigours of pioneer

---

[7]J. W. Bennett and S. B. Kohl, "Interpretations", 22.

life (i.e. with a full bank account), and with the intention of starting off on a large scale. Of course, a few speculators appear in this category, but most were prominent local citizens. Robert Lang (11 quarters) has already been mentioned. David McLeish, who ended up with sixteen quarters, was an unusual case. On arriving from Scotland in 1886 he acquired a homestead with a pre-emption, and also bought two adjacent quarters of Dominion land; giving him possession of all of 14-9-24. In the same year he purchased all of the next section (15-9-24) from the C.P.R. McLeish probably paid someone to fulfill his homestead conditions. According to a local historian he was, in the beginning, an absentee owner who came out from Scotland every summer to supervise the cultivation of his "estate"[8]. That he did well is evident from the fact that in 1895 he purchased another whole section (13-9-24) from the C.P.R., adjacent to his holdings.

Several members of the same family often entered together for several adjacent homesteads and pre-emptions, and bought a quarter or two of C.P.R. land. This tactic was particularly important for the many settlers who could not afford large purchases. The examples of the Gillespies, who in 1883 entered for three homestead and sale quarters in 9-24 and soon after picked up three C.P.R. quarters, and the McIvor family, who in 1890 took all of 20-9-25 with three homesteads and a sale, illustrates this. The land disposal and tenure systems, and thus the records, were

---

[8]Watson, "Oak Lake", McLeish interview notes. It appears that McLeish later moved to the area permanently.

oriented towards the individual; which may be slightly misleading. If many such small family holdings were worked as a single unit (as was probably the case to begin with, at least), farms in Sifton may have been larger in practice than statistics will admit. Unfortunately, it is almost impossible to determine the actual extent, and effects, of such informal arrangements.

Overall, these figures for "total ownership" present a useful picture of one facet of Sifton's development: the part played by the primary disposal system. Two related aspects--the large numbers of people involved, and the differing compositions of their holdings--are particularly striking. It is apparent that there were two distinct stages in distribution. The first, encompassing almost all of the owners, was that based on the free homestead, supplemented by cheap C.P.R. lands. In the interest of promoting rapid and intensive settlement, a small holding was made available to virtually anyone who desired to acquire one. The second stage--of expansion based on highly priced lands--involved a far lower proportion of the owners. To join this select group a settler had either to have had capital to begin with, or to have developed purchasing power through the improvement of his original holding. The small numbers of owners included show how difficult the latter process must have been. It is also apparent, however, that while these "total ownership" figures are accurate and useful within their own parameters, they have a limited applicability in terms of the actual and

changing state of land tenure in Sifton. In short, they present a static picture of a dynamic situation.

The "total ownership" statistics show neither the secondary disposal of the land involved, by private sale or other means, nor secondary acquisitions by these and other owners. For instance, a person listed as having acquired three quarter-sections from the Dominion and/or the corporations between 1881 and 1920 might well have sold some or all of these, and then have acquired other lands in the area from other settlers doing the same thing; or have left it completely. Information on this aspect of development would, obviously, be useful. But, while the primary records of such transactions are available [Land Titles], their complete exploitation would have involved a disproportionate expenditure of research time. Fortunately, another approach to the problem is possible.

The major question which secondary disposal records can resolve concerns the cost of settlement in terms of human resources. In other words, what proportion of settlers were unable to establish themselves in Sifton, in the long run, and why did they fail? Municipal Assessment Rolls provide the means of answering this question. They give as complete a picture of land tenure in the area for a given year as can be had. However, they pose two problems for the researcher. The first is to find them. Many have simply disappeared. The earliest available for Sifton is that for

1930-33[9]. The second is to find a constructive use for them. In this case, where a complete range of comparable information for an earlier period is available, the 1930 Roll is an ideal source. The analysis of this document has provided a provocative insight into the dynamics of the process of settlement in Sifton; and, in particular, into the staggering "wastage of human material" which it entailed.

Several of the economic and agricultural developments already noted in Sifton, centering around the trend towards larger farms and the reasons for this, presume a fairly sizeable turnover in farm holdings during the forty years under study: one completely aside from the 14.5% turnover which took place before the land was actually distributed. These indicators, however, do not prepare one for its actual scope. When the new Assessment Roll was compiled in Sifton in the spring of 1930, about 1,105 quarter-sections in the R.M. were in private hands. Of this, however, only 60% was owned either by persons who had taken the land themselves in 1881-1920, or by the direct heirs of these people[10]. Moreover, this portion

---

[9]Assessment Rolls, unlike Collector's, were usually updated each year for several years before a new one was started. Only the first and last years' can be readily worked out (1930 and 1933, in this case). Collector's Rolls for Sifton are available for 1925-29, but the Assessment Roll has been used here since more information is given. Also, 1930 is a useful date, being distant enough from the end of the study-period to lend perspective, but before the disruption of the Depression.

[10]Where the surname of the person originally taking a quarter reappeared in the 1930 list, or where kinship could be established from other sources (e.g. local histories), the land was counted as retained by the original taker. The Roll was then examined for other lands belonging to these 1930 owners to determine total holdings deriving from 1881-1920 acquisitions. Short of a comprehensive geneological search, it would

TABLE 6

RETENTION

Area	% Ttl. area disp. 1931	Orig hldgs rtned 1931 as % disp	Retained Lands						Ttl. hldgs srvrs 1931 as % disp
			Date of acquis. %			Type of acquis. %			
			1881-1900	1901-1920	1921-1930	Hd.	Crn.[1] purch.	Corp. purch	
7-23	94.4	25.7	60.0	37.2	2.9	28.6	11.4	60.1	72.8
8-23	78.5	24.8	39.3	61.3	-	32.1	7.1	60.7	46.0
9-23	84.0	18.2	68.2	31.9	-	45.5	27.3	27.3	42.1
7-24	92.4	25.6	23.5	67.7	8.8	20.6	35.3	44.1	63.2
8-24	87.5	25.4	43.7	56.3	-	18.8	53.1	28.1	55.6
9-24	90.3	21.5	78.6	7.2	14.3	46.4	17.9	35.7	50.0
7-25	95.8	34.1	51.1	49.0	-	27.7	19.2	53.2	68.8
8-25	75.0	27.8	36.7	63.3	-	23.3	43.3	33.3	71.3
9-25	69.4	28.0	57.1	39.3	3.6	42.9	10.7	46.4	69.0
Sifton	85.3	25.7	50.0	46.8	3.2	30.6	25.0	44.4	59.9

[1]Includes Dominion Land, School and Provincial disposals.

was based on the original acquisitions of only 190 of the 632 people who had acquired land in 1881-1920 (30.2%). This means that just three out of every ten of those who succeeded in acquiring land in Sifton from the Dominion and the corporations during the first forty years of settlement and development still had a place in the R.M. at the end of fifty. To put the whole picture of initial acquisition in general terms, thirteen out of every hundred people who attempted to acquire land failed to do so, and another 61 were not, in the long run, able to keep what they had taken.

These figures bring Martin's statement about "the silent but deadly attrition going on upon the frontier" into sharp focus. Not even the "survivors" escaped its influence. The 190 individuals who, in the end, succeeded in establishing themselves and their families in Sifton, acquired a total of 472 quarters between 1881 and 1920 by homestead and purchase. This represented 37.2% of gross disposals in the R.M., and 43.5% of net disposals. In short, they entered for or initiated purchases on a quantity of land roughly proportionate to the size of the group, but generally were more successful in carrying the transactions through to completion and patent than most. By 1930, though, they and their successors retained only 276 (58.5%) of their original acquisitions: which means that, overall, only 25.4% of the net disposals

---

not be possible to compile an absolutely accurate list. Thanks especially to the tendency of family holdings to appear in localized clusters, however, it is felt that the range of error in the figures given is no greater than 5%, more or less.

made in Sifton during the study-period remained with their original takers by 1930. To compensate for these losses, however, the group had acquired a further 387 quarter-sections along the way, leaving them with a total of 663 quarters in 1930. This represented 51.2% of the total area of the municipality, and 60.0% of the disposed area at that time. The "survivors" are thus known to have been involved with transactions for 859 quarters, of which 77.2% were retained in 1930. Since it is highly probable that other secondary purchases were both made and disposed of before this date, the actual proportion of final retention is certainly lower.

The factors underlying success in settlement are obviously a matter of interest, considering the small numbers that achieved it. The 387 extra quarter-sections which the "original owners" had acquired by 1930 tell little, aside from the fact that the purchasers had a fair amount of money, and that many people were willing or required to sell their own acquisition. The 276 quarter-sections which they retained from their original acquisitions, however, present an interesting picture; especially since, in all probability, they represent the nucleus of the owners' operations.

Given the high odds against survival, it might reasonably be expected that the successful settlers would display certain distinguishing characteristics. With the marked differences in the nature and chronological patterns of disposal of the various grants, and the varying chronological patterns of disposal over the municipality, such characteristics

might particularly be expected to appear in the dates at which they acquired their lands, or the location of the land. With minor exceptions, however, these are remarkable only by their absence. The proportion of disposed lands (as of 1920) in each township still held by the original owner in 1930 was very even. The average was 25.7% per township, ranging from 18.2% (9-23) to 34.1% (7-25); and, excluding these two extremes, the range was only 6.5% for seven townships, from 21.5% (9-24) to 28.0% (9-25). As might be expected, a slightly higher proportion of the original holdings were retained in areas where more of the land was disposed of after 1900. In townships 7-23, 9-23, 9-24, and 9-25 between 57.1% and 78.6% of the original holdings retained in 1930 were acquired before 1901. In the last three, homesteads made up more than 40% of the total retained. In townships 8-23, 7-24, and 8-25 between 61.3% and 67.7% of the original holdings were acquired after 1900, and purchased lands were the dominant type in retentions. The dates of acquisition in townships 8-24 and 7-25 were evenly split between the two periods, with purchased lands predominating in the first township and homesteads an important element in the second.

These distributions directly reflect the general pattern of settlement in the municipality, in both dates and locations. The north and southeast, and parts of 8-24 and 7-25, were heavily settled in the initial rush, while the balance was taken up more gradually. This affinity is particularly evident in the times of original disposal of the retained

lands. Some 65.5% of net disposals in the R.M. were made before 1901. Although between thirty and fifty years had passed since their acquisition, fully 51.5% of the original holdings retained in 1930 fell in this category. It appears that the "survivors" constitute a fairly representative sample of the general run of original settlers. Neither time of arrival nor general location seems to have conferred an advantage on particular settlers. This conclusion is reinforced by the relatively stable ethnic composition of the municipality. As noted earlier, that of 1895 and that of 1921 were essentially the same; indicating that attrition was proportionate throughout the community.

The mode of acquisition involved in these retained original holdings presents a slightly different picture. In comparison to total disposals, the proportion of homesteads and Dominion land sales was much lower, that of C.N.W.L. Co. sales slightly so, and that of Swamp and C.P.R. lands higher; with School and H.B. Co. lands being marginally more prominent. Only 34.5% of the original holdings retained in 1930 had been taken as homesteads and Dominion land sales, whereas this category comprised 48.4% of net disposals and about 60% of the 1881-1920 owners had made such acquisitions. On the other hand, 37.3% of the retained lands had been acquired as C.P.R. sales, although these made up just 30.4% of net disposals. It appears that those who had or developed the means to buy land found themselves in a relatively better position than the "average" settler, who depended on the free homestead system as a basis of development. This

TABLE 7

ORIGINAL ACQUISITIONS AND SURVIVAL

# of quarters held	Orig. owners' acquisitions 1881-1920		Orig. acqstns of 1931 survivors		Orig. acqstns of non-survivors	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
1-2	521	82.4	134	70.5	387	87.6
3-4	81	12.8	36	19.0	45	10.2
5+	30	4.8	20	10.5	10	2.3
Totals	632	100.0	190	100.0	442	100.1

advantage probably arose from the ability to take exactly the land needed, when and where it was needed and became available, which purchase conferred. While Crown lands made up 55.6% of the 1930 retentions (slightly lower than the 61.1% in net disposals), purchased lands of all kinds made up 69.4%. Taking into account, as well, that 58.4% of the "original owners'" holdings in 1930 had been acquired by secondary purchase, the relative unimportance of free homesteads (13.1%) in forming the final pattern of settlement can readily be seen.

This observation can be carried a step further. The composition of the original holdings retained in 1930 strongly suggests that a direct relationship existed between long-term survival and the ability to purchase land. In any case, the survivors were able to acquire more of it than the majority of settlers. The average acquisition for the 632 persons who took land in Sifton in 1881-1920 was 1.92 quarter-sections. Some 82.4% took a half-section or less, 12.8% held either three or four quarters, and 4.8% five or more. However, the average for the 442 owners who, by 1930, no longer held land in the R.M. (either directly or indirectly) was only 1.69 quarters. Of the 442, 87.6% took a half-section or less, 10.2% took three or four quarters, and only 2.3% had five or more. By comparison, the average holding for the future survivors was markedly higher, at 2.42 quarter-sections. Only 70.2% of the 190 took a half-section or less, while 18.9% took three or four quarters, and fully 11.0% took more than four. More than three-fifths (62.1%)

of the original holdings of the survivors was held by persons owning three or more quarters; as opposed to 42.7% for all owners combined and 30.4% for the "non-survivors". In short, the chances of survival varied directly with the amount of land acquired; and the acquisition of additional land depended on purchase. Of those who took only one or two quarters in 1881-1920, 25.7% still held land in 1930; of those taking either three or four quarters, 44.4%; and of those taking from five to nine, 62.5% survived. Of the people who acquired ten or more quarter-sections, fully 83.3% still held land ten years after the end of the study-period.

By 1930 the average size of holding for the 191 "original owners" had increased to 3.47 quarters. The increase, though, was not a uniform one. Since the holdings based on the 191 "original owners'" original acquisitions were often split among several family members by 1930, it is difficult to precisely calculate real increases and decreases. However, of the 98 family groups[11] which held their modified holdings in 1930, the total holdings of 24 had actually decreased in size from the original acquisitions of 1881-1920, by an average of three quarter-sections per group. Those of 14 groups had remained the same total size as the original acquisitions. In the end, only 60 of the 98 family groups had managed to effect a net increase in the size of their

---

[11]This is a term of convenience, since some "groups" consist of just one landholder. However, not all of these were the original holder, so the effect is the same in any case.

holdings. This increase averaged 4.4 quarters per group, ranging from one quarter in 12 cases to 18 in one case; but in 45 of the 60 groups the net increase was less than six quarter-sections. In terms of the 191 individuals upon whose initial acquisitions these developments were based, this means that the holdings of only 102 (53.4%) had been increased by 1930. Not only had 70% of the people who acquired land in Sifton during the study-period lost it by 1930; half of those who retained their land had the same or less than they began with.

This statistic, however, does not contradict the conclusion that survival depended on purchasing more land. As noted earlier, the survivors' 1930 holdings were considerably different from those taken in 1881-1920. At least 859 quarter-sections are known to have passed through their hands in the process of development, with the result that only three-fifths of the 1930 holdings consisted of original acquisitions. Rapidly changing conditions made adaptibility necessary, and this depended on the ability to purchase new land to replace and supplement that in the original operation. The half of the survivors that did not increase their holdings by 1930 were, for the most part, those with larger-than-average ones to begin with, who simply maintained their favorable position. Relative to those who expanded they may appear "unsuccessful"; but this is hardly the case in comparison to the 70% of original owners who disappeared.

The development of a relatively stable commercial-agricultural community in Sifton took approximately forty

years. The price paid to pave the way for the "march of progress" was extremely high, in both human and natural resources. The Dominion's "total settlement" policy brought many more settlers into the area than could make an adequate living there under existing conditions. The natural result was an extremely high rate of attrition in their ranks. The promise of economic and social advancement implicit in the nature of the free homestead grant was largely illusory, when seen in the context of the general disadvantages imposed on settlers by its large-scale implementation. As John Stahl has noted, most settlers came to the West to "search for a better life from the failures and restrictions left behind in their old homes". However,

> the realities of the new land soon made themselves felt, often exercising a tyranny far more capricious than those from which many settler had fled.... The new life was hard and.... from the outset many of these settlers were handicapped by the very nature of the institutional arrangements made for land disposal.[12]

Those few who survived and established themselves did so by adapting themselves to the exploitive, laissez-faire atmosphere of the frontier; a world apart from the egalitarian premises of the free homestead system.

While a formidable accomplishment in itself, survival alone did not involve a guarantee of future success. The Dominion's settlement policy was basically an expedient one: a means of reaching immediate goals, with these immediate ends justifying the means. The same attitude was necessarily adopted by settlers. So pressing was the need to overcome

---

[12]J. Stahl, "Prognosis", 62-63.

immediate problems, that long-term ones were simply left to resolve themselves. The results of this were twofold. In the first place, settlers adapted themselves directly to the needs of the moment. The sudden fluctuations inherent in prairie agriculture thus tended to wreck havoc; as they did throughout the study-period in Sifton. The local mixed-farming economy--an expedient reaction to wartime conditions--appears to have held together until the Depression[13]. The sudden change in conditions thereafter caused Sifton's farmers severe problems; which steadily increased as the period dragged on. Writing of conditions in the mid-1930's, H. C. Grant concluded that "There is... and will continue to be, a good deal of farming which cannot be classified much above a subsistence level"[14]. In the second place, natural resources were intensively exploited without regard for future requirements. Scientists conducting a soil survey in the area in the early 1950's noted:

> Wherever drainage and topography permitted, the soils have been generally utilized by the continuous growing of grain crops alternated with black summerfallow. This has resulted in a severe and irredeemable loss of fertility through... wind erosion. Whenever poor surface drainage or rough, duned topography prohibited cultivation, the soils have been used to a limited extent for livestock grazing.... This pattern of land use has been very wasteful of the potential productivity of the... soils.[15]

The extended period of drought and depression of the 1930's

---

[13] See R. W. Murchie, Unused Lands for a description of the R.M. in 1926.

[14] H. C. Grant et al, Agricultural Income, 89.

[15] W. A. Ehrlich et al, Soil Survey, 59.

was a severe test of the quality of prairie settlement. In Sifton, as elsewhere, it was shown to lack the strong foundations necessary for long-term survival; let alone success. In Sifton, as elsewhere, it was necessary for the government to step in to prevent a complete collapse. Since that time major changes have taken place in the R.M., which appear to have provided these necessary foundations. These have consisted mainly of capital investments in agriculture made by the Dominion; notably for the water controls effected by the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration. In this light V. C. Fowke's comment is significant. The P.F.R. Act, he noted

> was, in a sense, a further instrument of Dominion lands policy. The Administration established under the Act has worked for twenty years with tremendous energy and enthusiasm, its efforts in a substantial part devoted to correcting the mistakes of the homestead period.[16]

The fact that such operations proved both necessary and successful provides a measure of the failure of the "Dominion lands" policy to promote truly efficient and effective settlement.

---

[16] V. C. Fowke, Wheat Economy, 285-286.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Ch. V: Conclusion

Local-historical studies should, ideally, strike an optimum balance between the general and specific qualities of their subjects. On the one hand, as G.F.G. Stanley puts it, "The local historian's task is to portray... the origin, development and growth to maturity of the community in which he is interested"[1]. This is the primary, and introspective goal of local historical work; to study local development on its own terms. On the other hand, as R. A. Preston notes, "Local history... must be written with the broader picture as a background.... It demands a sense of proportion"[2]. This is the second, and outwardly directed goal of local history; to place local development in the larger context which explains it, and which it in turn helps to explain. The first aspect is, of course, the key one, for it defines the genre. But it cannot stand on its own. In Sifton's case, a local continuum of development can be discerned. but it consists of a mixture of local and external factors working and interacting at a local level.

---

[1]See G.F.G. Stanley's introduction to D. McGowan, Grassland Settlers, p. iii.

[2]R. A. Preston, "Is Local History Really History?" Saskatchewan History 10 #3, p. 102.

The development of the R.M. of Sifton was greatly influenced by the "Dominion lands" policy. The conditions, and overall rate of land disposal were governed by this policy, and its goals were therefore injected into the process of settlement. The "Dominion lands" policy had two purposes: first, to promote rapid and intensive settlement and, second, to promote effective settlement in the long term. Insofar as the criteria of success of the policy itself were concerned, both goals were attained in the municipality. Sifton rapidly filled soon after it was opened up, and farming began immediately. By the end of the settlement period it was a relatively prosperous agricultural community. From the settlers' point of view, however, these short and long-term goals were incompatible. Simply put, the conditions created in the first stage of settlement were so dissimilar to those aimed for in the last that massive readjustment would be required in moving from one to the other. In the event, the burden of this adjustment fell on the settlers: not on the policy-makers or the institutions which they represented.

The settlers who came to Sifton after 1881 found themselves in a highly structured situation. Their goals, and the means of reaching them, were defined and controlled by the national policies governing settlement, and by the economic conditions which these policies created. In the initial stage of settlement, policy predominated. As many people as possible were to be put on the land and encouraged to begin production. Artificially easy conditions of land

disposal were therefore offered by the two major land-holders, and immediate crop production by the settlers was allowed to substitute for capital investment on their part. This approach literally turned Sifton into a farm community overnight. It was, however, a community made up of many small farms crowded closely together on the best land available. The settlers, faced with a situation in which a premium was placed on the immediate production of crops on their small individual holdings, adjusted their approach accordingly. Mutual aid was vital, and settlers sought proximity to their families, friends and other members of their ethnic group. In many instances, the long-term advantages inherent in good land were sacrificed in order to cope with this short-term consideration. The rate of initial failure, although high in absolute terms, was low in relation to the sheer numbers of settlers; indicating that most settlers adapted successfully to the situation thrust upon them. Having passed the first test, however, they then found themselves faced with an entirely new set of circumstances, which radically differed from those under which the first, crucial stage of development had proceeded.

In the second stage of development, the cold facts of economic life on the Prairies dominated. The small farm was not a viable unit in an economy based on staple production for international markets. Fluctuating prices on these markets created a high degree of uncertainty in farm returns, which was further aggravated by the unreliable climate. Farmers had to adapt to feast-and-famine conditions to survive

which meant that the best had to be made of optimum prices and production in the few good years, in order to survive the intervening bad ones. Large individual farms were usually necessary for this, and therefore extra land (capable of producing wheat) had to be acquired. The land disposal policy, however, continued to favour new settlement. Established settlers had to pay a premium price for new land, or for that given up by their unsuccessful neighbours, with prices steadily rising as competition intensified. This expansion required capital. Those who had brought it with them, or who successfully exploited the rare combinations of good crops and prices, had the means. Others, less fortunate, had either to drop out, or to raise capital by mortgaging their original holdings. The latter course involved a high risk of failure. If the production on the new land so acquired did not suffice to repay the debt incurred, both it and the original holding could be lost. In Sifton's case, nearly three-quarters of the original settlers proved to be lacking the flexibility or luck needed to survive in the long run. Attrition served to bridge the gap between rapid and effective settlement created by the "Dominion lands" policy. As Chester Martin put it, when so many "fell in no man's land before making their first objective, it can scarcely be claimed that the 'conquest of the wilderness' was easily won or effectually consolidated"[3].

---

[3]C. Martin, Policy, 174.

The community which emerged from the process of settlement was a mere shadow of the initial settlement from which it developed. The cost of the transition was borne by the settlers: in a direct and obvious way, by those who failed to establish themselves. The few who succeeded, however, also paid their share. In order to survive they learned to adjust to the rapidly and constantly changing conditions. Under the pressure of meeting short-term requirements, however, they were unable to give proper consideration to, and prepare for, long-term problems.

The first, and worst, of these was soil exhaustion. The settlers' ability to deal with immediate problems, notably with fluctuations in prices and weather, was based on an intensive and extensive exploitation of all available resources. The agricultural methods which promote long-term fertility and preservation--such as crop rotations and the extensive use of fertilizers--were not necessarily those which permitted the full use of productive capacity at the lowest immediate price in time and money. It appears that, in many cases, they were neglected for this reason. The second problem was major and abrupt market deteriorations. The depression of the 1930's, unlike earlier ones, was not a gradual development allowing gradual adaption to its conditions. Nor was it a transitory phenomenon which could be waited out. It came suddenly and held, without significant variation, for almost a decade. Many western farmers, including Sifton's, lacked the means (and, perhaps, the attitude) necessary to adapt to and last out a lengthy and fundamental change in

conditions. Their problems were aggravated by the exhausted land left them by fifty years of overuse. In this sense, the P.F.R.A. was created by the government as an institutional substitute for the long-term perspective which government settlement policies had forced farmers to ignore in the process of development. The Administration built the dams and water controls, and formulated and encouraged the proper agricultural techniques, which farmers had perforce neglected when struggling to meet the immediate demands of survival. It can only be concluded that the national policies implemented in the 1870's and 1880's led to an extremely wasteful, and essentially inflexible, pattern of settlement and development in the R.M. of Sifton. The challenge of the 1930's revealed its weaknesses. The process of readjustment--via a host of patchwork "solutions"--is still underway.

It is clear that the development of the R.M. of Sifton was greatly influenced by decisions and trends originating beyond the bounds of the municipality, and by factors over which residents had little or no control. At the same time, however, these extraneous influences operated within a local context. Local development had its own momentum; one which they might add to or inhibit, but could not entirely override. That is, a "new" element introduced by a change in policy, prices or weather, or in the course of events, did not have an independent effect. This largely depended on the nature of the existing community in and on which it operated; which, in turn, was shaped by the lines of earlier development. As a result, the "major factors" in western settlement isolated

and identified as such by national or regional historians cannot be taken at face value in local-historical analysis. Their character, at an operational level, may differ from that seen through a deductive approach. Two examples--the effect of speculation in land, and of World War One, on development--will serve to demonstrate this.

The disposition and disposal of land in Sifton clearly involved a considerable amount of speculative activity. It might therefore be assumed that such practices had a major impact on local settlement. In the context of local development, however, a determination of their actual effect will vary directly with the definition of "speculation" employed. If, on the one hand, speculation is narrowly defined as the withholding of unused land from the market by a non-resident owner for the purpose of realizing high unearned profits if and when prices rose, then the degree and effect of such activity in Sifton was minimal. Only a handful of individuals, such as Nanton, can be included in this category without reservation. If, on the other hand, speculation is loosely defined as the withholding of land from the market with the specific intention of selling it at a profit at a later date, then almost every transaction in the R.M. involved an element of speculation. Several of the major land grants were operated specifically for this purpose; as, in a less-direct fashion, were the rest. Similarly, every homesteader and individual purchaser was taking land on the premise that, at a later date, it would be worth more than they had invested in it, in one way or other.

In other words, "speculation" was a motive in all land transactions, public and private; because settlement as a whole essentially was a gamble. The difference between those few individuals encompassed by the narrow definition of a speculator--the specialists--and the many whose involvement in speculative activity was more diffuse and sporadic, was one of degree rather than kind. Nor was the difference that great in any case. One suspects that it may have resulted more from differences in opportunity than in intention. Extracting the specialists from the friendly sea in which they swam can result in a distortion of their character and role, and therefore of their actual effect on settlement. Speculation certainly had an impact, in reducing the availability of land to actual settlers. Such activity, however, was an intrinsic and pervasive part of the process of local settlement, and compensatory influences were locally generated. The independent effect of speculation can too easily be exaggerated.

Similar problems arise in assessing the effect of national and world events on local development; as in the case of World War One. The war definitely created new opportunities for Sifton's farmers, chiefly in the new and diverse market conditions which appeared, and which they were not slow in exploiting. The sudden shift away from wheat as the staple crop amply demonstrates this. The overall effect, however, cannot be determined so easily. If the war offered new market opportunities, the possible range of response to them was greatly limited by the nature of earlier developments.

By 1914 Sifton had already entered into a post-settlement environment, in which larger established farms dominated the local economy. The quality and quantity of land available for new settlement was uniformly low and small, and the overall chances of success in such a venture even lower. The advantages of the wartime conditions therefore accrued to established farmers, who had the means to expand and diversify. Local development had, however, been working in this direction for almost twenty years by a process of elimination. In this light, wartime conditions accelerated an existing trend, rather than starting something new. To local farmers the war was a phenomenon akin to a drought, or a rise in prices; a situation requiring expedient adjustments based on existing resources, in order to reap maximum benefits while it lasted. To simply state that the war caused local diversification would be misleading. It changed the pace, but not the character or process of local development. In short, in evaluating the effects of both speculation and the war (as examples) the dynamic nature of local conditions must be considered. This should apply at an aggregative as well as at an individual level of examination.

This study of the settlement and development of the Rural Municipality of Sifton raises several questions about western settlement as a whole. While Sifton is but one of hundreds of similar communities in the West, it is particularly representative of those near the C.P.R. main line which were founded during the early 1880's. It was in such areas that the "Dominion lands" policy was first tested and refined,

and where it had its longest run. The roots of later western development are found in their history. Sifton is also generally representative of prairie communities. The people who settled in the R.M. had counterparts in every district of the West, and all worked in a similar climatic, economic and institutional environment. This being the case, it is apparent that our understanding of the dynamics of western settlement is inadequate. Or, rather, the understanding which we now have may, in fact, be essentially correct; but it rests on somewhat shaky foundations.

It is well known, for example, that the rate of attrition among western Canadian settlers was very high. Chester Martin conclusively demonstrated this fact forty years ago. His figures have gone unquestioned and unmodified ever since; despite obvious shortcomings which Martin himself recognized. Aside from being incomplete, they are comprised of data taken entirely out of context, and leave the nature and actual rate of attrition unexplored. As far as could be ascertained, no one has since attempted to put this hidden cost of settlement in precise terms, and in the context of local development and national policies which directly account for it. This, probably, is because the calculation can only be done at a local level: an area of research largely ignored by the very people who have the skills and reason to do it. But if this explains the oversight, it does not excuse it. It might well be asked how the course of western settlement, or the long-term effects of settlement policy, can properly be studied without an understanding of the wastage of human

resources which it entailed. A parallel could be drawn to a military historian studying a war without reference to casualties or costs.

Criticisms of the existing standards of local history, and of general interpretations of the history of western settlement, are more common than they are useful in correcting deficiencies. Both types of writing have their own particular virtues and failings. Both fill a need and, by and large, fill it well. But this is not to say that the situation is satisfactory, for some needs have not yet been fully recognized. It is axiomatic that each generation writes its own history in terms of its own requirements. Many of today's problems in western Canada revolve around the question of our identity and our place in the nation. The answers to these problems lie in the future, rather than in the past. However, the key to their character--and so, possibly, to their solution--lies in the ways and means by which this region was brought into Confederation a century ago. The dynamics of the process of western settlement require further study and elucidation. Moreover, a new approach is needed; one which can bring "local history" into the mainstream of western historiography, where it properly belongs.

APPENDIX A: The Sectional Survey System

The sectional survey system has several versions, all based on a square grid. In western Canada this was based on townships six miles square, each consisting of 36 one square mile sections which were further broken down into four 160-acre quarter-sections. The quarter-section could further be broken down into four 40-acre legal subdivisions, or lots.

The location of any given piece of land is quite simple. Each township has a township number and a range number (e.g. 7-23). The first describes the position of a horizontal row of townships north of the 49th Parallel. For example, the southern edge of any township in township row #7 is exactly 36 miles north of the border, and its northern edge 42 miles north. The range number gives the position of a vertical column of townships in relation to a given north-south meridian line. All Manitoba ranges are numbered by their position east or west of the "Principal Meridian", which is located just west of Winnipeg. Sifton's nine townships are located in three range-columns (23, 24, 25), all of which are west of this Meridian. For example, the eastern edge of any township in range #23 W1 is exactly 132 miles west of the Meridian, and its western edge 138 miles west. A given township is therefore identified by stating the number of its township row (e.g. 7) and its range column (e.g. 23). The resulting co-ordinate (e.g. 7-23 W1) can only identify one township.

The 36 sections within each township are numbered transversely from east to west, working up the grid. Thus section

1 is in the southeast corner, and section 6 in the southwest corner. Section 7 is above section 6, and section 12 above 1, and so on; ending up with section 36 in the northeast corner. Each section is divided into four quarters, which are identified by compass directions: northwest, northeast, southwest, and southeast. Each quarter-section is further divided into four 40-acre legal subdivisions (L.S.). These are numbered on a sectional basis, in the same fashion as sections in a township, with L.S. #1 in the southeast corner, L.S. #4 in the southwest, and L.S. #16 in the northeast, and so on. Any point in western Canada can thus be precisely located on the same grid using the same coordinate system. To give an example of this, the main archaeological excavations at "Cherry Point" on the northern shore of the Lake were in the northwest corner of legal subdivision #13, the northwest lot of the southwest quarter-section of section #31 in township eight of range 24, west of the Principal Meridian: or, more conveniently, NW L.S. 13 SW 31-8-24 W1.

In between the section, strips of land were reserved for the construction of roads; the road allowances. All of Sifton was surveyed under the First System, which provided a complete grid of 72 miles of 99-foot ($1\frac{1}{2}$ chains) road allowances. Not all, of course, were used. These allowances came under municipal jurisdiction.

The Sifton area was surveyed in 1880 and 1881. Block outlines (townships) were done in 1880 by William Pearce's survey crew. Subdivision (into sections and quarters) began in Oct.-Dec., 1880 and was completed in Aug.- Nov., 1881. The

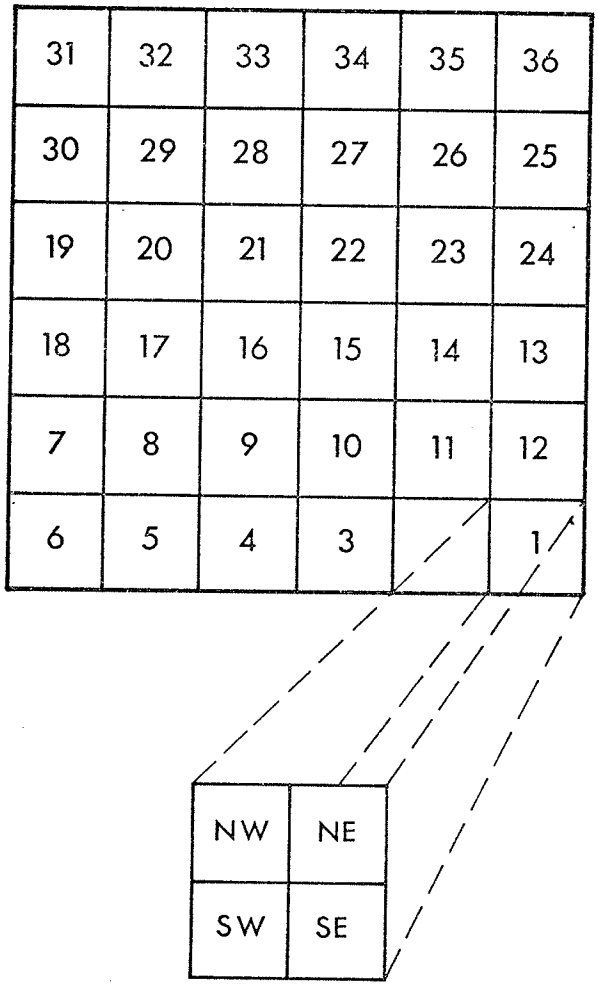
first townships done were 9-23, -24 and -25. Serious difficulties were encountered due to flooding and the lateness of the season, and some work had to be left until spring. Work on the six southern townships, the next year, went more smoothly. Surveyors submitted a township diagram and a page or two of descriptive notes for each township, including assessments of land quality. J. L. Tyman, Section, Ch. 2 examines the accuracy of these notes.

ACREAGE: The R.M. of Sifton ideally should consist of 207,360 acres (160 X 1296 quarter-sections). In fact, the surveyors of 1880-81 calculated the total as 209,792 acres; a difference of almost four sections. The error, however, was spread over the whole of the area. In township 8-23, for example, all of the quarters along the western edge were a little oversized.

In computing disposition and disposal, most transfers were counted as exactly 160 acres (or standard divisions and multiples thereof). In the case of C.P.R., unreserved Dominion, and Swamp lands, however, partial quarters were listed by actual acreage when they appeared; as was often found in marsh and water areas. This involved a trade-off between specific and general accuracy, since the working figure for "total acreage" in Sifton came out to 207,680 acres, or 320 acres more than the 'ideal' acreage. For some reason, efforts to resolve this discrepancy inevitably resulted in higher figures. Since the error involved is only 0.15%, and since it did not appear in distribution, it was therefore decided to let well-enough alone. For the purposes of this study the difference is not significant.

FIGURE 8

UNITS OF THE SECTIONAL SURVEY

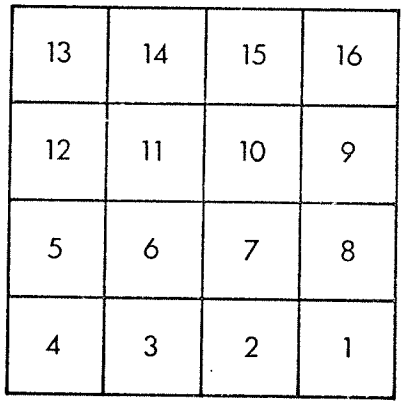


TOWNSHIP (showing sections)

1 MILE

SECTION (showing quarters)

1 MILE



SECTION (showing legal subdivisions)

1 MILE

APPENDIX B: Methods and Sources

This paper is primarily concerned with the disposition and disposal of lands in the R.M. of Sifton. In this it deals exclusively with their acquisition by the Dominion and the process involved in their transfer to private owners. In the case of the corporate grants and the Provincial lands this involved an extra step comprising the allocation of the grant by the Dominion. Both leases and private sales were excluded from the primary analysis for a number of reasons, particularly because of the time and resources which would have been necessary to deal with them.

There is, unfortunately, no single source which can provide the materials of the type used as the basis for this analysis. A wide range of sources therefore had to be examined, and the resulting data integrated. The smallest unit considered (except in special cases) was the 40 acre lot, although the better part of the area was disposed in uniform quarter sections. Five basic pieces of information were sought for each unit: the nature and date of the original grant, the date of sale or entry, the price, the time period of the transaction, and the name of the purchaser or enterer. Naturally, a great deal of supplementary information was acquired along the way.

The first step taken in the research was to transcribe the material given on the Township (Patent) Diagrams. This was often incomplete or missing completely, especially for corporate lands. The data from the Diagrams was then corrected and supplemented with reference to transcriptions

of the original land (and sales) records of the different grants. These were provided by Dr. John Tyman, Dean of Science at Brandon University, having been compiled for use in his doctoral dissertation "The Disposition of Farm Lands in Western Manitoba: 1870-1930" (Oxford: 1970). They have since been deposited in Brandon University's Community Resources Centre. This thesis would not have been possible without them. In most cases these records provided all five of the items noted above. However, some gaps and anomalies still remained.

To fill or explain these, several supplementary sources were consulted. These included the relevant Abstract Books (summaries of titles and changes of ownership) at the Land Titles Office in Brandon, and such municipal records as were available at the R.M. office in Oak Lake. The Abstract Books provided a fairly complete summary of title changes by quarter sections, and were particularly useful in supplying the names of purchasers and relevant dates and prices. For example, they appear to be the only source which provides the names of the purchasers of Hudson's Bay Company lands. They do not cover lands with titles registered under the Real Property Act but, fortunately, most lands were not changed to this system until after 1910. This information was supplemented from municipal records, studied with the permission of the Municipal Council of the R.M. of Sifton. These included Assessment and Collector's Rolls for the 1920's and 1930's, and Minute Books from 1894 on. The Rolls were not, of course, immediately applicable to the research

period, but did provide a complete and reliable set of ownership records which served to anchor the upper end of the other records firmly and were later used for comparative purposes. In addition, the Minute Books of the Municipal Council supplied several pieces of information relative to ownership changes, as well as giving an insight into local conditions and developments during the last half of the study period.

In many cases, cancelled entries and sales were not recorded permanently. Corporate records were generally better about this than public ones. Since this information is important in studying patterns of disposals, it was necessary to try and reconstruct it as far as possible. For this purpose, a number of secondary sources were consulted. These consisted mainly of lists of vacant lands published at different times by the government. Also, two lists compiled by County and Board of Trade officials and a number of real estate pamphlets were available. The earliest of these appeared in 1888. Thereafter a list of one sort or other was available for every two years or so until 1900. Some lists specifically noted whether a quarter had been cancelled or abandoned, especially in the case of homesteads.

By comparing the status given in these lists with the data already on hand from other records, it was often possible to spot cancellations with some degree of certainty. At times this involved comparing dates and owners for a given section, from which an unrecorded cancellation or abandonment could be inferred. This was particularly useful where

pre-emptions were involved. Other local materials, such as histories, letters and newspapers were occasionally useful. For example, the Baker Correspondence mentions that a homestead taken in 1886 had already been cultivated and abandoned before this time. The final figures for cancellations given in the paper, and especially those for Dominion lands, are not completely accurate although generally speaking the later figures are more so than the earlier.

While the information regarding disposals was being brought together, an owner file was compiled. This consisted of the names of individual owners with all of their recorded acquisitions appended. The information from these cards was later sorted according to family groups, areas, number and size of holdings and residential status (where possible). The municipal records and other local materials were especially useful in providing a rough guide as to who was, and was not, an actual farmer or resident.

The information collected for each quarter was then rearranged by type of disposition (e.g. homesteads, C.P.R. sale etc.) and was arranged chronologically within each category by date of sale or entry, and by area. Pre-emptions were dealt with both in their relation to homesteads and as Dominion land sales. Cancellations were (for each grant type) recorded both by their date of sale or entry and by the date of their return to the market. At this stage, the Agricultural Capacity rating was added to the disposal lists (see Appendix C). These arrangements of materials provided the basis for the actual analysis.

As has been noted, private sales were not included in the primary analysis. To compile them would have required as much work again as was necessary for the primary disposal records--if not more--involving both Abstract Books and Real Property files. Their integration with the disposal records also posed severe problems. As a partial substitute, the Assessment Roll for 1930 was used to examine the long-term development of land tenure in the R.M. The methods employed have been described in Chapter Four. Basically, the idea was to find out which of the persons and families who acquired land during the study-period established a "permanent" foothold; and, as far as possible, how.

APPENDIX C: Agricultural Capability Ratings

When studying settlement, and particularly that of a small area, it is important to have some means of including the quality of the land in the analysis. "Settlement", after all, usually meant farming and, so, the quality of the land was as, if not more, important than quantity. The quality of the land, however, is a function of many different variables: Drainage, topography, soil and vegetation cover, among others, must be taken into account, as must the optimum pattern of landuse which might be applied. The task of assigning "quality" is a very complex and specialized one which amateurs dabble in at their own risk. Yet, for the historical study of land settlement, some form of a simplified scale compatible with other research materials is necessary, and this has not been forthcoming from the experts: but the basic materials for constructing one are available.

In this thesis, the Canada Land Inventory, "Soil Capability for Agriculture" rating scale (Virden mapsheet 62F) was used as the basis for creating a scale to suit local conditions. The general C.L.I. scale consisted of eight classes ranging from "no significant limitations" (rate 1) to "no capability" (rate 7) and to "unclassifiable" (rate 0), with ten subclasses describing basic kinds of limitations to agriculture (e.g. water, soil, adverse terrain). The classes themselves, to quote the Descriptive Legend, "are based on intensity, rather than kind, of their limitations for agriculture. Each class includes many kinds of soil". In the case of Sifton, however, the classes relate very closely to

specific kinds of soil and, especially to drainage. Only seven classes (2-6 and 0) are present in Sifton, and four subclasses--one of which was not significant in the analysis. Using these, a ten-point uniform scale was created running from 1 (well-drained loam) to 10 (open water). Lands with an excess water problem were given a lower rating than similar lands without such a problem, on the principle that good drainage was a particularly significant factor in the study area. This was especially important during the study period when late-maturing grains were the only kinds available.

The C.L.I. map coding for Sifton was transcribed onto a quarter-section grid. Where the quarter was divided between two ratings, a value was assigned proportionately on a sectional basis. The ratings were also adjusted to reflect conditions in the 1880's. For this purpose the original surveyor's maps and notes were consulted, as were soil, geological and drainage maps and air photos (1968) at need. This was necessary, for a number of areas have been drained since the turn of the century and the southern shores of the lake have changed appreciably due to flood damage and water control projects.

It would appear that the figures given for agricultural capability are proportionately--and, to a high degree, individually--accurate. No major anomalies were encountered in the course of research, although class 6 (marginal sandhill) was found to be a somewhat ambiguous rating. Although treated

throughout as 'substandard', its capability in fact appears to have varied locally depending on intensity, situation and climate.

The following terms have been consistently used to describe general categories of land within the 10-class system:

1,2,3 : best quality
4,5 : good quality
6,8 : sandhill
7,9,10: marsh and lake

In addition, classes 1-5 have been collectively described as "good" and classes 6-10 as "poor".

RATINGS

C.L.I.	Sifton	Description
2i	1	-well drained loam
2w	2	-poorly drained loam
3s	3	-well drained sandy loam
4s	4	-well drained sand, level
4w/ws	5	-poorly drained sand, seasonal flooding
5s	6	-well drained sand, rolling
5w/ws	7	-poorly drained sand, fluctuating marsh
6s	8	-heavy sandhills
6w/ws	9	-semipermanent marsh
0	10	-open water

TABLE 8

AGRICULTURAL CAPABILITY RATINGS OF TOWNSHIPS IN SIFTON

Township	Quality							
	Best (1-3)		Good (4-5)		Sandhill (6 & 8)		Marsh (7,9-10)	
	¼s	%	¼s	%	¼s	%	¼s	%
7-23	-	-	113	78%	28	19%	3	2%
8-23	-	-	102	71	35	24	7	5
9-23	62	43%	49	34	33	23	-	-
7-24	-	-	16	11	91	63	37	26
8-24	-	-	81	56	9	6	54	38
9-24	7	5	102	71	35	24	-	-
7-25	18	13	43	30	53	37	30	21
8-25	10	7	68	47	6	4	60	42
9-25	-	-	79	55	63	44	2	1
R.M. Total	97	7%	653	50%	353	27%	193	15%

Bibliography

A. Archival and Unpublished Materials

Brandon, Man. Land Titles Office.
Abstract Books: Records of patents, liens, changes of ownership etc.

Brandon, Man. Mrs. B. Parsons.
Baker Correspondence, 1884-1889. Originals.

Brandon, Man. Dr. J. L. Tyman (transcribed)
Canada. Department of the Interior. Dominion Lands Branch. Patent Registers, etc. Lands Branch Archives, Winnipeg.

Canada North West Land Company
Contract Ledgers. C.N.W.L. Co., Calgary.

Canadian Pacific Railway Company
Sales Records and Land Grant Registers. Glenbow Foundation Archives, Calgary.

Hudson's Bay Company
Synopsis of H.B. Co. Grant, Farm Lands Sales Registers, and actual sales constracts. Hudson's Bay House, Winnipeg.

Manitoba. Department of Mines and Natural Resources.
Register of School Lands, Exchanges, Index to Swamp Lands, etc. Lands Branch Archives, Winnipeg.

University of Manitoba
Land Examiners Reports, Patent Registers. Office of the Comptroller.

Oak Lake, Man. Rural Municipality of Sifton.
Assessment Rolls, 1930-38.
Collector's Rolls, 1925-29.
Minutes of Council, 1894-1930.

Winnipeg, Man. Provincial Archives of Manitoba
Notes, articles, clippings, biographical sketches of pioneers, bibliography compiled for history of "The Early Days of Oak Lake, Manitoba". Donated jointly by Mrs. F. E. Watson, Vancouver and Mrs. F. Beverley Sharman, Winnipeg: c. 1890-1971 Originals MG8 A26.

Winnipeg, Man. Surveys Branch Archives.
Canada. Department of the Interior. Surveys Branch. Field Notes of the Dominion Lands Survey. Townships 7 to 9, Ranges 23 to 25. 1880-81.

Canada. Department of the Interior. Surveys Branch. Township (Patent) Diagrams. Townships 7 to 9, Ranges 23 to 25.

Bibliography

B. Public Documents

Canada. Department of Mines, Resources, and Environmental Management. Surveys, Mapping and Lands Branch. Air Photos of Townships 7 to 9, Ranges 23 to 25 (inclusive) Winnipeg: 1968.

Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics (Department of Agriculture) Census of the Three Provisional Districts of the North-West Territories, 1884-85 Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1886.

Census of Manitoba, 1885-86 Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1887.

Census of Canada, 1890-91. 4 vol. Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1893-1897.

Census of Canada, 1901. 4 vol. Ottawa: King's Printer, 1902-1906.

Census of the Northwest Provinces, 1906 Ottawa: King's Printer (C.S.P. 17a), 1907.

Census of Canada, 1911. 6 vol. Ottawa: King's Printer, 1912-1915.

Census of Prairie Provinces, Population and Agriculture, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, 1916 Ottawa: King's Printer, 1918.

Census of Canada, 1921. 5 vol. Ottawa: King's Printer, 1924-1929.

Census of Prairie Provinces, 1926 Ottawa: King's Printer, 1929.

Canada. Parliament. Sessional Papers: Canadian Pacific Railway Company

A. "Lists of lands relating to adjustments and corrections of the C.P.R. grant."
   i) 48 Vic. (1885) n.25 pp. 191-98
   ii) 51 Vic. (1888) n.25b pp. 129-50
   iii) 52 Vic. (1889) n. 36 p. 45
   iv) 54 Vic. (1891) n.25 pp. 101-05

B. "Lists of lands sold"
   i) 51 Vic. (1888) n.25b pp. 162-74 (1 Oct. 1886- 1 Oct. 1887)
   ii) 52 Vic. (1889) n.36b p. 291 (1 Oct. 1887- 1 Oct. 1888)
   iii) 54 Vic. (1891) n.25 pp. 112-15 (1 Oct. 1889 - 1 Oct. 1890)
   iv) 56 Vic. (1893) n.30a pp. 58-60 (1 Oct. 1891- 1 Oct. 1892)

Bibliography

C. Correspondence.
46 Vic. (1883) n.27 p. 46

Canada. Parliament. Sessional Papers: Dept. of Immigration. 57 Vic. (1894) n.13 pt. 1 Sched. D p. 13: "Foreign Settlements in Manitoba and the North-west Territories"

Canada. Statutes.
A. Dominion Land Acts
35 Vic. (1872) c.23
37 Vic. (1874) c.19
* 42 Vic. (1879) c.31
* 46 Vic. (1883) c.17
49 Vic. (1886) c.54
5 Eds. VII (1906) c.55
* 7-8 Ed. VII (1908) c.20

(* Consolidated Dominion Land Acts)

B. Other
33 Vic. (1870) c.3 (Manitoba Act)
44 Vic. (1881) c.1 (Charter of the C.P. Railway)
48-49 Vic. (1885) c.50 ("Better Terms" Act)

Manitoba. Legislative Assembly. Sessional Papers
Annual Reports of the Dept. of Municipal Commissioners, "Statistical Information"

4-5 Ed. VII (1905) #13 pp. 394-95
6-7 Ed. VII (1907) #17 pp. 502-03
10 Ed. VII (1910) #29 pp. 667-69
1 Geo. V (1911) #19 pp. 625-27
3 Geo. V (1913) #4 pp. 181-83
4 Geo. V (1914) #17 pp. 562-63
5 Geo. V(1915) #37 pp. 916-17

C. Books and Pamphlets

Anonymous. History of Oak Lake: 1882-1900
n.p.: ca. 1907. Typed Ms., 4p.

Beck, H. H. Improved Farms for Sale in Most of the Best Districts of Manitoba, etc.. Winnipeg: MacIntyre Bros., 1895

Bulloch, Ellen G. Pioneers of the Pipestone
Reston: n.p., 1929

Canada. Department of Agriculture. Canada Land Inventory. Soil Capability for Agriculture: Virden Mapsheet 62F
Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1966

Bibliography

Canadian Pacific Railway Co. Manufacturing and Business Opportunities in Western Canada. Winnipeg (?): 1911

Clingan, Ida. The Virden Story: 1882-1957 n.p.: n.p., 1957

Ehrlich, W. A. et al. Report of Reconnaisance Soil Survey of Rossburn and Virden Map Sheet Areas (Soils Report #6 Manitoba Soil Survey). Winnipeg: Manitoba Department of Agriculture, 1956

Ellis, J. H. Manitoba Agriculture and Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Activities. Winnipeg: P.F.R.A., 1944

Fall, Pat and Heepy, Margaret. History of Oak Lake: 1881-1900 Oak Lake: March, 1946. Typed Ms., 4p. (annotated and corrected copy supplied by Mr. C. Heepy, Oak Lake)

Fleming, Sanford. Report and Documents in Reference to the C.P.R.: 1880. Ottawa: Maclean, Roger and Co., 1880

Fowke, V. C. The National Policy and the Wheat Economy Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957

Grant, H. C., Davidson, C. B., and Chernick, J. E. Agricultural Income and Rural Municipal Government in Manitoba Winnipeg: Manitoba Economic Survey Board, 1939

Griswold United Church Women. Bridging the Years: Griswold Centennial Booklet. n.p.: Griswold United Church Women, 1967

Halstead, E. C. Groundwater Resources of Townships 7 to 10, Ranges 22 to 25 West of the Principal Meridian, Manitoba (Oak Lake Area) (Geological Survey of Canada, Water Supply Paper No. 298). Ottawa: Department of Mines and Resources, 1942

Haug, J. K. The 1974-1975 Excavations at the Cherry Point Site (DkMe-10): A Stratified Archaic Site in Southwest Manitoba Winnipeg: Historic Resources Branch, Dept. of Tourism, Recreation and Cultural Affairs, 1976

Hedges, J. B. Building the Canadian West: The Land and Colonization Policies of the Canadian Pacific Railway. New York and Toronto: Macmillan, 1939

Hedges, J. B. The Federal Railway Land Subsidy Policy in Canada Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1934

Bibliography

Hind, H. Y. Narrative of the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition of 1857, and of the Assiniboine and Saskatchewan Expedition of 1858. 2 vol. London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1860 (Reprinted, New York: Greenwood, 1969)

Innis, Harold A. A History of the Canadian Pacific Railway Toronto: University of Toronto Press, c. 1971 (1923)

Mackintosh, W. A. The Economic Background of Dominion-Provincial Relations: Appendix III of the Royal Commission Report on Dominion-Provincial Relations. J. H. Dales, ed. and intro. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, c. 1964 (1939) (Carleton Library #13)

Mackintosh, W. A. Prairie Settlement: The Geographical Setting Toronto: Macmillan, 1934 (Canadian Frontiers of Settlement Series, Vol. I)

Manitoba. Department of Agriculture and Immigration. Canada's Centre is Manitoba, etc. Winnipeg: 1901 (?)

Greater Manitoba: The Home of Mixed Farming Winnipeg: The Department, 1913

List(s) of Lands Open for Homesteading in Manitoba: 1897 and 1900. Winnipeg: Queen's Printer, 1897 and 1900

List of Vacant Homesteads and Cancelled Lands in the Province of Manitoba: 1892. Winnipeg: The Department, 1892

Martin, Chester. "Dominion Lands" Policy. L. H. Thomas, ed. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, c. 1973 2nd ed. (1938) (Carleton Library #69)

Morton, Arthur S. History of Prairie Settlement Toronto: Macmillan, 1938 (Canadian Frontiers of Settlement Series, Vol. II part I)

Morton, W. L. The Critical Years: The Union of British North North America, 1857-1873. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964

Manitoba: A History Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967 2nd ed.

Murchie, R. W. et al. Agricultural Progress on the Prairie Frontier. Toronto: Macmillan, 1936 (Canadian Frontiers of Settlement Series, Vol. V)

Bibliography

Murchie, R. W. and Grant, H. C. Unused Lands of Manitoba: Report of a Survey. Winnipeg: Manitoba Dept. of Agriculture and Immigration, 1926

Palmer, W. J., ed. and comp. Dennis County, Manitoba: The Finest Wheat Growing and Stock Raising Country in the World, etc. Winnipeg: Manitoba Free Press, 1888 (?)

Robson, I. History of Deleau-Bethel District n.p.: The Author, 1967. Typed Ms.

Ross, D. A. & Co. Manitoba Farms and Lands Register, etc. Winnipeg: n.p., 1886

Manitoba Lands for Sale Winnipeg: McIntyre Bros., 1890

Rowell, N. W. and Sirois, J. The Rowell/Sirois Report: Book I. D. V. Smiley, ed. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, c.1963 abridged (1940)(Carleton Library #5)

Spence, W. J., comp. The University of Manitoba: Historical Notes, 1877-1917. Winnipeg: n.p., 1918

Thomson, Donald W. Men and Meridians: The History of Surveying and Mapping in Canada. 3 vols. Vol. 2: 1867-1917. Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1967

Tyman, John L. By Section, Township and Range: Studies in Prairie Settlement. Brandon: Assiniboine Historical Society, 1972

Vipond, Dorothy. Proudly We Speak: A History of the R.M. of Woodworth. Kenton: Woodworth Centennial Committee, 1967

Virden Board of Trade. Manitoba Homesteads and Other Lands Open for Settlement, etc. Virden: Virden Board of Trade, ca. 1898

Whiteford, J. L. and Moody, E. A. M., eds. Virden Review: 1957-1970 ("An updating of 'The Virden Story' to mark Manitoba's Centennial, 1970"). Virden: Virden Town Council, 1970

D. Articles

Bannister, N. "Early History of Oak Lake and District." In The Virden Story, pp. 243-45. Compiled by I. Clingan. n.p.: 1957

Bibliography

Bennett, John W. and Kohl, S. B. "Characterological, Strategic, and Institutional Interpretations of Prairie Settlement." In Western Canada Past and Present, pp. 14-27. Edited by A. W. Rasporich. Calgary: University of Calgary Press, c. 1975

Bennett, John W. "Adaptive Strategy and Processes in the Canadian Plains." In A Region of the Mind, pp. 181-200. Edited by R. Allen. Regina: Canadian Plains Studies Centre, c. 1973

Chalmers, Mrs. L. "End of an Era for the Findlay Community." In Reston Recorder, Oct. 1, 1970.

Dempsey, H. A. "Local Histories as Source Materials for Western Canadian Studies." In Prairie Perspectives 2, pp. 170-84. Edited by A. W. Rasporich. Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, c. 1973

Fisher, Murray. "Local Government Reorganization." Papers Read Before the Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba III #17 (1960-61): 15-23

Friesen, J. "Expansion of Settlement in Manitoba, 1870-1900." H.S.S.M. III #20 (1965): 35-48

Galbraith, J. S. "Land Policies of the Hudson's Bay Company: 1879-1913." Canadian Historical Review 32 #1 (March, 1951): 1-21

Giraud, Marcel. "Metis Settlement in the North-West Territories." Translated by C. M. Chesney. Saskatchewan History 7#1 p. 1-16

Haug, J. K. "Preliminary Interpretations of the Investigations at the Cherry Point Site (DkMe-10), A Stratified Archaic Site in Southwest Manitoba." Ms. submitted to the Canadian Archaeological Association Journal, Dec., 1975

Heber, Mrs. E. "Charles Wesley Speers - Dynamic Colonizer of Western Canada." H.S.S.M. III #28 (1971-72): 75-83

Johnson, Hildegard B. "The Rational and Ecological Aspects of the Quarter Section." Geographical Review XLVII #3 (July, 1957): 330-348

Morton, W. L. "A Century of Plain and Parkland." In A Region of the Mind, pp. 165-80. Edited by R. Allen. Regina: Canadian Plains Studies Centre, c. 1973

Morton, W. L. "The Significance of Site in the Settlement of the American and Canadian Wests." Agricultural History Vol. 25 pp. 97-104

Bibliography

Norrie, K. H. "The Rate of Settlement of the Canadian Prairies, 1870-1911." Journal of Economic History June, 1975, pp. 410-427

Preston, R. A. "Is Local History Really History?" Saskatchewan History 10#3 (Summer, 1958): 97-103

Pridham, E. A. "The Title to Land in Manitoba." H.S.S.M. III #15 (1958): 7-26

Regehr, T. D. "Historiography of the Canadian Plains after 1870." In A Region of the Mind, pp. 87-102. Edited by R. Allen. Regina: Canadian Plains Studies Centre, c. 1973

Richtik, James M. "The Policy Framework for Settling the Canadian West: 1870-1880." Agricultural History XLIX #4 (Oct. 1975): 613-28

Spry, Irene. "The Great Transformation: The Disappearance of the Commons in Western Canada." In Man and Nature on the Prairies, pp. 21-45. Edited by R. Allen. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, c. 1976

Stahl, John. "Prairie Agriculture: A Prognosis." In Prairie Perspectives, pp. 58-76. Edited by D. Gagan. Toronto and Montreal: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, c. 1970

Studness, C. M. "Economic Opportunities and the Westward Migration of Canadians During the Late Nineteenth Century." Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science Nov. 1964

Warkentin, John. "Manitoba Settlement Patterns." H.S.S.M. III #16 (1960-61): 62-77

Warkentin, John. "Steppe, Desert and Empire." In Prairie Perspectives 2, pp. 102-36. Edited by A. W. Rasporich. Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, c. 1973

Weir, T. R. "Settlement in Southwest Manitoba: 1870-1891." H.S.S.M. III #17 (1960-61): 54-65

E. Unpublished Theses and Dissertations

Bauer, William E. "The Department of the Interior and Dominion Lands, 1873-1891: A Study in Administration." Master's Thesis, Queen's University, 1953

Bibliography

Clark, S. Delbert. "Settlement in Saskatchewan with special reference to the influence of dry farming." Master's Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1931

Jahn, Hertha E. "Immigration and Settlement in Manitoba (1870-1881): The Beginnings of a Pattern." Master's Thesis, University of Manitoba, 1968

Kemp, H. D. "The Department of the Interior in the West, 1873-1883: An examination of some hitherto neglected aspects of the work of the Outside Service." Master's Thesis, University of Manitoba, 1950

Mitchner, E. Alyn. "William Pearce and Federal Government Activity in Western Canada, 1882-1904." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Alberta, 1971

Richtik, J. M. "Manitoba Settlement: 1870 to 1886." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1971

Tyman, John L. "The Disposition of Farm Lands in Western Manitoba: 1870-1930." D. Phil. Thesis, Oxford University, 1970

F. Newspapers

Oak Lake News
July 21, 1901
Aug. 14, 1901
Oct. 9, 1901
May 28, 1902
Aug. 13, 1902
Jan. 3, 1907
Jan. 10, 1907
Feb. 4, 1907

Winnipeg Manitoba Free Press
Dec. 18, 1880
March 4, 1883
May 15, 1890
Sept. 26, 1892