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**“The line which separates”:
Race, Gender, and the Alberta-Montana Borderlands, 1862-1892**

Sheila McManus

**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

Graduate Programme in History

York University

Toronto, Ontario

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Abstract

This study analyzes the uneven process by which Blackfoot country became the Alberta-Montana borderlands, focussing specifically on the years between 1862 and 1892. It argues that despite constant attention by American and Canadian federal authorities, the transition was uneven because it relied on unstable categories like race, gender, and nation which were challenged by local geographical and social conditions. This dissertation uses two main bodies of primary sources: the Annual Reports of key departments in the Canadian and American governments from the mid-1860s to the mid-1880s, and the extant personal papers of white, English-speaking women who came to the region between 1862 and 1892. There are three levels of comparative analysis: between the two federal governments, between the federal governments and local communities, and between the two sets of local communities. The study draws on three overlapping bodies of theoretical literature – post-structuralism, cultural geography and post-colonialism – to interrogate and re-cast existing historical scholarship on the North American West in the nineteenth century. In doing so it draws attention to the discursive tools of rule, such as surveys, mapmaking, and census-taking, which were used by both governments to colonize their western empires. It then brings a close, comparative analysis of the Alberta-Montana borderlands to this framework as a case study, to argue that local topographical, geographical, economic and social conditions confounded federal categories and tools of rule.

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food to several portions of this work, and I am very grateful. And although the poverty-line funding of graduate students made it necessary, it still felt like an opportunity to work for Michele Dagenais, Jean Barman, and independent historian Carol Anderson.

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Table of Contents

Introduction – From Blackfoot country to borderlands	1
Chapter 1 - Mapping the limitless: North American governments look west in the nineteenth century	29
Chapter 2 – “Their own country”: Drawing lines in Blackfoot Territory	90
Chapter 3 – “A land where there is room for all”: Immigration, nation-building, and non-aboriginal communities	151
Chapter 4 – “When you have none but Indians”: White women in the borderlands	205
Conclusion – The lines which separate	255
Bibliography	260

List of illustrations

Figure 1 – “Territory of Montana” 1876	49
Figure 2 – “Map of the Country to be Traversed by the Canadian Pacific Railway” 1876	50
Figure 3 – “Map of Part of the North-West Territory, Including the Province of Manitoba...” 1878	51

Introduction: From Blackfoot country to borderlands

Two national parks lie on the east side of the Rocky Mountains where the mountains bisect the 49th parallel: Waterton Lakes National Park on the north side of the line, and Glacier National Park on the south side. I have a vivid memory from a childhood trip to Waterton of looking south from the north end of the lake and thinking that if the other end of the lake was in a different country, it should look different. Years later, as I criss-crossed the border between Alberta and Montana over the course of several research trips, the imaginary nature of this “international” border was again brought home to me: if it were not for the Canada-U.S. Customs building (called “Coutts” on Canadian maps and “Sweetgrass” on American ones), there would not be any way to tell when you had crossed the line. Although sections of the line are visible from the air, on the ground the constants in these borderlands are more striking than the differences: mountains to the west, dry prairies to the east, and a big sky always above you. Economic activities also seem similar – some grain fields and the few remaining grain elevators still standing, some cattle, some horses. In all likelihood, the only aboriginal people you will see as you travel from Calgary to Helena will be one or two staff members at the border crossing itself.

The geographical constants are the strongest reminder that this region was once part of a coherent territory, albeit one with its own shifting boundaries: the home of the three tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy (the Piikuni or Peigan, Kainah or Blood, and Siksika or Blackfoot proper) and their close neighbours and allies the Tsuu T’ina or Sarcee and the Nakoda or Stoney. Although historians disagree as to the appropriate use of the label “Confederacy” for the first three groups, there is general agreement that significant amounts of cultural and linguistic commonalities existed, and at times these social and familial

allegiances led to strong military alliances.¹ American observers in the late nineteenth century referred to the three groups collectively as the “Blackfeet,” while Canadian writers called them the “Blackfoot” and included the Tsuu T’ina and Nakoda in that category.² Nonetheless, contemporary historians and nineteenth century commentators agree that these groups claimed the land east of the Rocky Mountains as their territorial homeland and aggressively defended it against neighbouring aboriginal groups. This region, which became the Alberta-Montana borderlands, is the starting point of this dissertation.

Between 1700 and 1850, before these communities had sustained contact with whites, Blackfoot culture had already undergone significant and rapid changes. In the first half of the eighteenth century the Confederacy had acquired horses from the Shoshoni and guns from the Cree. By 1800 they no longer needed intermediaries to acquire European trade goods, because Hudson’s Bay Company posts had arrived on the North Saskatchewan River near the upper end of their territory. They did not trap beaver in large quantities, so they traded buffalo meat, robes and horses to the whites of the Hudson’s Bay Company and North West Company who were competing for their business. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Confederacy was at its peak, and managed to squeeze the fur traders out of its territory altogether for a few decades. The Blackfoot were regarded as formidable enemies by neighbouring aboriginal groups: the Cree and Assiniboine to the north and east, the Crow and Shoshoni to the south, and the Kutenais and Flatheads to the west. By 1850, the Confederacy’s on-again, off-again relationship

¹ Hana Samek uses the term “Confederacy” to collectively describe the three groups and denote the close ties that existed among them, while Theodore Binnema rejects the term for implying a high level of political organization which did not exist. This study will use the term, but follows Samek’s usage. Samek, *The Blackfoot Confederacy 1880-1920: A Comparative Study of Canadian and U. S. Indian Policy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987); Theodore Binnema, “Old Swan, Big Man, and the Siksika Bands, 1794-1815,” *Canadian Historical Review* 77:1 (1996): 1-32.

with the American fur traders had pulled its territory towards the south and away from the HBC posts. Blackfoot country extended from around present-day Edmonton, Alberta to south of present-day Great Falls, Montana. Its western edge was the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, and the eastern edge was around the 110th meridian, the present-day Alberta-Saskatchewan boundary.³

Between 1850 and 1900 the Confederacy's contact with whites was more frequent and dramatic changes came more quickly. The 49th parallel was surveyed in the 1870s, and in the 1880s the railroads were completed, linking the borderlands to eastern markets. Montana became a territory (which brought a degree of self-government) in 1864 and a state in 1889, while the district of Alberta was carved out of the North-West Territories in 1882 and remained a territory of Canada until it became a province in 1905.⁴ By 1900 the Blackfoot had been reduced to eight reservations, tiny fractions of their former territory. One was in northern Montana and the rest were spread throughout southern Alberta, and their land had been re-drawn on national political maps as the Alberta-Montana borderlands. In the span of a few decades the 49th parallel was on its way to becoming *the*

2 This study uses "Blackfoot" except when "Blackfeet" appears in a quote, while other nation-specific terms will be used interchangeably: Canadian scholars, for example, use the term "First Nations" while "Indian" is standard in American writing.

3 These pre-1850 changes are discussed in greater length in Anthony Hendry's journal, re-published as *A Fur-Trader's Journey: York Factory to the Blackfeet Country, 1754-1755* (Toronto: Canadiana House, 1973); John Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), and Robert M. Utley, *The Indian Frontier of the American West 1846-1890* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), p. 26-29.

4 Montana's name comes from the Spanish adjective meaning "mountainous," and was given to the new Territory in 1864. Michael Malone and Richard Roeder, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976), pp. 95-96. When the District of Alberta was created in 1882, Governor-General the Marquis of Lorne named it after his wife, Princess Louise Caroline Alberta, daughter of Queen Victoria. D. Blake McDougall, *Princess Louise Caroline Alberta* (Edmonton: Legislature Library, 1988). See Chapter 1 of Paul Carter's *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) for a fascinating analysis of the role of naming in the colonial endeavour, using Australia as his specific example.

metonym for all the real and imagined differences between the United States and Canada, even though more than half of Canada's citizens live south of that latitude.

Richard White has written of the American West that such political boundaries "are a series of doors pretending to be walls," and the 49th parallel is just one of several "arbitrary lines drawn on the map." He argues that "[g]eography did not determine the boundaries of the West; rather, history created them."⁵ This dissertation builds on White's observation about the historical construction of political boundaries to analyze the discursive and institutional tools governments and settlers used to construct social boundaries. In the last four decades of the nineteenth century, the arbitrary and invisible 49th parallel was only one of the doors which the Canadian and American governments tried to pretend was a wall; others include the walls between wild/unsettled land and safe/domesticated land, aboriginal and newcomer, white and non-white, rancher and farmer, women and men. To the consternation of federal authorities, those walls were always more permeable than officials wanted them to be.

This study analyzes the uneven process by which Blackfoot country became the Alberta-Montana borderlands, focussing specifically on the years between 1862 and 1892. Historians have not studied these years as their own coherent time period, choosing to focus instead on one or more "turning points" which created "before" and "after" periods. Aboriginal historians, for example, usually focus on the "pre-reserve" or "reservation life" of the Blackfoot; economic and political historians often begin with the completion of the railroads in the early 1880s; social historians have concentrated on the first large wave of white settlers in the 1890s and the impact of the arrival of the first white women on local race relations. I challenge those demarcations by arguing that there was no single "moment" or turning point in the creation of the borderlands. Surveying the 49th parallel

did not make it a functioning international border; creating reservations for the Blackfoot did not stop their mobility, and the arrival of the first white women did not create an immediate shift towards harsher racial segregation and hierarchies. White communities and the nation-state's presence and control were still tenuous at best in the borderlands by the start of the 1890s. The transition from Blackfoot country to borderland was uneven and never as successful as historians have suggested, because the process was forced to rely on intangible and unstable categories like race, gender, and nation: categories which were repeatedly challenged and re-drawn at the local level.

The closing decades of the nineteenth century were critical in the history of this sub-region at the north-western corner of North America's Great Plains. Within fifty years the Blackfoot were dispossessed of their lands and decimated by hunger and disease, and white settlement had its tentative toehold in the earth. I argue that federal and local officials and local white communities relied upon socially-constructed boundaries to distinguish one country from the other, and various communities from each other. To divide a coherent region into two distinct national possessions, federal officials both in the capitols and on the ground created a range of intangible dividing lines in the borderlands with the tools of surveying, mapping and counting, discursively separating "our" side and "our" land and "our" Indians from those on the "other" side of the line.

Borderlands make obvious the fact that nations and their margins require a great deal of work to create and maintain, and when those borders are not even as tangible as a river or a wall, governments turn easily to the use of already-existing social boundaries like race and gender. As Stuart Murray has argued, borders which are "colonial constructions" attempt to overwrite pre-existing local political and cultural maps with the "national spaces"

⁵ Richard White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A History of the American West* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), p. 3.

of the colonizers.⁶ In the late nineteenth century, the American and Canadian governments were trying to forge the Montana-Alberta borderlands out of Blackfoot country, a difficult task when these new places were so far removed from Ottawa and Washington. It was an uneven and highly contested process, and the 49th parallel played a complicated role: federal officials struggled to make it visible and meaningful, the Piikuni, Kainah and Siksika sometimes ignored and sometimes exploited it, and early white women settlers paid little attention to it. I argue that by the time large numbers of whites began to settle the area around 1900, the first phase of western colonization was ending, not beginning as much of the historiography has suggested, and the patterns of social and spatial division needed only to be reinforced, not created.

At first glance the histories of the Canadian and American wests look very different and each narrative has produced a rich and diverse “national” historiography. American historians have often debated where, exactly, “the west” begins and ends, and whether it is best understood as a place or a process.⁷ Frequently characterized as having had a violent and complex history, the American west has also grappled continually with the idea of the “frontier” as the line of white settlement racing westward. While Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis, with its heavy mythic baggage of white conquest and masculine political freedom, is inadequate for grasping the diverse history of the American west, it is very useful for understanding the ways in which late-nineteenth-century American officials perceived the west and its future place in the nation.⁸ The American claim to the land that

⁶ Stuart Murray, “Introduction,” *Not On Any Map: Essays on Postcoloniality and Cultural Nationalism* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997), p. 12

⁷ Recent scholarship on the American West as place and process, a debate started by Frederick Jackson Turner, includes the introduction to Part One of White’s *It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own*, and the first two chapters of Donald Worster’s *Under Western Skies: Nature and History in the American West* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁸ The classic essay “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” and other key works, can be found in *Frontier and Section: Selected Essays of Frederick Jackson*

would later include Montana was established by the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. If an aboriginal group became “American Indians,” the scholarship has often hinged upon themes of armed conflict with and dispossession by white settlers and the United States Army.⁹ White settlement of the west was rapid and haphazard, and local political development followed quickly on the heels of eager and aggressive white settlers. The historiography of immigration and migration to the west often focuses on explaining the ways newcomers became Americans and assimilated American ideologies.¹⁰ The transcontinental railroads are seen as dynamic engines of regional growth, inspired by individual entrepreneurs.¹¹ The work of the “New Western” historians has decisively shifted the direction of much of this scholarship by stressing the complexity of American Western history and insisting on the importance of race and gender for understanding that history.¹²

Turner, introduced by Ray Allen Billington (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961).

- ⁹ Two excellent monographs on these conflicts are John Tebbel and Keith Jennison’s *The American Indian Wars* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), and Uteley’s *The Indian Frontier of the American West 1846-1890*.
- ¹⁰ See, for example, Jon Gjerde’s *The Minds of the West: Ethnocultural Evolution in the Rural Middle West, 1830-1917* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997). An excellent recent addition to the American historiography is Ronald Takaki’s *A Different Mirror*, which compares the experiences of indigenous Americans who were not newcomers, with those of African Americans who did not choose to immigrate, and with those of a range of European and Asian immigrants. Takaki, *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America* (Boston, New York, Toronto, London: Little, Brown and Company, 1993).
- ¹¹ See, for example, James Ward’s *Railroads and the Character of America 1820-1887* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), *The Man Who Found the Money: John Stewart Kennedy and the Financing of the Western Railroads* by Saul Engelbourg and Leonard Bushkoff (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1996), and Beth LaDow’s chapter on James Hill in *The Medicine Line: Life and Death on a North American Borderland* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), pp.73-88.
- ¹² Two of the best-known examples of New Western history are Patricia Limerick’s *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1987) and White’s “*It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own.*”

The history of Canada's west is generally sketched as a slow and orderly transition from the fur trade to white settlement, with the 1870 and 1885 Rebellions framed as the two exceptions which prove the rule. The Canadian Pacific Railroad and the North West Mounted Police usually play the lead roles in the narrative transition, and both are usually studied as tools of the Canadian state.¹³ Land surveyors are given key supporting roles.¹⁴ Canadian historians have not spent much time debating where "the west" begins; it is taken for granted that the border between Manitoba and Ontario marks the eastern boundary of the west, and that the 49th and 60th parallels are the southern and northern edges. The land which became Alberta was purchased in 1869 from the Hudson's Bay Company, which had managed most of Canada's north and west as its own commercial enterprise since 1670. If an aboriginal group became one of western Canada's "First Nations" peoples, the writing has focused on their relationship to the fur trade and to the North West Mounted Police, devoting more time to the period of cooperation between natives and newcomers, as well as the various coercive strategies the Canadian government used which stopped short of direct armed violence.¹⁵ White settlement of the prairie west has been framed as gradual and centrally-controlled, followed by the slow but steady evolution of local political

¹³ See the anthology edited by Hugh Dempsey, *The CPR West: The Iron Road and the Making of a Nation* (Vancouver and Toronto: Douglas and McIntyre, 1984), John Eagle's *The Canadian Pacific Railway and the Development of Western Canada, 1896-1914* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989) and A. A. Den Otter's *The Philosophy of Railways: The Transcontinental Railway Idea in British North America* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997). R. C. Macleod's *The North-West Mounted Police and Law Enforcement, 1873-1905* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976) is a good study of the role of the Mounties in the west, as is the recent collection *The Mounted Police and Prairie Society, 1873-1919*, edited by William Baker (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1998).

¹⁴ For the history of surveying in Canada, including numerous chapters on the west, see both volumes of Don W. Thomson's *Men and Meridians: The History of Surveying and Mapping in Canada* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1967).

¹⁵ The most complete single-volume study of aboriginal people in Canada is J. R. Miller's *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Native-White Relations in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989).

institutions.¹⁶ Canada's immigration historiography has been strongest in the areas of policy and diversity, and studies of migrants to the west have often mirrored this trend.¹⁷

It is clear from these abbreviated narratives that Canadian and American historians have generally chosen to see the "wall" of the border instead of the swinging doors of human experiences in the west. Indeed, many maps included in scholarly works abruptly end at the 49th parallel as if the rivers and mountains have been cut off. Nonetheless, there have been some important exceptions to this historiographical architecture, which emphasize the common histories of these two wests. Some topics, like land policy, have received similar treatment on each side of the border, reflecting the importance of the public lands to the history of the two nations and their governments.¹⁸ Other subjects have been the subject of direct comparison, and such classic works as Paul Sharp's 1955 study *Whoop-Up Country: The Canadian-American West, 1865-1885*, have been joined by more recent studies such as John Bennett and Seena Kohl's 1995 monograph *Settling the*

¹⁶ See, for example, Paul Voisey's *Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); John Bennett and Seena Kohl, *Settling the Canadian-American West, 1890-1915: Pioneer Adaptation and Community Building* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), and the second edition of Lewis Thomas, *The Struggle for Responsible Government in the North-West Territories, 1870-97* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978).

¹⁷ See, for example, Roy Loewen's *Family, Church and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and New Worlds, 1850-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Frances Swyripa's *Wedded to the Cause: Ukrainian-Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity, 1891-1991* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); David DeBrou and Aileen Moffatt's *"Other" Voices: Historical Essays on Saskatchewan Women* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina, 1995); Catherine Cavanaugh and Jeremy Mouat's *Making Western Canada: Essays on European Colonization and Settlement* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1996), and Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock's *The Making of the Mosaic: A History of Canadian Immigration Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

¹⁸ See, for example, the two works which have been of the most use for this study: Everett Dick, *The Lure of the Land: A Social History of the Public Lands from the Articles of Confederation to the New Deal* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), and Chester Martin, *"Dominion Lands" Policy*, edited and with an introduction by Lewis Thomas (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973; first published in 1938).

*Canadian-American West, 1890-1915: Pioneer Adaptation and Community Building.*¹⁹

Ranching and Indian policy are two areas which have witnessed particularly fruitful comparative historical analyses. The historiography of Canadian and American ranching includes Terry Jordan's 1993 work *North American Cattle Ranching Frontiers: Origins, Diffusion, and Differentiation*, Richard Slatta's *Comparing Cowboys and Frontiers*, published in 1997, and the outstanding 2000 collection *Cowboys, Ranchers and the Cattle Business: Cross-Border Perspectives on Ranching History* edited by Simon Evans, Sarah Carter, and Bill Yeo.²⁰ Three of the best examples of recent scholarship in North American Indian policy are Hana Samek's *The Blackfoot Confederacy 1880-1920: A Comparative Study of Canadian and U. S. Indian Policy* published in 1987, Roger Nichols' 1998 study, *Indians in the United States and Canada: A Comparative History*, and Carol Higham's 2000 monograph *Noble, Wretched and Redeemable: Protestant Missionaries to the Indians in Canada and the United States, 1820-1900.*²¹ Each of these works has added immeasurably to our knowledge of the history of the Great Plains portion of the Canadian-American borderlands, but they often stopped short of actively interrogating the process by which the 49th parallel became a national, political border.

¹⁹ Paul Sharp, *Whoop-Up Country: The Canadian-American West, 1865-1885* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955); Bennett and Kohl, *Settling the Canadian-American West*.

²⁰ Terry Jordan, *North American Cattle Ranching Frontiers: Origins, Diffusion, and Differentiation* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993); Richard W. Slatta, *Comparing Cowboys and Frontiers* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997); *Cowboys, Ranchers and the Cattle Business: Cross-Border Perspectives on Ranching History* edited by Simon Evans, Sarah Carter, and Bill Yeo (Calgary, AB and Boulder, CO: University of Calgary Press and University Press of Colorado: 2000).

²¹ Samek, *The Blackfoot Confederacy 1880-1920*; Nichols, *Indians in the United States and Canada: A Comparative History* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1998); Higham, *Noble, Wretched and Redeemable: Protestant Missionaries to the Indians in Canada and the United States, 1820-1900* (Albuquerque and Calgary: University of New Mexico Press and University of Calgary Press, 2000).

This dissertation joins the scholarship which employs the explicitly comparative “borderlands” approach by studying the border as a social construction. While all borderlands studies are by their nature comparative, not all comparative studies take a borderlands approach, which is a more recent but overlapping historiographical shift. Included in this trend are such works as the 1991 collection edited by Victor Konrad, *Borderlands: Essays in Canadian-American Relations*; and Beth LaDow’s 2001 work on the Montana-Saskatchewan borderlands, *The Medicine Line: Life and Death on a North American Borderland*.²² Instead of taking the border as a given, these scholars have questioned how it came to be, and how it shaped the people, places, and processes on both sides.

My study makes several specific contributions to this historiography. I analyze how Canadian and American policy makers struggled to gain control over western North America, and the regulatory tools they used to try and bring regions of the west into the federal body politic. This dissertation focuses in particular on three tools: the surveying and map-making through which federal authorities sought to “re-imagine” the west in terms of European agricultural production; the spatial, social, and sexual regulation of western aboriginal peoples, especially the Blackfoot; and immigration policies to “people” the west with newcomers dedicated to Euro-North American agricultural, spatial, and gender practices. Each of these regulatory tools was built upon particular notions of how space, race, gender and sexuality were to be organized and expressed. Together, these tools helped federal authorities define the political boundaries of Canada and the United States, and bring about their national visions.

This dissertation thus departs from the existing historiography in its emphasis on discursive and ideological tools, rather than the physical mechanisms of rule that have been

²² Robert Lecker, ed. *Borderlands: Essays in Canadian-American Relations* (Toronto:

the focus of many historical studies. By offering a national comparison, I argue that in spite of the significant differences between the two nations, both federal governments used similar discursive tools in their efforts to extend their nations “from sea to sea.” This emphasis is supported throughout the study by evidence of federal authorities tracking the successes and failures of their colleagues across the line. I further complicate existing historical scholarship by interrogating federal beliefs in the homogeneity of “the west” as a cohesive region. By focusing on one sub-region of the North American west, this dissertation reveals how the shared topographical features of the Alberta-Montana borderlands, the Blackfoot Confederacy’s use of the sub-region, and the economic development of and immigration to the borderlands, complicated and undermined federal visions of a coherent, integrated “west.” The tension between local developments and events and federal efforts to deploy their tools of rule is addressed throughout this dissertation. For example, historians of the “cattle kingdoms” in northern Montana and southern Alberta have paid close attention to the geographic, political, economic and social development of ranching and ranching communities in the region. My dissertation builds on this work by analyzing the colonial roots of ranching in the region and the powerful discursive connections and disjunctions between federal policies that facilitated ranching, discouraged the mobility of aboriginal people, and encouraged immigration. Where the existing scholarship has emphasized the environmental conditions which made the region “naturally” suited to grazing large herds, my study suggests that the willingness of federal officials to encourage ranching did not mean they ever abandoned their visions of 160 acre farms blanketing every corner of the west. The establishment of ranching as the key enterprise in the borderlands was not inevitable, and instead was the result of larger colonial processes.

A final addition to the existing historiography is my inclusion of race and gender as categories of analysis within a borderlands framework. Feminist scholars have long acknowledged variations in the construction of race and gender norms over time, and this study examines how those norms may or may not vary across space even when they do not vary in time.

My focus on three transitional decades in one borderlands region allows me to bring together topics (such as land and aboriginal policy) and perspectives (such as federal officials and local white women) which have rarely been given equal space within the same work. By bringing a comparative historical analysis to these topics, this region, and these decades, specific analytical questions can be pursued that a more in-depth study of a single topic could not. This dissertation challenges “national” historiographical narratives which are based on such demarcations as treaties and railroads, which assume that white settlement to the region did not really begin until the late 1890s, or assume that whites and aboriginals were the only two racial groups present in the borderlands in the latter decades of the century. Borderlands scholarship demands that the similarities as well as the differences, in how people live their lives and view their places in the nation, be accounted for. Focusing on these decades as their own unit of time allows me to highlight the agency and resistance of the Blackfoot during these years, as well as the agency of white, Chinese, and black men and women in the creation of these borderlands. I apply the insights of the existing scholarship to a particular region and time period in an attempt to re-cast the history of this region as being about more than just the sum of its parts. I highlight what is uniquely Canadian or American in this part of the west, as well as the powerful commonalities.

This dissertation strikes a balance between Canadian and American sources, between national narratives and international theories, between federal and local perceptions, between the state and the individual. It stands where a rich body of historical

writing meets three overlapping bodies of theoretical literature which have each taken up the issue of political and social borders in their own way. Post-structural scholarship, particularly Michel Foucault on the production of categories of knowledge and discursive tools of rule, and Benedict Anderson on the ways nations are imagined communities, has been particularly influential.²³ The 49th parallel was defined by an “our side/their side” view on the part of the federal governments, although that binary vision was rarely shared by the Blackfoot or articulated by the white women who lived in the region. Given that there were no physical barriers between nations or racial groups in these borderlands, each state relied on such categories as “Canadian” and “American,” “native” and “white,” to give meaning to the differences they were trying to create.

The second body of theoretical scholarship which has shaped this study is the work of cultural geographers on the social production of gendered and racialized space. In terms of its physical and social geography these borderlands occupied a particular place in the eyes of North American bureaucrats as one of the last portions of the Northern Great Plains to be settled by whites. Each government was solidifying its control of the region at a particular time in the history of its development as a nation-state. To colonize and nationalize the region and its original peoples, each government had to impose the border and make it stick; its maps and its categories had to be the accepted ones. By stressing that their side of the 49th was better suited for particular settlement or that “their” Blackfoot were better-behaved, officials were using language, in the words of Derek Gregory, as “an instrument of *physical* colonization...” The landscape of the borderlands “had to be differentiated through naming in order to be brought into an existence that was meaningful

²³ See in particular Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1980) and *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised ed., (London: Verso, 1991).

for the colonizers and within which they could frame their own actions.”²⁴ For example, this dissertation shows that by describing some land as better-suited for agriculture and other land better for stock, officials were imposing economic patterns that made sense to them and mapped out the economic future of the region. And by insisting that “their” side contained better farmland, officials reinforced their belief that their side could be used for farmland at all – a contention that was not always self-evident.

In the case of these borderlands, their distance from the national seats of government meant that most federal forms of differentiation were initially indirect and imaginary; for one official to write that his country’s side of the border was more conducive to economic development or more attractive to immigrants, he had to rely on nationalist dreams more than any physical reality. All maps, as Peter Jackson has argued, “are ideological instruments in the sense that they project a preferred reading of the material world.” This “ideological” nature of maps and mapping means that some of the meanings they project are dominant, while others “result from struggle against the dominant order” because “resistance is always possible.”²⁵ This dissertation will show that the Alberta-Montana borderlands, its indigenous people, newcomers of various racial groups, and even some of the officials responsible for enforcing the maps, repeatedly challenged the dominant readings which federal maps were trying to embed.

The work of feminist geographers has also highlighted, as Doreen Massey explains, the fact that “geographical variation in gender relations ... is a significant element in the production and reproduction of both imaginative geographies and uneven development.” She adds that “[p]articular ways of thinking about space and place are tied

²⁴ Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), p. 172.

²⁵ Peter Jackson, *Maps of Meaning: An introduction to cultural geography* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989) p. 186.

up with, both directly and indirectly, particular social constructions of gender relations.”²⁶ This dissertation argues that in the Alberta-Montana borderlands the construction of spaces of masculinity and femininity were complicated and generally unspoken, yet were absolutely fundamental to the national projects of consolidating state control over western spaces. For Canadian and American officials, for example, “the west” was a fundamentally masculine space where white men conquered native men and developed western resources, at the same time as the land itself was feminized as a thing to be possessed. Yet women were not entirely absent from national dreams about the west; American women could access land directly through the Homestead Act, and the Canadian government made an effort to attract white immigrant women to settle and populate the west. Each country, therefore, did implicitly imagine that a certain kind of white, heterosexual femininity had at least a small place in their west, and white women themselves created their own spaces in this western borderlands region.

The third body of work which has informed this dissertation is feminist post-colonial scholarship on the production and regulation of race, gender, and sexuality in colonial contexts. The transition from Blackfoot country to Alberta-Montana borderlands was clearly a colonial process, whereby a “new” land, empty and yet not empty, was in need of claiming/taming, and white farmers and ranchers were just the ones to do it. Possession and control of western lands were expected to add to the wealth and prestige of the federal governments back east, and play a critical role in creating and strengthening nationalist rhetoric. Colonizing the borderlands required more than just the differentiation of the Canadian and American sides of the 49th parallel, and Ann Stoler has argued that “Europeans in the colonies imagined themselves and constructed communities built on

²⁶ Doreen Massey, *Space, place and gender* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994) p. 2.

asymmetries of race, class, and gender...”²⁷ “White” was privileged over “Indian” and “male” over “female” on both sides of the border, and yet there were subtle differences in these “asymmetries” on either side. Stoler adds that the “exclusionary politics of colonialism demarcated not just external boundaries but interior frontiers, specifying internal conformity and order among Europeans themselves.”²⁸ The spatial, racial, and gendered lines between coloniser and colonised, although supposedly self-evident, in fact required a great deal of policing.

Racial distinctions, increasingly imbued with new meanings in the nineteenth century, were critical to western settlement and the creation of the Alberta-Montana borderlands. The inseparability of discourses of gender and race has been highlighted by recent work in a range of disciplines. Historian Gail Bederman argues that towards the end of the century in the United States, the white middle class increasingly employed race to make their claims for superiority. Like gender, race links “bodies, identities, and power”, and “[i]n a variety of ways, Americans who were trying to reformulate gender explained their ideas about manhood by drawing connections between male power and white supremacy...”²⁹ Bederman is not just concerned with the particularly American juxtaposition of whiteness and blackness; she also discusses the ways in which whiteness and white masculinity were juxtaposed in the west against Indianness and Indian masculinity, and it is these aspects of her analysis which have much to offer to this study.

²⁷ Ann Laura Stoler, “Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in Twentieth-Century Colonial Cultures,” in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, eds. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti and Ella Shohat, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) p. 344.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 365.

²⁹ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 20.

This connection between whiteness and manhood was hardly new, but in the last decades of the nineteenth century North American whites “were discovering an extraordinary variety of ways to link male power to race.” Sometimes “manly power” was linked “with the racial supremacy of civilized white men,” and at other times it was linked to “the ‘savagery’ and ‘primitivism’ of dark-skinned races, whose *masculinity* [white men] claimed to share.” Although these “strategies may seem contradictory, they appeared coherent at the time because they both drew on the powerful discourse of civilization.” For Americans and Canadians, the word “simultaneously denoted attributes” of race, class, and gender. One had to be white to be civilized, for example, but being white was not a sufficient precondition; one also had to adhere to particular gender and class norms. In addition, the discourse of “civilization” could also be used by the people left at its margins to make competing claims, and thus it was never as totalizing as its adherents hoped.³⁰

Real and discursive struggles between aboriginal and European manhood in western North America were never just about establishing the supremacy of a particular kind of white masculinity, because in the late nineteenth century Ottawa and Washington were also struggling to establish their national supremacy in the west. As Ruth Frankenberg has noted, particular definitions of whiteness became inseparable from notions of North American “nationhood.” Although Americanness, Canadianness, and whiteness are “by no means coterminous,” categories of race, nation, gender and landscape “are profoundly shaped by” and “co-produce” each other.³¹ The possible range of “co-constructions” remains “fundamentally asymmetrical,” however, because “the term ‘whiteness’ signals the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than

³⁰ Ibid. pp. 21-23.

³¹ Ruth Frankenberg, *White women, Race matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) p. 233.

disadvantage.”³² In North America, as in many other colonial contexts, the dominance of “whiteness” was reinforced by its associations with masculine nationhood and the rightful possession of feminized land.

This complex, contradictory discourse was easily deployed by North American governments when they looked at western lands and aboriginal communities. For example, western lands needed to be civilized through cultivation to make them profitable, but both governments believed that the west’s “wildness” and vast expanses would make the land attractive to white settlers. Similarly, United States Secretary of the Interior Samuel Kirkwood could praise the strong attachments indigenous families had to their kin and homelands,³³ at the same time as those attachments were attacked for thwarting federal efforts to remake aboriginal people into nuclear families and yeoman farmers. In the end, every complicated facet of the federal governments’ relationships with western land and western natives could be used to justify their conquest.

This dissertation offers a case study of a particular borderlands region to this international and interdisciplinary literature on gender, race, frontiers, and colonialism. A key strength of borderlands scholarship is the way it can illuminate larger national and international processes, from settlement and colonization to localized constructions of race and gender. Firmly grounded in a sense of place and the material realities of the region, this work applies a discursive analysis to a range of sources to get at a broader understanding of the colonization of this particular sub-region, and of the creation of the Alberta-Montana borderlands in relation to the rest of “the west” and broader national processes.

³² Ibid. pp. 236-237.

³³ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5. 47th Congress, 1st session. Nov. 1, 1881.

I relied on two main bodies of sources for my research: the papers of the Canadian and American governments from the mid-1860s to the mid-1880s, particularly the Annual Reports of both countries' Departments of the Interior and Canada's Department of Agriculture, and the extant personal papers of white, English-speaking women who came to the region between 1862 and 1892. I chose these sources for several reasons. The Annual Reports of the Departments of the Interior were my main sources because in both countries that one Department was responsible for land and Indian policy. The United States' Department of the Interior contained the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Land Office, and the Geological Survey, and after 1873 Canada's newly-created Department of the Interior was responsible for the administration of the North-West Territories, the Dominion's aboriginal population, Crown lands, and the Geological Survey. Canada's Department of Agriculture was responsible for immigration issues throughout this time period. The Annual Reports from these departments were particularly useful because they contained so many different kinds of reports and correspondence from every level and location of the departmental hierarchy, from the Ministers and Secretaries at the top to the lowest-ranking Indian agents and surveyors in the field, and from officials who worked in Ottawa and Washington to those who worked in the borderlands. I concentrated on the late-1860s to mid-1880s because these were the years in which much of the policy groundwork was laid, and in which the borderlands received specific attention as objects of colonization as opposed to the less-specific information-gathering efforts of the 1850s and the large influx of white settlers which began after the mid-1890s.

There is no doubt that these government reports, while certainly "public" documents in that they were submitted to the elected houses of each government and published annually, normally had an audience limited to the other officials whose job it was to read them and a few other elected politicians who chose to read them for their own

purposes.³⁴ While other works have focused on the opinions of eastern politicians, authors and newspaper men about the west, I was more interested in the information available to, and generated by, the officials responsible for actually managing the west, whether it be Ministers in Ottawa and Secretaries in Washington who administered land policies, or low-ranking Indian agents who worked in the borderlands reporting on the “progress” of the Blackfoot. For the same reason I did not examine private correspondence between government officials: I wanted to know what information and opinions were deemed important enough from a political and policy standpoint to make it into the Annual Reports.

There are three layers in each Report: first, the report of the Minister or Secretary responsible for the Department, in which he provided a lengthy overview of the Department’s activities for the year; second, the reports of the Deputy Ministers and Commissioners responsible for individual bureaus or departments, such as “Indian Affairs” or the “General Land Office,” in which they would sum up their activities and those of their staff for the year; and third, massive appendices which reproduced the reports of the dozens of individual agents working around the country or, in the case of Canada’s immigration agents, around the world. What made these Reports particularly useful and fascinating sources was this multiplicity of voices. For example, the reports of local Indian agents were often deeply sympathetic to the hardships of the aboriginal communities those agents were supposed to be helping, and, just as often, were implicitly or explicitly critical

³⁴ Although, as Debora Rindge has noted in her study of the role of photography in the United States Geological Survey, copies of the annual reports of the Survey were also distributed by the Smithsonian to education and scientific institutions to meet public demand for the information and images. It is possible that the Canadian reports also found a limited distribution outside of the halls of government. Debora Rindge, “Picturing an Expedition: Three Roles of Men in Landscape Photographs from the U.S. Geological and Geographical Survey of the Territories (1867-1879),” *Gendered Landscapes: An Interdisciplinary Exploration of Past Place and Space*, edited by Bonj

of federal policy decisions which were not based on such sympathy. As a result, they produced a very different narrative than the introductory remarks a Minister or Secretary may have made a few hundred pages earlier at the very beginning of the same report. Conversely, local surveyors were generally far more enthusiastic boosters for their region than higher-ranking officials who had to keep the entire nation in mind, and the surveyors would frequently urge their distant eastern governments to move more quickly to incorporate the west within the nation.

At first read, the inclusion of the local agents' reports seems to fracture the unity and authority of the Minister's or Secretary's summary report. Yet, upon closer examination, the Annual Reports reflect the structure of information-production, and make visible the process whereby diverse pieces of local information were hammered into broader perceptions of and policies for managing the west. As such, the appended reports, many of which included information or opinions which challenged federal policies, did not undermine the legitimacy and authority of the Minister or Secretary but in fact served to underscore that legitimacy by demonstrating that higher-ranking officials were keeping the needs of the whole nation in mind.

I was explicitly interested in contrasting the perceptions of local women with those of local and federal male authorities to test the currency of "national" or "official" visions of the west against the perceptions of individual white women who came to the borderlands with the intention of settling there. As a feminist historian I am keenly interested in the active roles these women played in making the borderlands, and wanted to test their perceptions of the borderlands against post-colonial literature which stresses the critical roles white women have played in other colonial contexts. I therefore compare and contrast the Annual Reports with the personal papers of white, English-speaking women who

migrated to the borderlands before the major turn-of-the-century influx of white settlement. Federal officials and local white women in both countries shared many assumptions about the connections among race, space and gender, but a close analysis of these two different groups of sources also revealed a few telling differences. I was able to find diaries, memoirs, and reminiscences of thirteen women in north-western Montana and five women in southern Alberta dealing with the years between 1862 and 1892. I had hoped to find more diaries, fewer reminiscences, and more Canadian sources, but a careful search of five archival collections (three in Alberta and two in Montana) made it clear that for the borderlands region before the 1890s, extant personal papers were few.

I chose the years 1862 and 1892 as the beginning and ending of the period I wanted to examine for three reasons. I wanted to analyze the decades before the major influx of white settlers in the 1890s because little attention had been paid to those years and I knew that the whites who arrived around the turn of the century had not come to an “empty” place with no history. I also wanted to complicate histories of the west that took the reservations of the 1870s or the railroads of the 1880s as their opening or closing dates. The final factor in my choice of dates was the limited number of surviving sources written by white women during or about the borderlands in the late nineteenth century. The earliest diary I found was written in 1862, which gave me my starting date, and a reminiscence which began in 1892 seemed to be the latest I could go without using sources written during or about the beginning of the large influx of white settlement into the region.

There are two striking differences between the American and Canadian women’s papers: the American sources are mostly from or about the 1860s and 70s and include a significant number of memoirs and reminiscences, while the Canadian sources are all diaries or letters written during the 1880s and 90s. The temporal difference is easier to explain than the different kinds of sources: the slow trickle of white women into northern Montana took place earlier than in southern Alberta because of easier access via the

Missouri River. The different kinds of sources are more puzzling; Sandra Myres found the exact opposite in her research on “frontierswomen” in Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand, uncovering more Canadian reminiscences and American diaries, and speculated that it might be perhaps “most of the material for the Canadian West is from the post-1870 period when there was less emphasis on keeping diaries and daybooks.” Although my research contradicts hers in this respect, I share her caution when using reminiscences because of the way “Details of the past become blurred and hardships softened by the rose-colored tints of nostalgia and longing for ‘the good old days.’”³⁵ While mindful of the significant differences in tone, objective, context and audience between a diary written at the time and a memoir written later, I found few differences between these types of sources when it came to the categories of analysis I was pursuing – specifically ideas of race, space, gender and nation. The similarities in the content of these sources and the discursive analysis pursued in this dissertation thus allowed me to treat these different genres as subsets of a single, “sources written by women” category.

There are clearly several other kinds of sources that could be studied for the mediating roles they played between the federal and local levels, and between the male officials and female settlers. The railroad companies performed a wide range of administrative functions in the west, particularly in the areas of land policy and promoting immigration, but they did not begin to play this kind of direct role in the Montana-Alberta borderlands until after the mid-1880s. Montana’s territorial government was more developed and powerful than that of the North-West Territories, but responsibility over land and Indian policy remained with the federal governments. Indeed, Montana’s territorial legislature devoted most of its attention to local financial issues and economic

³⁵ Sandra Myres, “Victoria’s Daughters: English Speaking Women on Nineteenth Century Frontiers,” in *Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives*, eds. Lillian Schlissel, Vicki

development in the 1860s, 70s and 80s.³⁶ Local newspapers would have been another possible source, given their potential for shaping local perceptions and opinions, but there was little local press until the 1880s and I wanted to get at the perceptions of women without the difficulty of trying to confirm whether a woman had read a particular paper at a particular time. Nor did I include any extended discussion of the North West Mounted Police or the United States Army, particularly in the area of controlling aboriginal peoples, because this dissertation was focused primarily on such less-coercive technologies of state power as mapping and census-taking. On many of the key questions which have driven this study, therefore, these sources had little to say until the last few years of the time period being discussed.

The movement in this dissertation is from largest to smallest, in that the first chapter analyzes federal perceptions of immense western spaces and the final chapter discusses the personal papers of a small number of white women in the borderlands. Within each chapter there is a similar thematic movement, from federal to local perspectives for example, or from land policy to the perceptions of a single woman or agent.

Chapter 1, "Mapping the limitless: North American governments look west in the nineteenth century" compares Canadian and American land policy and surveyors' reports to discuss the earliest state-sponsored demarcations of the land east of the Rockies and the difficulties both sides faced when trying to get these new lines to stick. The invisible lines of a survey and the impermanent markers left behind seemed to have little meaning in this wide-open region. Although Canada and the United States were at very different stages in their national political development, they had remarkably similar ideas about "the west" and

Ruiz and Janice Monk, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988) p. 263.

³⁶ This observation stems from my sampling of the records of the Legislative Assembly in 1866, 1868-71, 1876, 1881, and 1885. Montana Historical Society, Journals of the Legislative Assembly of Montana.

what it would mean to further development: “the west” was a place of racial and political purity, physically removed from older political conflicts, and the space where the true destiny of both countries would unfold. At the same time, both countries used tools like surveying that undermined “the west” as a coherent space by revealing both the diversity of the land and the difficulty of enforcing spatial demarcations. Canadian and American discourses about “the West” were based on the ideal of 160-acre farms and male-headed families, for example, but ranching dominated the borderlands economy and it entailed different assumptions about race, gender, and land: fewer men and no women were needed to manage cattle over much larger areas of land.

Each government relied heavily on the knowledge it collected and created about the west to feed its imagination and its policies. The 1860s, 70s and 80s were busy decades of mapping, surveying, counting, and reporting. I analyze the discursive construction of knowledge about the west on the part of the governments, and the ways in which they used the knowledge thus produced to reinforce and justify their tools of rule.

The people of the Blackfoot Confederacy were an even bigger threat to the meaningfulness of the border, and their ongoing cross-border mobility and resistance to official boundaries is examined in Chapter 2, “‘Their own country’: Drawing lines in Blackfoot Territory.” Each government struggled to keep “their” Blackfoot on “their” side of the border and within the invisible boundaries of reservations, and reinforced these attempts at physical containment by attempting to re-shape the Blackfoot’s cultural and gender patterns. The continued mobility across the 49th parallel by the southern Blackfoot tribes (particularly the Piikuni and Kainah) represented both a challenge to and a way to reinforce the border, demonstrating that it was just an invisible line while giving officials on each side the opportunity to blame the “other” side’s Indians and Indian policy for ongoing problems.

Chapter 3, "A land where there is room for all': Official views of immigration to North America's West," compares Canadian and American immigration policy to argue that although their policies and degrees of authority were quite different, there were powerful discursive similarities in their views of immigration and immigrants. For example, both governments placed their views of and hopes for an agricultural west at the centre of their discussions of immigration, and agreed that a particular kind of white man was needed to settle and develop western resources. They had different opinions about the sort of role white female immigrants should play in western development, and often did not recognize the diversity of the non-aboriginal communities which were established in the Alberta-Montana borderlands before the 1890s. By examining those communities, this chapter argues that not only was the region more racially diverse than federal officials wanted "the west" to be, but the dominance of ranching placed the region outside of official discourses of western expansion, migration and settlement.

Chapter 4, "When You Have None But Indians": White Women in the Borderlands," draws on the diaries, memoirs and reminiscences of some of the first white women to settle in the borderlands to analyze their role in the region's colonization and to compare their perceptions of the land and aboriginal people with the perceptions of the federal governments. Much of the existing historiographical and post-colonial literature on the place of white women in settler societies suggests that these women, no matter how small their numbers, played critical "civilizing" roles from the moment they arrived on the "frontier." I challenge this view by arguing that in the borderlands before the major influx of white settlers, the role of white women was more complicated and drawn-out due to their small numbers and their own spatial isolation on large ranches. These supposed linchpins of national and racial civilization had their own perceptions of race and gender to create local communities which did not necessarily accord with national goals, and thus these women played complex roles in the process of colonizing the borderlands. For

example, where the federal governments saw only whites and Indians in western spaces, and only limited ideas of the kinds of places white women would occupy, white women saw a complex racial and gender hierarchy which included black and Chinese people, and a significant amount of physical and social space for themselves. White women also paid little explicit attention to the real or symbolic meanings which Ottawa and Washington had tried to attach to the international border.

I conclude with a discussion of the 1890s, when the Alberta-Montana borderlands finally began to resemble what federal officials had in mind for over 30 years: white settlement in the region increased, lines between white and aboriginal hardened, and irrigation and dry-farming techniques held out the hope that even here agriculture could triumph. Yet in southern Alberta it was American-born Mormons who began the first irrigation experiments, and a rail line linking Lethbridge and Great Falls added a new challenge to the meaning of the 49th parallel.

Chapter 1

Mapping the limitless:

North American governments look west in the nineteenth century

In 1872 Professor Cyrus Thomas of the United States Geological Survey penned a description of his first impression of Montana Territory:

Passing over the broad plains which spread out westward from the Missouri River, the first objects to attract our attention are the mountains. We enter upon our western journey with a desire to see them, and the long monotonous ride across this broad expanse, even though sweeping along at railroad speed, intensifies that desire. And when we first catch a glimpse of some lofty peak or range, especially if it has a crown of snow upon its summit, glittering in the bright sunshine of that limpid atmosphere, all other objects for the time are forgotten....

In the eyes of this would-be colonizer, the mountains' beauty was matched by their utility: those snowy crests were "the great reservoirs upon which the hopes of the agriculturalist depend.... the sure harbingers of a plenteous harvest the following season."¹ Such romantic prose may have seemed out of place in Thomas' technical report on the agricultural resources of Montana. Yet this passage includes most of the conventional elements of a colonial journey and text – the anticipation; the long distance between "here" and "there"; the assistance of technology; some "never-seen-before" scenery at the end; the blend of beauty and utility; and a landscape conveniently empty of other people to allow the gaze of the white, male, writer to enjoy unimpeded vistas of his desired object. Indeed,

¹ United States, Department of the Interior, *Report on the Geological Survey of Montana*, Part II, "Agricultural Resources" by Prof. Cyrus Thomas, House Executive Documents, #326, 42nd Congress, 2nd session, 29 February 1872, p. 205. David Emmons notes that Thomas was the principal assistant of Ferdinand V. Hayden, one of the more unabashed boosters of a highly romanticized American West in the late nineteenth century, and Hayden's influence in this regard is evident in Thomas' work. Emmons, "The Influence of Ideology in Changing Environmental Images: The Case of Six Gazetteers," in *Images of the Plains: The Role of Human Nature in Settlement*, eds. Brian W. Blouet and Merlin P. Lawson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975)

even Thomas's supposed reliance on the technology of rail travel was more metaphorical than real: in 1872 the only way to get to Montana Territory was by boat up the Missouri River or overland on a horse. He may have travelled part of the way on the Union Pacific railroad which ran from Chicago through Illinois, Missouri, Nebraska, Wyoming and then on to the coast, but no railroad would reach Montana for another decade. The "railroad speed" of his journey referred as much to his optimism for the future of the region's development as it did to the real experience of a trip by rail.

This blend of romanticism and science, imagination and utilitarianism, was typical of the multiple ways Canadian and American authorities viewed the western domains which they claimed as their own during the latter half of the nineteenth century. This chapter explores the ways officials in the American and Canadian Departments of the Interior perceived and tried to manage the Alberta-Montana borderlands from the 1860s to the mid-1880s. In doing so, the chapter accomplishes two things. First it traces the development of federal discourses of western spaces, from "unlimited", unknown and far-away, to known, nationalized, and accessible. It builds on the existing historiography of the re-imagining of the North American west in the nineteenth century to show how post-structuralism, cultural geography, and post-colonial scholarship complicate and extend our understanding of this process. The chapter then turns to federal records to show how the Alberta-Montana borderlands confounded new federal visions of the west as an agricultural paradise, and of the Canadian and American wests as two distinct and different places.

Historiographic re-imaginings of "the West" in the nineteenth century

The re-visioning of the North American west and the various roles the west played in both countries' national narratives and dreams of the future has been discussed at length

by such scholars as Doug Owram and Douglas Francis in Canada and Henry Nash Smith and William Goetzmann in the United States. Drawing on the writing of eastern boosters, fiction and art, traveller's texts and surveyors' reports, these studies show how the idea of the west as an agricultural paradise was produced in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Their work traces the successive re-imaginings of the west, from desert and wasteland to garden and heartland, and demonstrates that these images were both the justification for and necessary precursor of military and economic domination. Owram, for example, analyzes the writing of a range of English-speaking expansionists in central Canada, to trace how writers as diverse as ministers and journalists constructed and deployed an image of the North-West as the breadbasket of the future, while Nash focusses on nineteenth-century fiction and poetry to examine the creation of the American West as the "garden of the world."²

I use these works as a jumping-off point to consider one aspect of the re-visioning process which has received less scholarly attention: namely, how the officials charged with administering the west translated popular images of the west into policy, and how the Alberta-Montana borderlands in particular were re-visioned as a sub-region of the west. The government reports discussed below reflect the pattern of change established by Owram, Goetzmann, and others, and I argue that the multiple re-visionings of the borderlands were characterized by an ongoing tension between what the officials in Ottawa and Washington wanted "the west" to be, and local topographical, geographical, climatic, and social conditions. Unlike non-governmental boosters or low-level officials and agents,

² Doug Owram, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992, 1st. ed 1980); Douglas Francis, *Images of the West: Responses to the Canadian Prairies* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1989); Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (New York: Vintage Books, 1950); William

however, high-ranking federal authorities had to confront the 'failures' of their much-lauded tools.

As the existing historiography has established, Canadian and American perceptions of "the west" in general shifted several times over the course of the nineteenth century, aided largely by the reports of numerous mapping and surveying expeditions. As Don Thomson has observed, European mapping of Canada's western interior had begun long before the first government-sponsored expeditions of the 1850s, and Herman Friis has examined the close relationship between the military and mapping arms of the American government in the nineteenth century, beginning most famously with the Lewis and Clark expedition up the Missouri River in 1804-06.³ Scholars have demonstrated that certain key expeditions produced the framework upon which both governments built their perceptions of the western interior in the nineteenth century. For example, Captain Stephen Long's expedition to the Yellowstone region in 1820 gave the phrase "Great American Desert" to the lexicon and mental maps of future white writers.⁴ Douglas Francis notes that Dr. Edwin James, author of the chronicle of the Long expedition, wrote "Great Desert" on the map accompanying his report on "a region that extended from the Mississippi to the Rockies and from the Gulf of Mexico to the Parkland belt."⁵ In 1853 Congress authorized

Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and the Scientist in the Winning of the American West* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966).

- 3 See Don Thomson, "The Early Penetration of Canada's Western Interior," Ch. 14 of *Men and Meridians: The History of Surveying and Mapping in Canada*, 2 Volumes, (Ottawa: Queen's Printer 1967). For a detailed history of the contributions of the American topographical engineers, and reproductions of many of their maps, see Herman Friis, "The Role of the United States Topographical Engineers in Compiling a Cartographic Image of the Plains Region," in Blouet and Lawson, *Images of the Plains*, pp. 59-74.
- 4 B. H. Baltensperger, "Plains boomers and the creation of the Great American Desert myth," *Journal of Historical Geography*, 18:1 (1992) p. 61.
- 5 R. Douglas Francis, "The Ideal and the Real: The Image of the Canadian West in the Settlement Period," in *Rupert's Land: A Cultural Tapestry* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press for the Calgary Institute for the Humanities, 1988), p. 256.

the Secretary of War to survey each of four possible routes for a transcontinental railroad, and Isaac Stevens, newly-appointed Governor of Washington Territory, led the northernmost survey in 1853-1854.⁶ His party travelled through present-day North Dakota, Montana and Idaho, and along the way he signed various treaties with aboriginal groups (including the Blackfoot) and assessed the area's potential for agriculture and white settlement. His results were first published by the United States government in 1855 and his glowing account of the potential of the northern Great Plains became a government publication in 1860.⁷

1857 proved to be the key year for the Canadian government in shaping its visions of the land east of the Rockies. No less than two government-sponsored expeditions travelled to the western interior that year, marking the decisive shift away from the era of fur-company exploration and mapping and towards government exploration and mapping for the purpose of agricultural settlement. Henry Youle Hind's group was backed by the Canadian government and Captain John Palliser's was supported by the British government, and their expeditions generated a wealth of information the governments could use to produce and fill in their real and imagined maps of the west. As Doug Owsram concluded, their reports "reassembled the geographical picture of the North West into a clear and dramatic outline ... based on the potential of the region rather than its actual state." Their expeditions also created the two terms which became the standard descriptive categories for the land east of the Rockies: "the fertile belt," a strip extending eastward through central Alberta into Saskatchewan which slowly drifted south into Manitoba, and "Palliser's triangle," the northern edge of the great plains encompassing roughly the bottom third of southern Alberta and south western Saskatchewan. Both phrases "made sense

⁶ Friis, "The Role of the United States Topographical Engineers," pp. 64-65.

⁷ John Warkentin, *The Western Interior of Canada: A Record of Geographical Discovery*

only in terms of agriculture and settlement,” and Owsram argues that proving the existence of the fertile belt was particularly important if agricultural settlement was to be encouraged.⁸

Scholars like Suzanne Zeller, John Warkentin, and William Goetzmann have also highlighted the role played by the growing fascination with science in the nineteenth century production of images of the west. Zeller has emphasized the “utilitarian” nature of nineteenth century Canadian science, and its belief in the practical application of scientific knowledge.⁹ The work of Warkentin and Goetzmann has demonstrated how this belief in science as the way to understand and affect the world shaped scientific approaches to the west. Warkentin, for example, describes the nineteenth century development of geographical knowledge about the western interior of Canada as evolving “from simple description, to classification, and finally to interpretation and explanation of the geographical features of the region.”¹⁰ William Goetzmann traces the same pattern in the United States, noting that when the “professional explorer and scientist” began to head west in the 1840s, it marked “a new and significant refinement, not only in the scientific approach to the West, but in all aspects of the search for knowledge.” Geographical “discovery” shifted away from the “simple notation” of western landmarks and trails towards resource-assessment and the application of “engineer’s calculations” to the West.¹¹ As each nation embraced science as the way to know and therefore dominate its

1612-1917 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964) p. 150

⁸ Owsram, *Promise of Eden*, p. 67. Indeed, Owsram notes that the “fertile belt” made it easy for Canadians to transplant the image of the garden into the west, while Smith has pointed out that in the United States the myth of the garden “had to confront and overcome another myth of exactly opposed meaning, although of inferior strength – the myth of the Great American Desert.” Smith, *Virgin Land*, p. 202.

⁹ Suzanne Zeller, *Inventing Canada: Early Victorian Science and the Idea of a Transcontinental Nation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

¹⁰ Warkentin, *Western Interior of Canada*, p. 3

¹¹ Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire*, p. 232.

land, people, and resources, the immense spaces of the west could be seen as ready-made laboratories.

Taken together, these authors have demonstrated that in the United States and what would become Canada, eastern promoters, like the bureaucrats described in the following pages, produced new visions of the west which blended science and romance. The region's agricultural potential and its future as "the garden of the nation" could be "proven" by the new tools of science. Scholars like O'Wram and Nash have ably demonstrated that the romanticized process of re-visioning the North American West in nineteenth century was crucial to each government's dreams of national destiny, while Warkentin and Goetzmann have shown that Canada and the United States forged their dreams with similar sets of scientific tools.

The "missing link": the 49th parallel, post-structuralism, and the production of North American nations

Important as these historians' insights have been, their emphasis on expansionist rhetoric and the development of scientific knowledge about the west has not consistently included a critical appraisal of how such expansion enhanced the power of the central government, or the ways in which territorial expansion and nation-building helped produce the discursive tools of rule needed to make the nation itself "real." One exception is historian Richard White, who has described the American west as "the kindergarten of the American state," in which federal power and institutions "took on modern forms."¹² This description is equally true, if not more so, for the Canadian west. For both governments, every aspect of western exploration and land policy was rooted in the production of "the

¹² Richard White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A History of the American West* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), p. 58.

nation” as much as the production of “the west.” Canada and the United States were not self-evident “nations” because their borders and political institutions were very new on the world stage, and they could not claim a unique language or cultures.¹³ As a result, both became highly invested in the other tools nineteenth century governments could use to assert their nationhood.

Michel Foucault has argued that in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century modern governments came to rely on an unprecedented array of technologies of power to classify and manipulate their populations, using new technologies such as surveillance to generate state power.¹⁴ This idea of the gaze of the state as a key facet of a state’s power has been used by post-structuralist scholars to re-evaluate the nature of governmental power in the modern era. Foremost among these scholars is Benedict Anderson, who argued in *Imagined Communities* that this interlocking grid of knowledge and control was a desired end in itself because its thoroughness would allow each state “to always be able to say of anything that it was this, not that; it belonged here, not there.”¹⁵ Knowledge itself, particularly the kinds of knowledge (like survey and census data) which governments began to produce, became a key way for those governments to imagine and create the nations they wanted to be.

In a similar vein Thomas Richards has demonstrated that a fascination with collecting and organizing different kinds of knowledge to both enhance and demonstrate national power was by no means limited to North American governments; the collection of

¹³ See E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Canto Press, 1992, 1st edition 1990), for a thorough analysis of the role of language in the nineteenth century’s obsession with nationalism.

¹⁴ See in particular *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (London: A. Lane, 1977) and *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

¹⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (London: Verso, 1991) p. 184.

information, whether or not anything could be done with it, was also a preoccupation for European colonial nations in the nineteenth century.¹⁶ Like the “imperial archives” studied by Richards, records from the American and Canadian Departments of the Interior reveal efforts by their governments to gain control over western land through the production and collection of knowledge. In the process both governments deployed certain technologies of power, like surveying, mapmaking, and census-taking, that defined those governments as modern, scientific, and rational. The apparent coherence and unity of the knowledge being produced about North America’s western interior, as embodied in the annual reports of the Departments of the Interior, was both a fiction and function of empire. It was easier for officials to unify data than it was for them to actually “unify an empire made of territory,” and yet even the data had a tendency to refuse to hang together, challenged by competing information and competing perspectives.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the fantasy of complete and coherent knowledge aided the parallel fantasy that each state was slowly and surely consolidating its control of the west in general and the liminal borderlands in particular. As my discussion of the Alberta-Montana borderlands will show, surveys and mapmaking were not about producing “real” knowledge of the west as much as they were about producing the idea of the west as a function of the nation. In short, these two North American nations provide perhaps the strongest examples of Anderson’s “imagined communities,” and the west was at the heart of those communities. What went on there was of no small importance for the future of the nation.

As well as being the scientific laboratories of the nation’s imagined future, it is clear that the west also acted as a romantic stage for those imaginings. J. L. Allen has noted that “the vastnesses of the Plains and the Rockies” of the American west became a “natural

¹⁶ Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London & New York: Verso, 1993).

stage that offered boundless potential for the American imagination, already stimulated by the European Age of Romance.”¹⁸ Professor Thomas’ choice of language, in the quote that opened this chapter, was typical of the ways officials romanticized and eroticized those vast western spaces. He speaks of his “desire” to “catch a glimpse” of the mountains, and “a crown of snow” can cause a viewer to forget other “objects,” which can be read as both “things” and “goals.” As Paul Carter has argued in his study of the colonization of Australia, the “landscape that emerges from the explorer’s pen is not a physical object: it is an object of desire, a figure of speech outlining the writer’s exploratory impulse.”¹⁹ Professor Thomas was one of the “professional scientists” whom Goetzmann described as “taking the field” in the nineteenth century, but he is also a man in love with the beauty of the west, an explorer and conqueror who is in a position to express his love and claim that which is loved. Indeed, his desire causes him to forget – for a moment at least – the utilitarian reasons for his journey and observations. Western spaces were big enough to be both laboratory and stage for Canadian and American national destinies, but it was as romantic “stage” that the west achieved its highest value.

Constructing that stage required that its precise limits be determined. The process whereby the 49th parallel was surveyed in the early 1870s shows the tools of surveying being used to create the image of coherent national borders, and thus not just “the garden” but “their garden” took shape in their minds. Astronomical calculations and piles of rocks on the ground allowed federal officials to draw the line on their maps. Britain and the United States first agreed that the 49th parallel would be the line dividing their respective western territories in 1818 – a quiet, bloodless division of an enormous amount of

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 4

¹⁸ J. L. Allen, “Horizons of the sublime: the invention of the romantic west,” *Journal of Historical Geography*, 18:1 (1992) p. 27.

territory. Don Thomson notes that in its “length and durability the 49th parallel across the western interior of North America” is “unique as an international boundary” because it is based on an astronomical concept instead of “natural features” like rivers.²⁰ The line had to be surveyed because it could not be perceived through local experiential knowledge, yet more than half a century would pass before the two governments got around to actually surveying it. In December of 1870, one year after Britain and the United States finally agreed on the most westerly portion of the border in the Pacific Northwest, President Ulysses S. Grant proposed “a joint United States-British project to mark the boundary between the Lake of the Woods and the summit of the Rocky Mountains.” The 1871 Fenian raids into Manitoba and confusion over the “precise location of the border” in certain locations helped “to expedite survey preparations.” Congress agreed to spend \$50,000 to get the American survey underway, while the British and Canadian governments agreed to split the costs of surveying the Canadian side.²¹ The two halves of the North American Boundary Commission Survey, called the “International Boundary Commission” by the Canadian government and the “Northern Boundary Commission” by the Americans, were in operation from 1872 to 1874. The precise astronomical location of the 49th parallel was marked with cairns every few miles.

Although it had been proposed by the American government, the completion of the survey was particularly gratifying for the Canadian government. David Laird, Canada's Minister of the Interior, was pleased to announce in his annual report for 1874 that the work of the Boundary Commission had been completed and the line west of Manitoba was “indicated by cairns, generally about three miles apart.” Uncertainty about the exact

¹⁹ Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 81.

²⁰ Thomson, *Men and Meridians*, vol. 2, p. 176.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 164

location of the international boundary line had, in the past, led to “difficulties and disputes, which might have led to grave international complications,” so “in the interests of peace as well as on other grounds, the authoritative determination of this missing link in our international boundary line cannot but be a source of satisfaction to the Imperial and Dominion Governments.”²² The “missing link” in the border between Canada and the United States had been found and agreed-upon, finally confirming the separateness and distinctness of their two countries. Both governments could now look west and know, if nothing else, when they were looking at their own territory. Yet this accomplishment turned out to be less definitive than expected because the invisible border had limited symbolic value to people actually traversing it. Having drawn the line between their two western spaces, Ottawa and Washington had to make that line meaningful with other kinds of categories.

160 acres: cultural geography, homestead legislation and the production of western spaces

The theoretical framework established by post-structuralist scholars has been used by cultural geographers to argue that mapping and surveying were not just about more “accurate” measurements but about new ways of conceiving and valuing colonial and western spaces. The work of scholars like Paul Carter, Allison Blunt and Gillian Rose has urged historians to think about space, like nations, as “imagined.” Blunt and Rose note the explicit connection between Foucault’s post-structuralist theories and cultural geography by

²² Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for year ending 30 June 1874*, Sessional Papers 1875, Volume 7, #8, p. 5.

stating that “spaces are constituted through struggles over power/knowledge.”²³ As a result, the ways in which different spaces are constructed reflect contemporary cultural beliefs and social categories like race and gender. Authors like Owsam and Goetzmann certainly understand the new ways western spaces were being imagined in the nineteenth century, but assume the existence of categories like “the nation” rather than focussing on the productive capacity of such categories.

The best illustration of this is the land policies each government crafted to organize their western empires. Federal authorities produced their vision of western spaces through categories of race and gender: land policies were premised upon notions of yeoman farmers, patriarchal households, and agricultural civilization. Both governments had laid the foundations for their dreams of an agricultural future with two template Acts: the United States’ 1862 Homestead Act and Canada’s 1872 Dominion Lands Act. These Acts provide clear evidence of the ways both governments wanted to organize spatial, gender, and race relations in the west, and formed the basis for all subsequent land policy. By institutionalizing the 160-acre farm, it is clear that each government expected and wanted its future in the west to duplicate its past in the east.²⁴ For the Canadian government, entrenching the section grid with its 160-acre norm was also a clear rejection of the much older francophone land use pattern of narrow strips set next to each other along river banks. After all, the survey system of base lines and 36 square-mile sections which would be used across North America's plains and prairies as the foundation for agricultural settlement had been established by the United States in 1785 with the eastern States in

²³ Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, “Introduction” to *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies* (New York and London: the Guildford Press, 1994), p. 5.

²⁴ White, *It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own*, p. 142.

mind.²⁵ In Ontario or Ohio ample rainfall and timber meant that 160 acres was a good size for a “family farm.” In the northern great plains west of the 100th meridian (which runs through Manitoba and the Dakotas), 160 acres was too small to be a profitable ranch and too large to be a profitable non-irrigated farm, and yet the 160 norm remained.²⁶

In 1862 the Republican Congress in Washington under President Lincoln passed the Homestead Act, and it had as much to do with political considerations as it did with land distribution. Scholars have noted that the future of the west, how it would be settled and by whom, was an ideological and political football in the years preceding and during the Civil War.²⁷ The Homestead Act was meant to settle the debate by enshrining “the myth of the garden and the symbol of the hardy yeoman” in legislation, thus assuring the dominance of Northern institutions in the west.²⁸ The act allowed any male or female person twenty-one years of age or older, or any person who was the head of a family, who was a citizen or intended to become one, to claim 160 acres of public land.²⁹ More than any other piece of legislation, the Act shaped what the American west looked like and how western land was distributed in the late nineteenth century.

Likewise, Canada’s 1872 Dominion Lands Act, as Chester Martin argues in his classic study of the Act, was intended to “vindicate” the Macdonald government’s

²⁵ Everett Dick, *The Lure of the Land: A Social History of the Public Lands from the Articles of Confederation to the New Deal* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), p. 19

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 158

²⁷ See, for example, Chester Martin, “*Dominion Lands*” Policy, edited and with an introduction by Lewis H. Thomas, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973, orig. published 1938), pp. 15-16; Smith, *Virgin Land*, pp. 194-200; Emmon, “The Influence of Ideology on Changing Environmental Images,” pp. 127-131; Eric Foner, *Free soil, free labor, free men: the ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press 1970).

²⁸ Smith, *Virgin Land*, p. 194.

²⁹ United States, *An Act to Secure Homesteads to Actual Settlers on the Public Domain*, 37th Congress, 1862.

“assertive national policy.”³⁰ But where Martin claims that the policy’s “origin is to be found not in provincial politics but in the race for the Pacific with the United States,”³¹ he misses the fact that cultural disagreements were being settled in the Dominion Lands Act no less than in the United States Homestead Act. Sandwiched between sections on the survey system and grazing lands, the homestead provisions entrenched English land-use patterns and the 36 square-mile sectional grid instead of French land-use policy which was based on the seigneurial system’s long, thin, river lots. It was the Canadian government’s survey team which sparked the 1869-70 Red River Rebellion by attempting to impose the grid system on the community, and the 1872 legislation ensured that a square 160 acres would be the base unit for western Canadian land use.

These Acts were clearly about far more than distributing western lands because they spell out what each country did and did not want its future to look like. What Washington and Ottawa did want was for agriculture and independent land-ownership to be the foundation of western and national development, a common and explicit goal demonstrated in the easy terms offered for 160 acres of public land. However, Washington also wanted to ensure that its west was not Southern, and Ottawa wanted to ensure that its west was not French. Canadian scholars have noted that Prime Minister John A. Macdonald’s “national policy” was also designed to ensure that the Canadian west remained Canadian.³² Behind

³⁰ Martin, *Dominion Lands*, p. 127.

³¹ Ibid. p. 117. A strong challenge to this view of the CPR’s “technological nationalism” can be found in A. A. den Otter’s *The Philosophy of Railways: The Transcontinental Railway Idea in British North America* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

³² See, for example, Donald Creighton, “John A. Macdonald, Confederation, and the Canadian West,” in *Historical Essays on the Prairie Provinces*, ed. Donald Swainson (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970) p. 63, R. Douglas Francis, “The Ideal and the Real: The Image of the Canadian West in the Settlement Period,” *Rupert’s Land: A Cultural Tapestry* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press for the Calgary Institute for the Humanities, 1988), p. 257, and Martin, “*Dominion Lands*” Policy.

each Act were additional assumptions about the kind of person each government wanted to homestead the west.

Both Acts originally offered similar terms to any person who was the head of a family or 21 years of age. The United States stuck to this language, but there was still a definite assumption that the people heading west and staking their claims would be men and a particular kind of men. To some degree the yeoman farmer was conceived of as an independent economic actor, but in fact he represented a household of economic production. Unlike the southern planter, who relied on coerced labour, the yeoman farmer depended on the “consensual” labour of his wife and children. Thus when Commissioner of the General Land Office Joseph Wilson stated in his 1867 report that the purpose of the Homestead Act “is to hold out incentives for immigrants to identify themselves with the broad fields of the west, and secure their labour for such a period in the strength of manhood or maturity of life as will insure stability in settlements, development of arable resources, and steady increase of agricultural wealth,”³³ he envisioned a west that would “make men.” This connection between masculinity, land ownership, and economic development was hardly new, but it is interesting that he chose the word “immigrants” to denote what he perceived as the target group of the legislation. The men being made may have been foreign-born or Euro-American men migrating westward, but in either case it would not be aboriginal men who would settle and develop America’s western lands.

³³ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of the Commissioner of the General Land Office, Joseph Wilson for 1867, House Executive Document, #1, 39th Congress, 2nd Session, p. 378. The fact that small numbers of women were taking advantage of the Homestead Act was never mentioned in the reports I examined. Nancy Taniguchi suggests in her review of the selected decisions of the General Land Office from 1881-1920 that Montana turned out to be one of the most favourable locations for women homesteaders, in that women in Montana won more cases than they lost (17 wins and 10 losses between 1881 and 1900) when they brought a complaint to the GLO. Taniguchi, “Lands, Laws, and Women: Decisions of the General Land Office, 1881-1920, a Preliminary Report,”

Canada's Dominion Lands Act did not limit women's access to homesteading privileges until 1876, and after that date the most significant difference between the Canadian and American legislation was that single women were barred from homesteading by the Dominion Lands Act. The 1872 Act simply stated "[a]ny person who is the head of a family, or has attained the age of twenty-one years, shall be entitled to be entered for one quarter section or a less quantity of unappropriated Dominion lands, for a purpose of securing a homestead right in respect thereof."³⁴ In 1873 the minimum age was dropped to 18. In his report for 1875, Surveyor-General J. S. Dennis stated that he wanted "[t]o render females, not being heads of families, ineligible to enter for homesteads" under the Dominion Lands Act.³⁵ He did not offer any further explanation for his recommendation, but he got his wish: the Act was amended the following year to specify "[a]ny person, male or female, who is the sole head of a family, or any male, who has attained the age of eighteen years, shall be entitled to be entered for one quarter-section, or a less quantity, of unappropriated Dominion lands, for the purpose of securing a homestead right in respect thereof."³⁶ This revision entrenched the government's belief that men and women should have different relationships to western land, unless a woman was the head of a family and could therefore come close to replicating the household structure deemed necessary for settlement. Thus where the American legislation focused on the class dimension of land ownership by encouraging independent yeoman farmers and not affluent planters, the

Great Plains Quarterly, Volume 13, Fall 1993, pp. 223-36.

³⁴ Canada, *Dominion Lands Act 1872*, Section 33.

³⁵ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for year ending 30 June 1875*, Sessional Papers 1876, Volume 7, #9, p. 6.

³⁶ Canada, *An Act to amend the Dominion Lands Act*, Section 4, 1876. It is telling that the same gender division did not apply to timber culture – the 1876 revisions explicitly stated that any 18-year old male or female could apply for up to one quarter section of land "as a claim for forest tree planting." The other anomaly between the homesteading and timber culture provisions was that the latter required an applicant to be a British citizen, which the former did not.

Canadian legislation emphasized the patriarchal structure of land ownership through gender exclusion. Property ownership had a long history in British law as a fundamentally masculine trait and right with fundamental links to citizenship and nation-building, and the ownership of large parcels of land which required hard physical labour to develop was a particularly masculine kind of property ownership. The Homestead Act and Dominion Lands Act were formally and informally designed to ensure that western spaces were organized and distributed to support these powerful cultural norms.

“Buffalo country”: post-colonial scholarship and mapping as the production of meaning

Where post-structuralists have emphasized the discursive production of tools of rule by modern nation-states, and cultural geographers have pushed us to see the ideological production of space as reflective of social categories like race and gender, post-colonial scholars have insisted that territorial expansion was secured with the tools of colonial conquest. Here again much of the existing historiography on the nineteenth century West has tended to interpret westward expansion as an integral part of unique national narratives, without always recognizing that in doing so Canadian and American governments used the same discursive strategies being employed by European empires around the globe. Even much “New Western” historical scholarship in the United States, which has insisted on re-thinking nineteenth century western expansion as conquest and has included race and gender as central to that process, has done so without acknowledging the larger international framework of European-style colonization.³⁷ In Canada, scholars like Sarah Carter and Adele Perry have been more willing to analyze the colonial and imperial aspects

³⁷ See, for example, Patricia Limerick’s *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1987).

of nineteenth century Canadian expansion and colonization.³⁸ The “imperialist” history of the North American West, that is, did not end when such European imperial powers as France, Spain, or England retreated from the continent. With this perspective the Canadian and American wests can be seen as white settler colonies akin to Australia and South Africa.

International scholars of colonialism have argued that mapping and surveying and scientific information-gathering were not just tools of North American exploration and nation-building, but also of international empire building, and that the act and process of mapping are more important than the maps which are produced. Anne McClintock, for example, notes that “the knowledge constituted by the map both preceded and legitimized the conquest of territory.” The map is also “a technology of possession, promising that those with the capacity to make such perfect representations must also have the right of territorial control.”³⁹ Scholars like McClintock borrow from Benedict Anderson’s insights to analyze maps and mapmaking, and see them as working to produce not just “the nation” but also “the empire.”

Maps produced by colonial governments thus contrast sharply with maps produced by aboriginal groups for their own use, because the former are meant to be read as assertions of national and imperial ownership.⁴⁰ Three maps from the mid-1870s provide vivid evidence of the ways in which Washington’s and Ottawa’s imperialist agendas were

³⁸ Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West* (Toronto and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997); Adele Perry, *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

³⁹ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 27-28.

⁴⁰ See Theodore Binnema’s article, “How Does a Map Mean? Old Swan’s Map of 1801 and the Blackfoot World,” in *From Rupert’s Land to Canada*, eds. Theodore Binnema, Gerhard J. Ens, and R. C. Macleod (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press,

used to re-imagine their wests, and show how multiple categories of meaning overlapped on the same terrain: the 1876 map of the Territory of Montana, the 1876 “Map of the Country to be Traversed by the Canadian Pacific Railway, To Accompany Progress Report on the Exploratory Surveys,” and the 1878 “Map of Part of the North West Territory,” showing the first 7 numbered treaties (see Figures 1-3).⁴¹ The form and content of these maps show a crowded and complicated west, where a newly-dominant national narrative has not yet erased older patterns.

For example, each of the three maps shows multiple economic agendas, from the much older system of trading posts to the coal deposits, land surveys and railroad lines of a capitalist economy. The 1876 map of Montana shows “Baker’s Post” on the Milk River, one of many posts established throughout the borderlands in the 1860s and 70s by Fort Benton trader I. G. Baker, and an “Old Trading Post” further south on the Judith River. The 1876 and 1878 Canadian maps show a network of faint dotted lines labelled “Traders Roads,” which run from east to west throughout the region, and at least three cross the border between southern Alberta and Saskatchewan and northern Montana. Yet even as these maps signal the presence of older regional economies, they also erase much of the economic history of the west. Here the Canadian maps are most telling. In spite of nearly

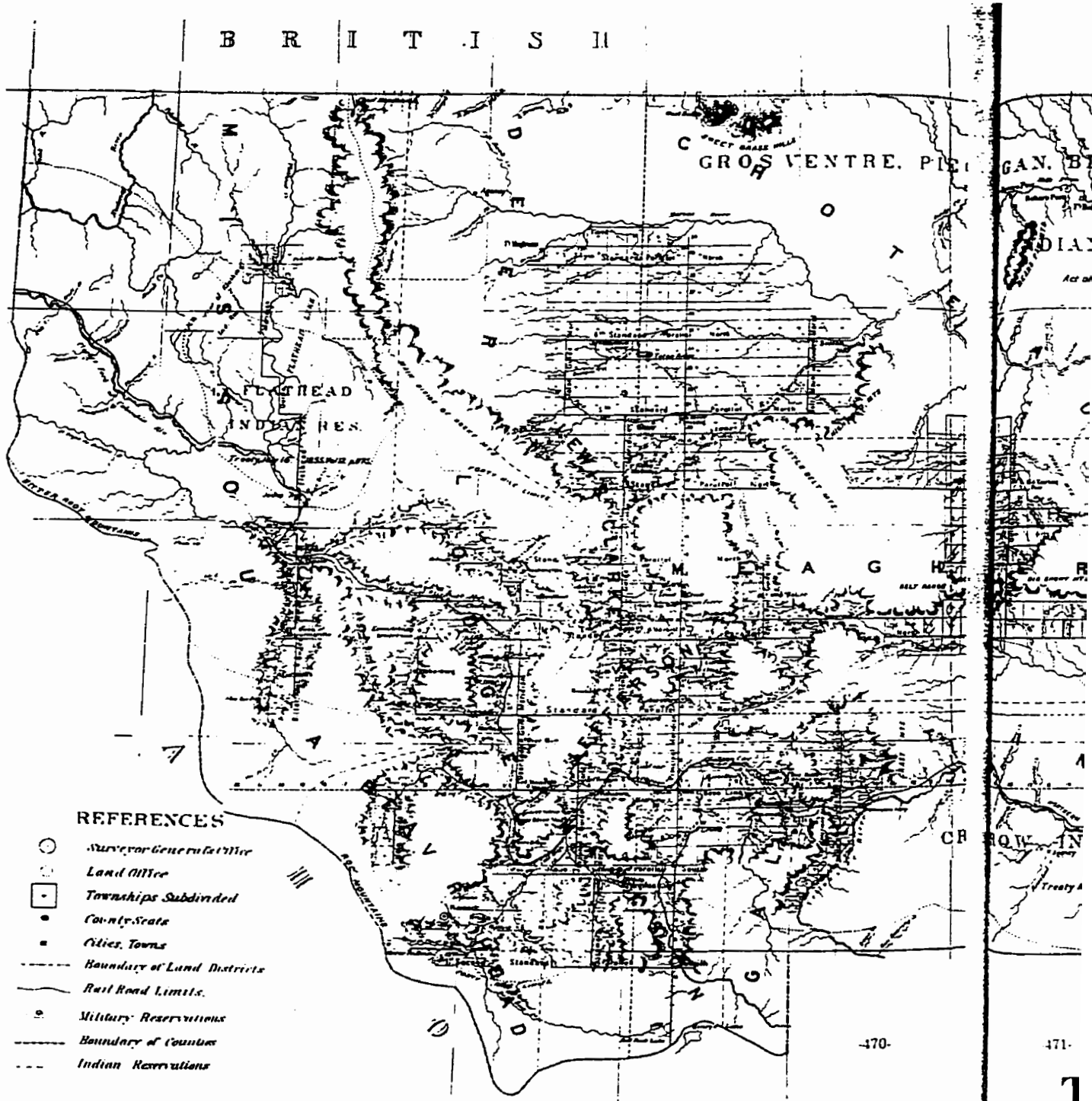
2001), pp. 201-224, for a fascinating analysis of a map produced and used by the Siksika in the early nineteenth century.

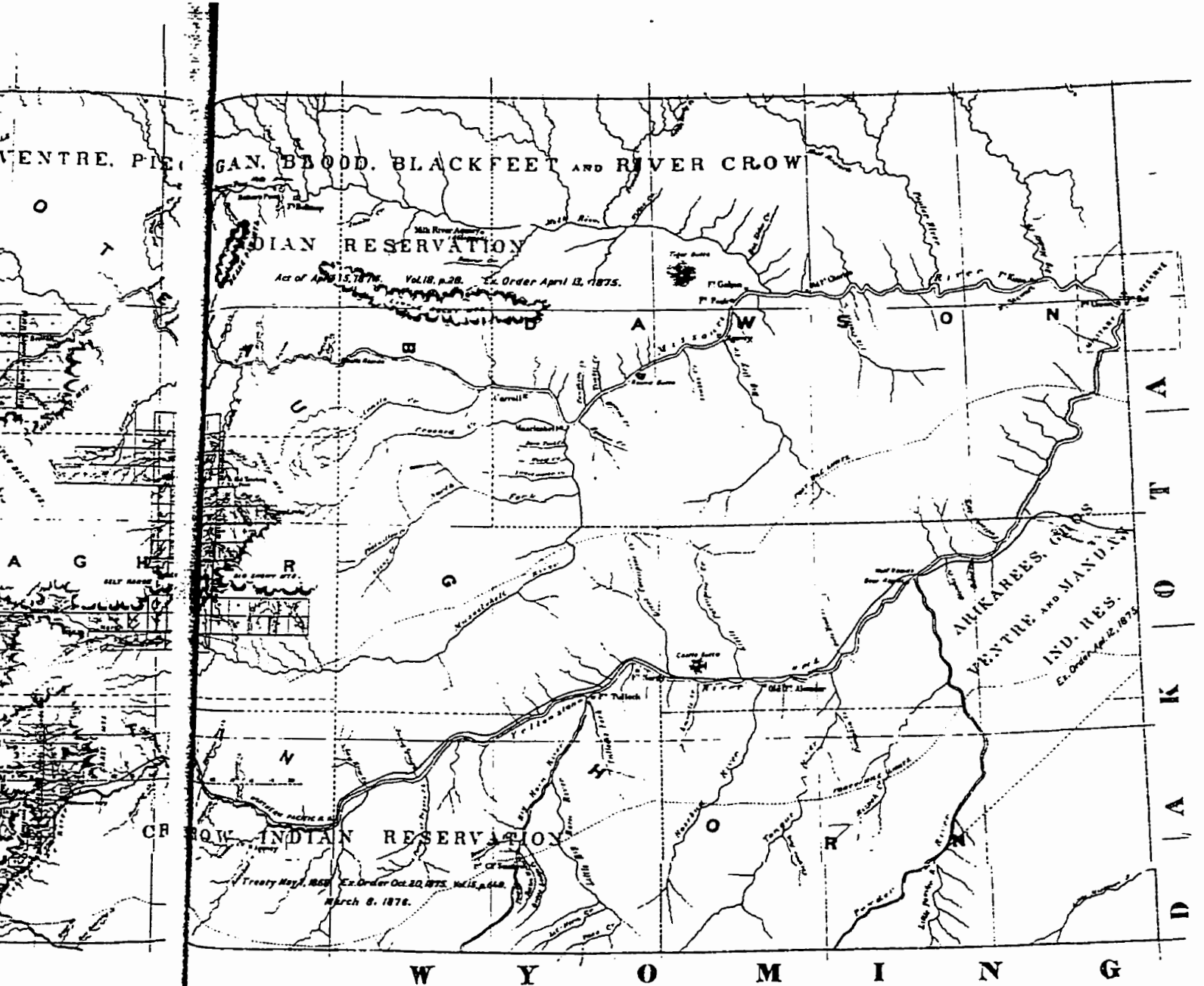
⁴¹ United States, Department of the Interior, General Land Office, “Territory of Montana,” 1876, reproduced in *Grit, Guts and Gusto: A History of Hill County*, ed. Edna Gunderson, (Havre, Montana: Hill County Bicentennial Commission, 1976) pp. 470-71.

Canada, Department of the Interior, “Map of the Country to be Traversed by the Canadian Pacific Railway, To Accompany Progress Report on the Exploratory Surveys,” 1876.

Canada, Department of the Interior, Dominion Lands Office, “Map of Part of the North West Territory, Including the Province of Manitoba, Exhibiting the several Tracts of Country Ceded by the Indian Treaties 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, To accompany Report of Hon. D. Mills, Minister of the Interior, 31st December, 1877,” 1878.

Figure 1



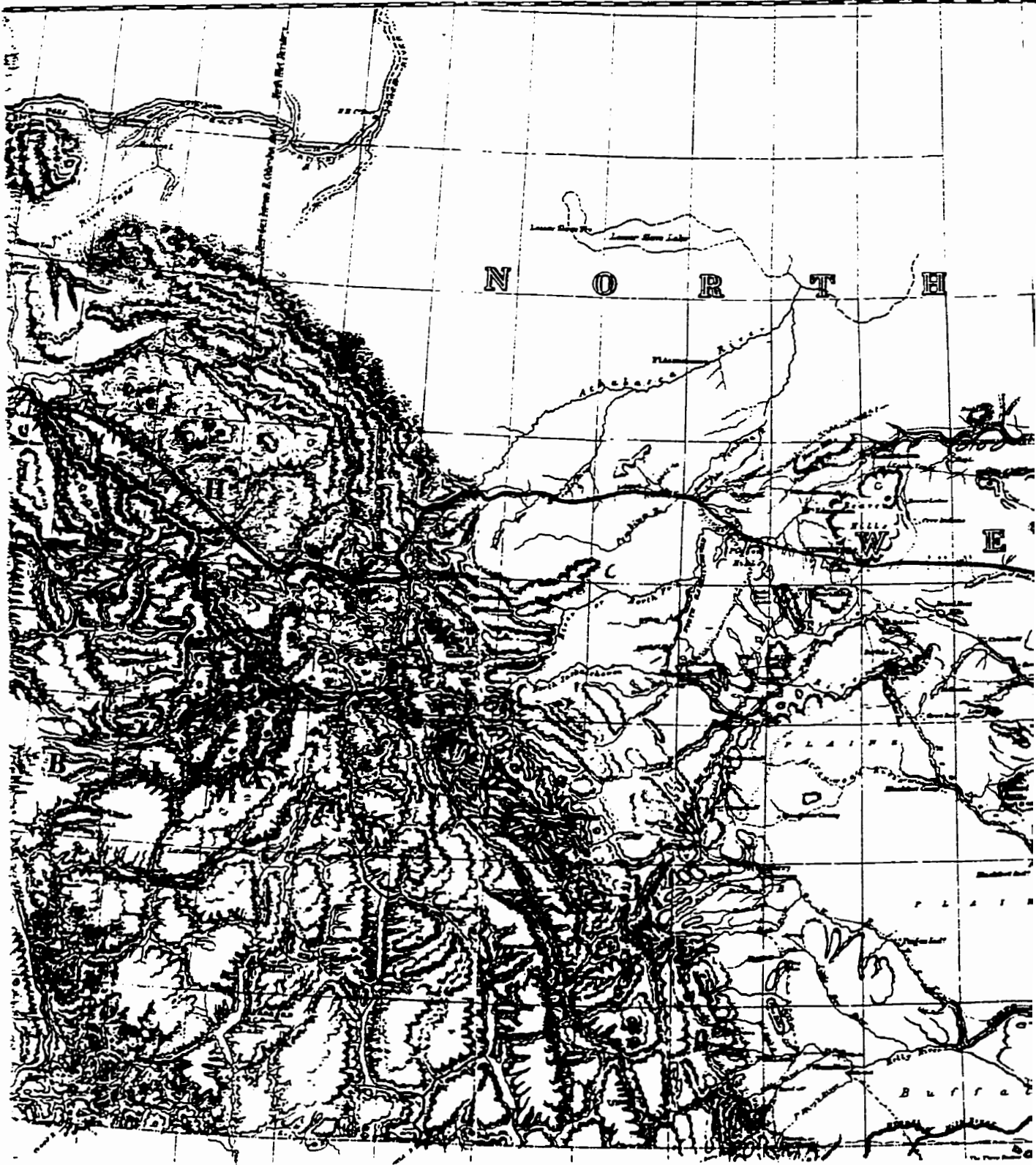


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Compiled from the official Records of the General Land Office and other sources by
C. ROSSER, Principal Draftsman &c.

Figure 2

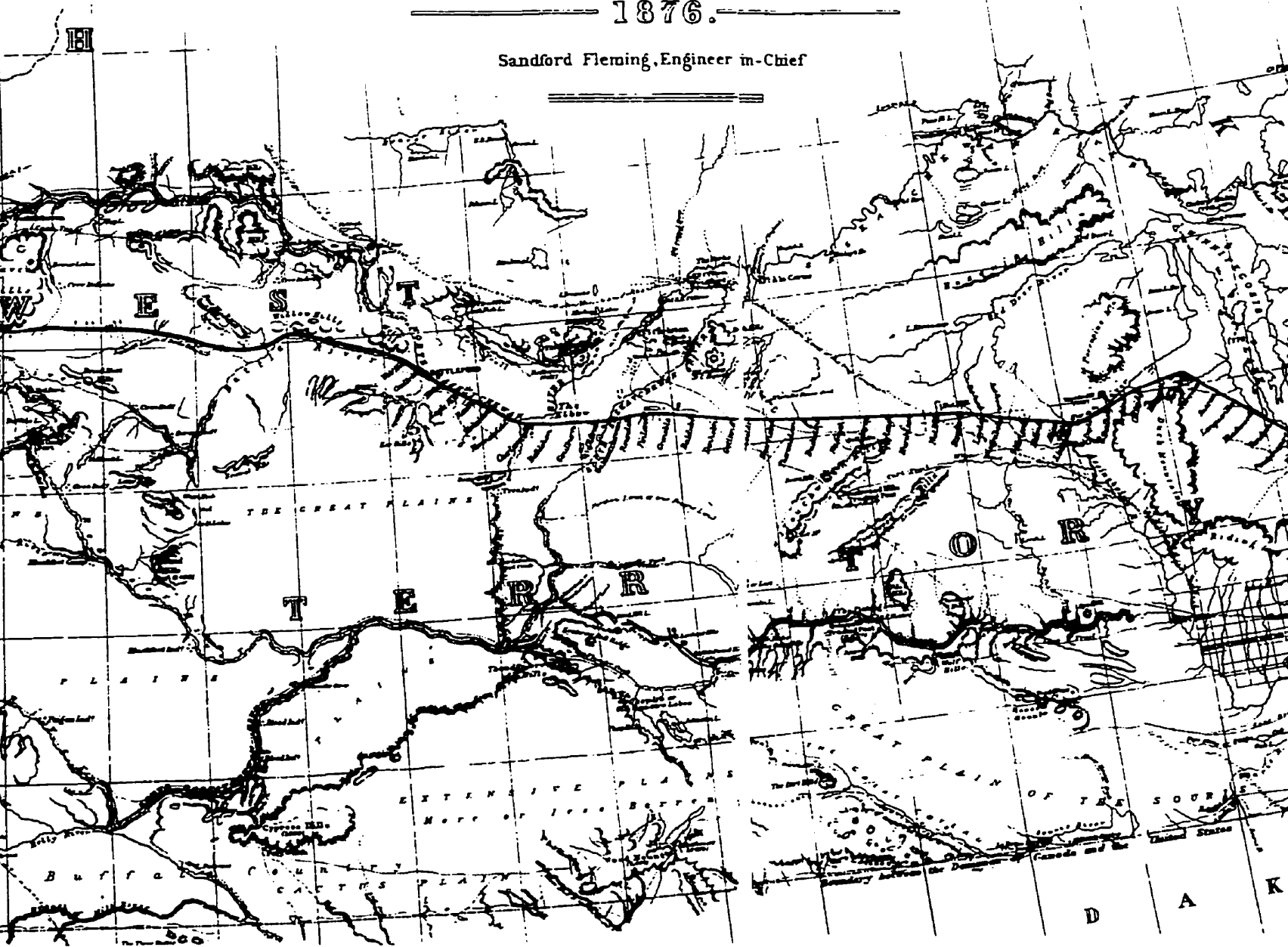


MAP
OF THE COUNTRY TO BE TRAVERSED BY THE
CANADIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY

TO ACCOMPANY PROGRESS REPORT ON THE EXPLORATORY SURVEYS

1876.

Sandford Fleming, Engineer in-Chief





MAP

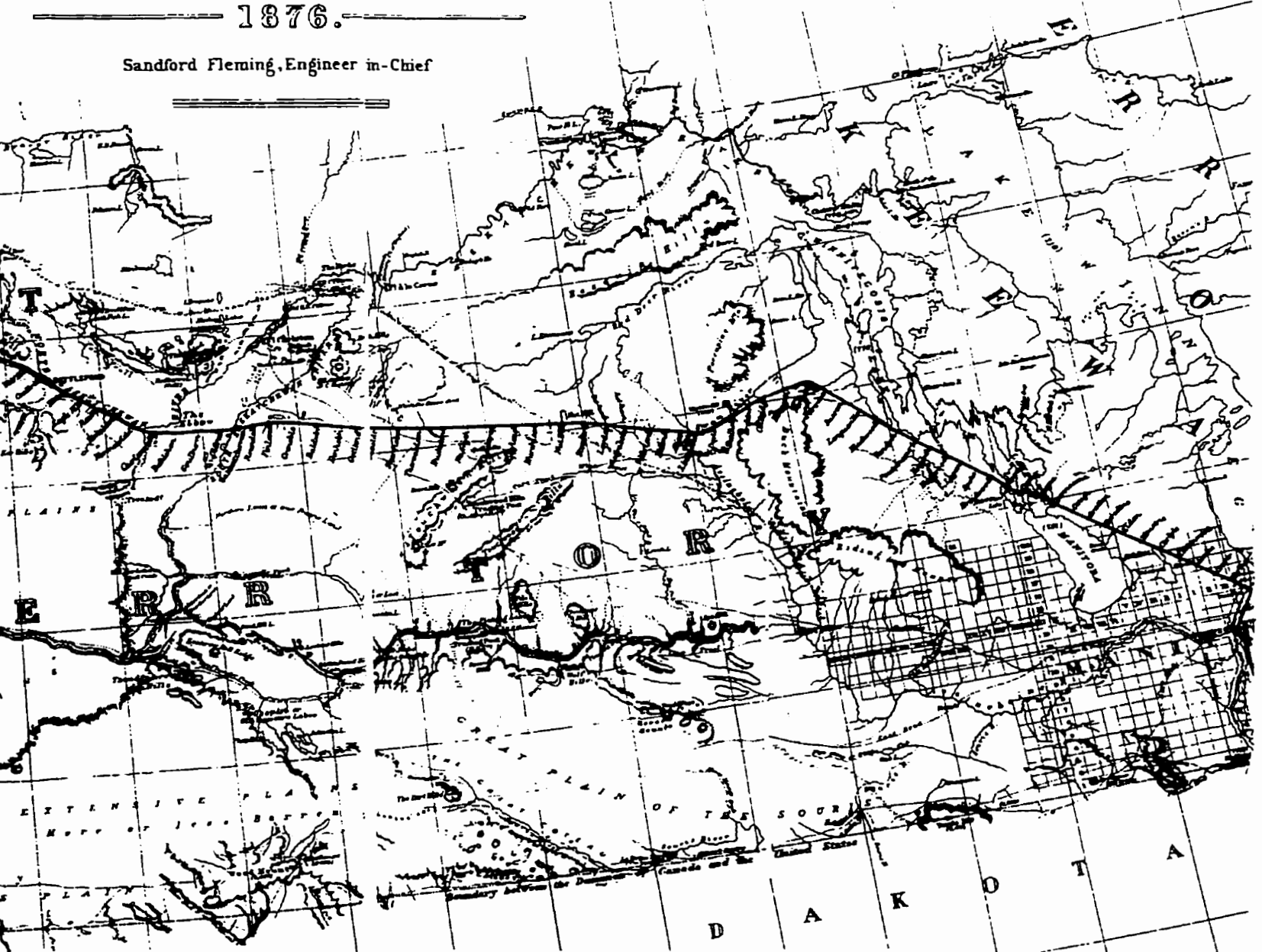
OF THE COUNTRY TO BE TRAVERSED BY THE

INDIAN PACIFIC RAILWAY

COMPANY PROGRESS REPORT ON THE EXPLORATORY SURVEYS

1876.

Sandford Fleming, Engineer in-Chief



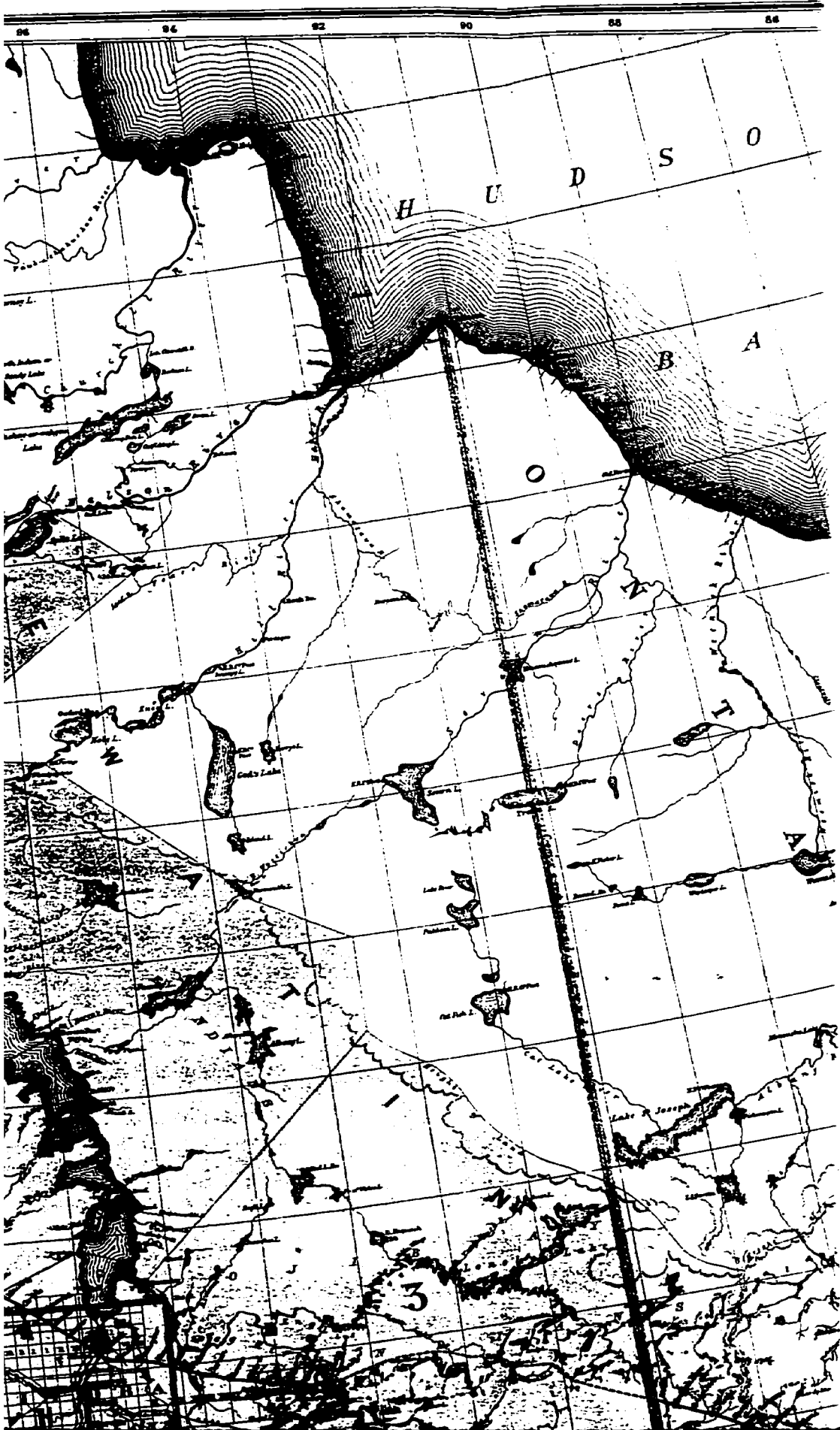
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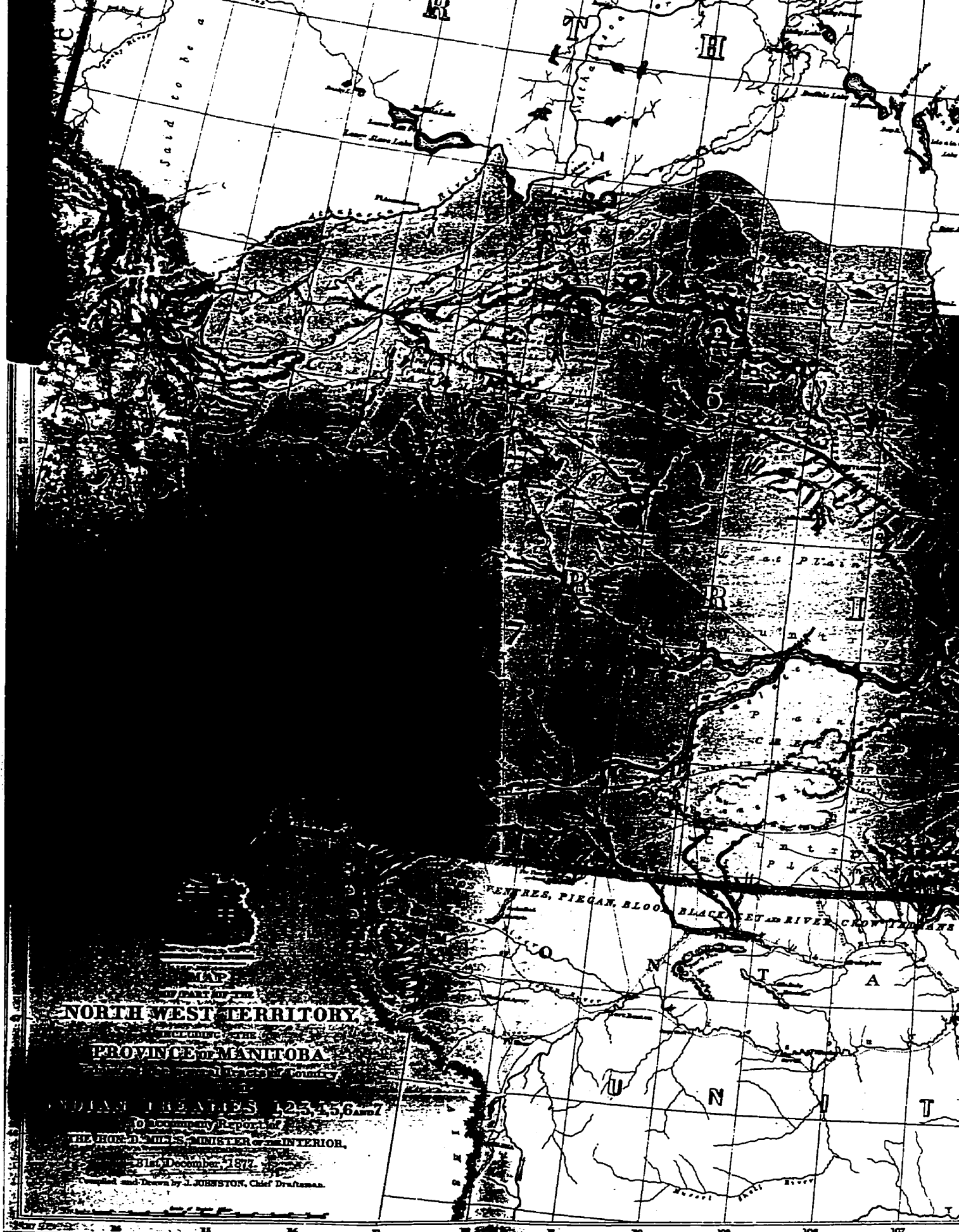
Oversize maps and charts are microfilmed in sections in the following manner:

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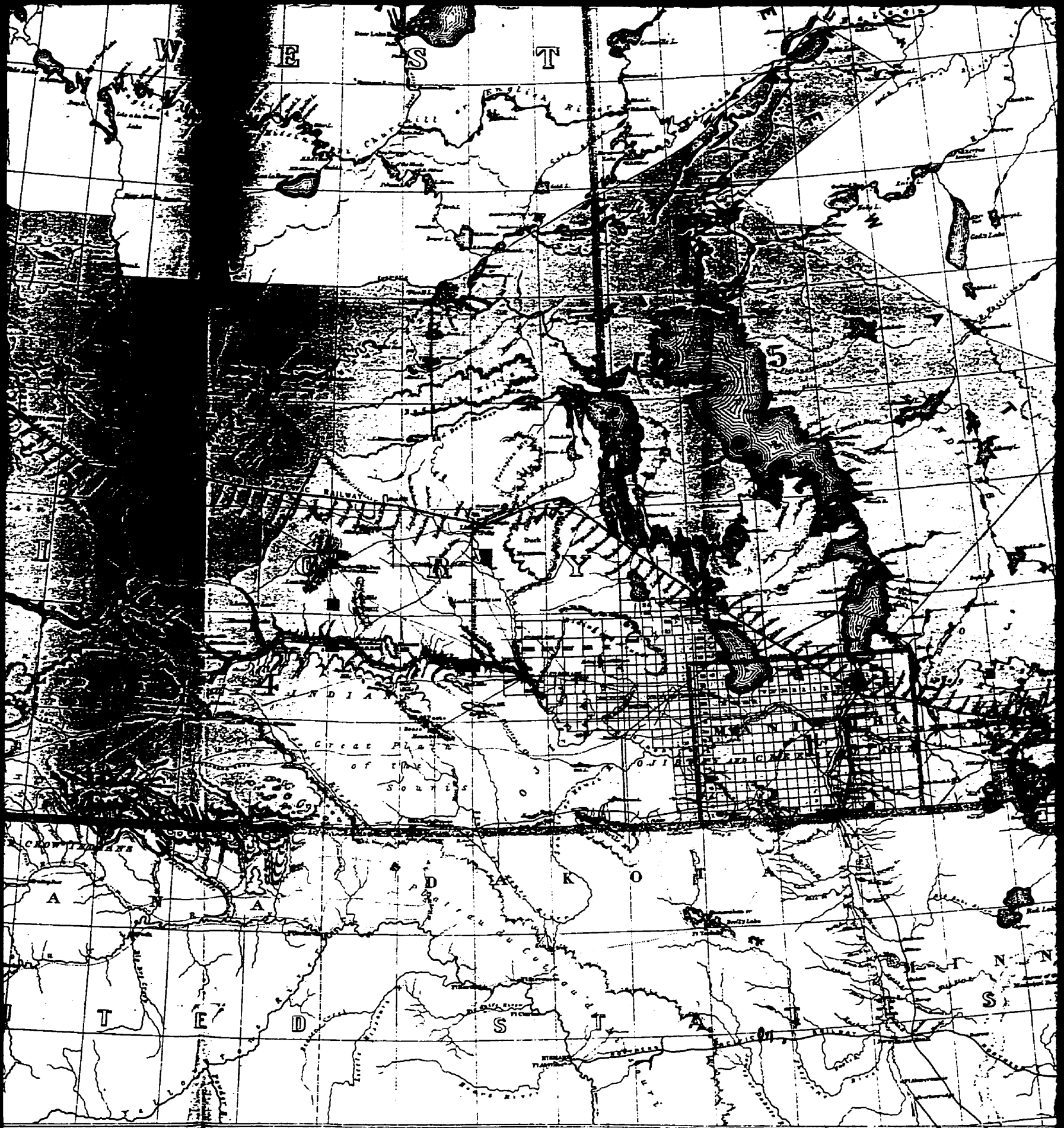
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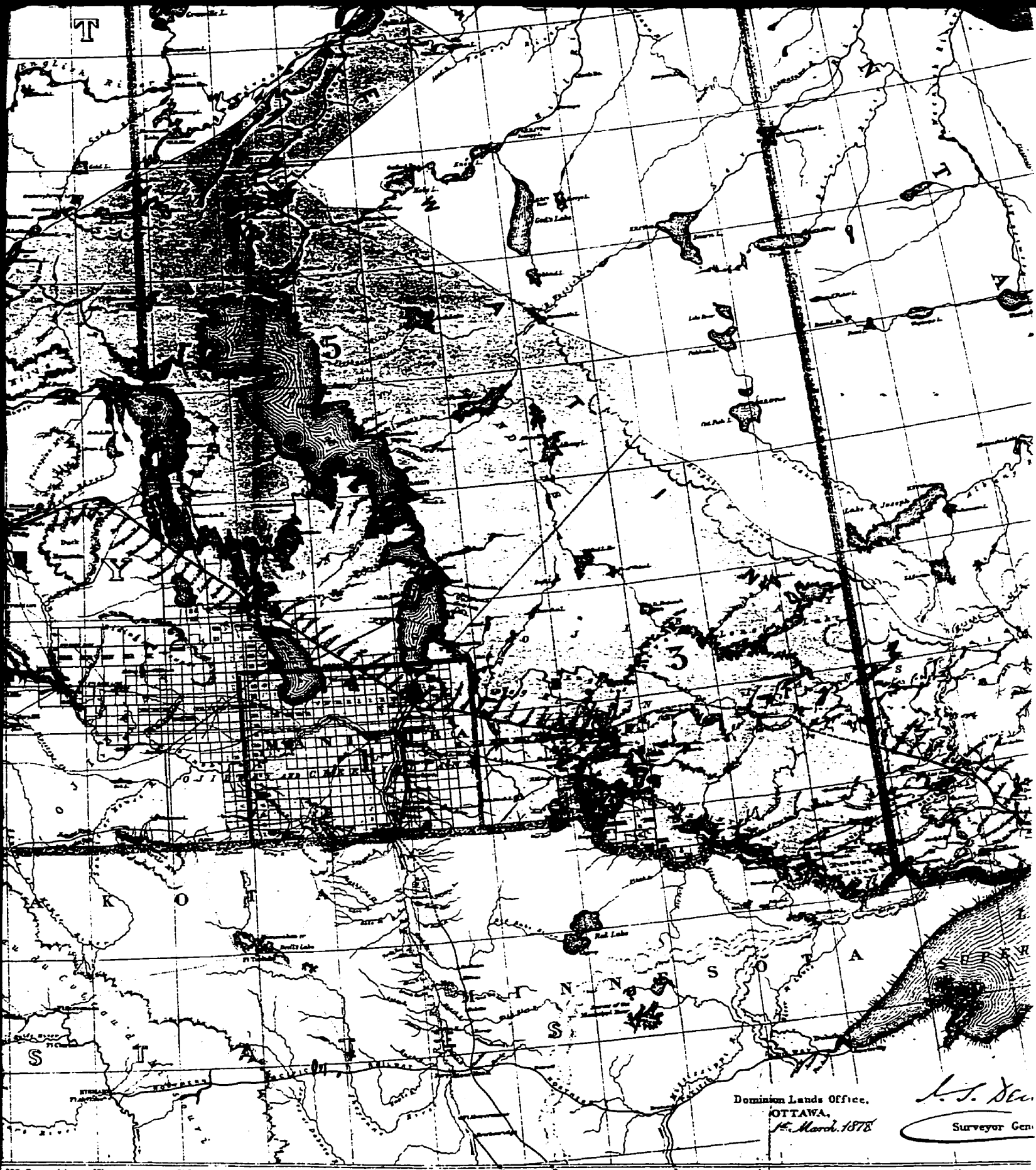


MAP
 BY PART OF THE
NORTH WEST TERRITORY
 AND
PROVINCE OF MANITOBA
 SHOWING THE
 BOUNDARIES OF THE
 TERRITORIES AND PROVINCES
 AND THE
INDIAN TREATIES 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 AND 7
 AS REPORTED BY
 THE HON. D. MILLS, MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR,
 31st December 1877.
 Compiled and Drawn by J. JOHNSTON, Chief Draftsman.



PRELIMINARY EDITION.

107° Longitude from the 101°



Dominion Lands Office,
OTTAWA,
1st March 1878

A. J. Dea
Surveyor Genl

101. Greenwich. 101 100 99 98 97 96 95 94 93 92 91
NOTE - Refer to the map of the
ION.

200 years of European-First Nations trade throughout the watershed of Hudson's Bay, the detailed cartographic knowledge of northern latitudes is largely absent from the maps of the 1870s. The northern reaches of Canada's "west" fade away from view, while the new economic developments south of the 54th parallel are foregrounded.

It is the lines of the new economy which dominate these maps and invite viewers to see them as maps of the future. The precise grids of local surveys appear, implying settlement and political development. On the Canadian maps the surveyed areas appear only in Manitoba although the basic grid of latitude and longitude is evident, while the Montana map shows several patches of surveyed land. A closer look at the rich topographical details of the Montana map shows the Sweet Grass Hills and other hills and mountain ranges drawn in relief, with the survey grids nestled in the valleys below them, creating the illusion that the surveyed land is flat and arable. One portion of surveyed land begins immediately south of the Marias River, which then marked the southern edge of the Blackfoot reserve, and "Coal" is recorded at the northern edge of this surveyed area. The projected route of the Northern Pacific Railroad and its "Forty Mile Limits" have been drawn as if the line was already completed, when it had not even been built to Montana's eastern border yet. Similarly, the route of the Canadian Pacific Railway is firmly etched on the 1876 and 1878 maps, although the northern route would be abandoned a few years later in favour of a more southerly line, and the 1878 map also chooses to note only the portions of the Northern Pacific Railway that have been completed. By displaying these survey grids and the rail lines of the future as if they were fact, or, in the case of the 1878 Canadian map, as if the CPR was done and the Northern Pacific was not, viewers of the map are asked to look to the prosperous agricultural future of the region and of the nation.

The two Canadian maps also demonstrate Paul Carter's assertion about the maps of colonial Australia as being "littered" with highly textured features and descriptive comments

“which, far from being authoritative, recorded nothing more than the traveller’s distant, one-sided impression as he reined in his horse and focused his glasses on the haze.”⁴² The 1876 map, for example, shows a faint smudgy line, labelled “Northern Limit of true Prairie Land,” running in an arc eastward from the mountains, through what would become central Alberta and Saskatchewan, and dropping to the border west of Manitoba. South of that line, most of what would become southern Alberta is labelled “Plains” (in contrast to the “Great Plains” and “Extensive Plains More or less Barren” which appear slightly to the east), and finally, just north of the border, “Buffalo Country” and “Cactus Plain” appear as descriptions of the kind of land to be found. On the 1878 map the descriptions of “Plains,” “Buffalo country” and “Cactus Plain” are still in place, and “Said to be a Region of great Fertility” has been added to the relatively empty area of Peace River Country. This latter description reinforces the new economic narrative of the 1878 map; it appears above and to the left of the planned route of the CPR, implying that one reason for running the line to the north is to extract the products of that fertility for eastern markets. By appearing on maps signed by the Surveyor-General himself, these descriptive, subjective, and romantic impressions are discursively granted the weight of scientific authority and suggest that only a small part of Canada’s west is too dry or barren to be cultivated. At the same time, the “litter” on these maps reminded nineteenth century viewers that there was still much to be learned about this romantic space, presenting just enough detail to whet the viewer’s appetite. Maps of western North America were dotted with fragments of information, signalling the exotic unknown which was fuelling the imperial vision. For example, the 1876 map of the North-West Territories shows individual points labelled “Blackfoot Camp” and “Slaughter Camp,” while “Blackfoot Ind,” “Peigan Ind” and “Blood Ind” also appear as individual points with what looks like an exclamation mark after each one.

⁴² Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, p. 71.

Aboriginal people are very present in all three maps, but each one displays that presence differently. The 1876 map of the Territory of Montana shows four Indian reservations and the dates of the treaties or executive orders which set their barely-visible boundaries. The long thin strip along the top of the Territory is described as the “Gros Ventre, Piegan, Blood, Blackfeet and River Crow Reservation,” a label which is duplicated on the 1878 Canadian map. The 1876 Canadian map does not indicate any reserve boundaries anywhere in the west, and the presence of aboriginal people is noted with single points. The 1878 Canadian map used a different colour to indicate the territory covered by each Treaty, and the names of signatory aboriginal groups are listed below each Treaty’s number. Although the “Blackfoot Camp” is still in evidence, the individual points marking “Blackfoot Ind” and so on are gone. The maps make it clear that aboriginal people are being supervised: the Montana map shows one “Agency” near the north-west corner of the Territory on the Marias River, and the “Milk River Agency (Abandoned).” The 1878 Canadian map even shows the old location of the “Blackfoot Agency” south of the Teton River in northern Montana, instead of its newer location closer to the border on the Marias River. The supervisory authority of these agencies is reinforced by the regulatory authority of the military forts shown throughout in southern Alberta and northern Montana. The 1878 Canadian map goes so far as to indicate the “Route of Mounted Police Force 1874” because that map’s narrative was focused on the treaties, but the line did not appear on the 1876 map, which was focused on the narrative of the CPR.

With the use of firm lines and faint ones, large text and small, these maps were meant to be bold statements about the west’s place in the national political economy. They show a clear blend of science and romance, from the scientific projections of township surveys and railroad routes, to the romance of uncharted land and aboriginal groups with exclamation marks after their names. There is no doubt that the firm lines of science are to

be seen as triumphant, but there is just enough of the exotic left to keep the west an exciting object of study.

“No trace of survey remains”: the borderlands confound national maps

These federally-produced maps and the information used to construct them create the impression that by the mid-1870s the 49th parallel was a political reality, although it is striking to note that where the Montana map shows nothing north of the border and describes the northern land as “British,” the two Canadian maps include a significant amount of topographical and political information about the land south of the border. The 1876 map describes the 49th as the “Boundary between the Dominion of Canada and the United States,” and the 1878 map includes everything down to the 46th parallel, to show the line of the Northern Pacific Railway and the northern half of Minnesota, Dakota Territory and Montana Territory.

A closer look at these maps also shows complex local conditions which would challenge dominant federal visions and undercut the meaningfulness of the 49th parallel as a political border. “Buffalo country” and “cactus plain” do not present much incentive to agricultural settlement, and railroads that are firmly drawn but not yet constructed are unable to reorient a local economy towards a national one. Federal officials did not waver from their faith in the power of knowledge, however, and with the borderline firmly drawn on their maps could focus on producing information about “their side.”

There was a handful of obstacles which made it more difficult to generate accurate information about the Montana-Alberta borderlands: their distance from the national capitols, the mountains on their western edge which made surveying difficult, and the presence of mobile Blackfoot communities. These difficulties were regularly used by surveyors and officials alike to explain and justify the lack of information or the inability to collect better information. There can be no doubt that these difficulties were more

immediate and overwhelming for American officials because white settlers headed to the American west more quickly than the surveyors and in greater numbers than in Canada. For example, in 1867 Joseph Wilson, Commissioner of the United States General Land Office, wrote that because Montana Territory was “remote from the seat of the surveyor general's office” and because of “the unsettled condition of the plains, growing out of Indian incursions, it has been deemed proper to defer surveys in that Territory until the ensuing season.”⁴³ When the surveys did begin in Montana, they moved quickly: by 1870 Wilson was able to report that about 1.5 million of the Territory's 92 million acres had been surveyed. He added that the territory was larger than the states of New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio combined, and its “most striking feature” was the Rocky Mountains.⁴⁴

The mountainous topography of western Montana gave the surveyors several problems in the early 1870s. In 1871 for example, Willis Drummond, Wilson's successor as Commissioner of the General Land Office, wrote that “owing to the abrupt and mountainous character” of western Montana the surveys were “to a considerable extent, disconnected, and have been restricted mainly to those detached bodies of lands available for actual settlement..” He assured his readers, however, that “great care” had been taken “to make the projection as regular as practicable.”⁴⁵ The goal of the survey was to impose

⁴³ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of the Commissioner of the General Land Office, Joseph Wilson for 1867, House of Representatives Executive Document #1, 39th Congress, 2nd Session, p. 369.

⁴⁴ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of the Commissioner of the General Land Office, Joseph Wilson, House Executive Documents, #1, Part 4, 41st Congress, 3rd session, 31 October 1870, p. 129.

⁴⁵ United States. Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of the Commissioner of the General Land Office for 1871, House of Representatives Executive Documents #1, 42nd Congress, 2nd session, p. 42. This

the fixed and connected grid of the survey on disconnected and unstable landscapes, on the assumption that the invisible grid itself would act to settle the land.

Surveyor-General for Montana John Blaine admitted in his 1872 report that the surveys were “very irregular” because of the mountains, but were “all properly connected by standard and meridian lines, and projected according to the regular system of public land surveys.”⁴⁶ The real and irregular terrain could be imaginatively forced to conform to the regularity and purity of the geographical grid, but it was not easy or cheap. The following year, Professor Ferdinand V. Hayden, Geologist to the United States Department of the Interior, wrote that he wanted to defer any further surveys around the headwaters of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers, because “the expenses of transportation, subsistence, and labor are so great, that it seems desirable to delay the further prosecution of the work in the Northwest until railroad communication shall be established. The Indians, also, are in a state of hostility over the greater portion of the country which remains to be explored.” He recommended moving the Survey's focus further south for the next season, and indeed the 1873 season was spent in Colorado.⁴⁷

This hiatus did not last long. The growing influx of white settlers meant that by the late 1870s surveyors were again doing their best to impose regularity on Montana's troublesome topography. In his report for 1883, Surveyor-General of Montana John S.

perception that the surveyed sections were “disconnected” from the rest of the territory is understandable when one considers the 1876 map of the Territory of Montana, discussed above, where the surveyed sections begin and end abruptly and are surrounded by land which, if not quite blank, does not yet have the dense discipline of the grid imposed on it.

⁴⁶ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of the Surveyor-General of Montana, John E. Blaine for 1872, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 42nd Congress, 3rd session, p. 143.

⁴⁷ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Letter from B. R. Cowen, Acting Secretary of the Interior to James Blaine, Speaker of the House of Representatives, containing a letter from Prof. F. V. Hayden, US Geologist, House Executive Documents #166, 42nd Congress, 3rd Session, 27

Harris pleaded for more money to be spent surveying the Territory. The “agricultural valleys of the eastern portion” were being settled quickly, “and if surveys could only be extended to keep pace with the demand the immigration would be still larger.” If more money was spent on surveying, “the principal lines might be extended over the whole Territory and the greater portion of the township lines run,” allowing more settlers “to secure subdivisional surveys by the special deposit system.” A larger appropriation would also allow the deputy surveyors to be paid more, an urgent necessity because “the unsurveyed portion of Montana is so rough and broken a character that it cannot be surveyed at the present rates.”⁴⁸ In short, it took a great deal of hard work to project the invisible lines of the survey across Montana’s uneven landscape.

Canadian officials had fewer problems keeping the surveys ahead of settlement because the much slower pace of western settlement north of the 49th parallel gave less cause for urgency, and the violence which surveying had sparked in 1869 at Red River encouraged caution.⁴⁹ In spite of the Canadian government’s desire to nationalize western spaces as quickly as possible, Macdonald’s National Policy did not include large expenditures for surveying. When Canadian officials did look farther west than Manitoba, it was with the same kind of fractured vision American officials had. Surveyor-General Lindsay Russell noted in 1878 that the surveys of Manitoba and Keewatin were proceeding satisfactorily, but “various settlements” were “springing up” in more remote parts of the North-West, requiring “detached surveys of townships and of river frontage farm lots.”⁵⁰

January 1873.

⁴⁸ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Surveyor-General of Montana John S. Harris, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 48th Congress 1st session, 21 July 1883, p. 247.

⁴⁹ A good overview of the Riel Rebellion and the role played by Canadian surveyors can be found in Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987) pp.117-128.

⁵⁰ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for year ending 30th June 1878*,

The government certainly wanted to encourage settlement, but local surveys that were not properly connected to the larger national grid or river lots that did not connect at all were still problematic.

Once surveyors had been in the borderlands and left again, the impermanence of their markers worried local and national officials in both countries. Implicit in this constant fear over the fate of the survey markers was the recognition that if the governments could not get their markers, which were the only physical representation of official, national, white control, to endure after the surveyor had left, federal possession of and control over the land was going to remain tenuous at best. In 1874 for example Montana's Surveyor-General Andrew Smith complained that a better way of marking the corners of the surveys was needed because the system of supporting posts in mounds of earth was proving to be quite inadequate in stock-raising territory. The posts "stand but a few hours, in some instances but a few moments," before the cattle paw the mound away and rub down the post. In time, the posts are "either picked up and burned, used as a picket-pin, or removed far from its original position." Without fixed markers to "perpetuate" the corners of a survey, the purpose and integrity of the survey itself was at risk.⁵¹ Commissioner of the General Land Office S. S. Burdett took this complaint a step further, declaring in 1875 that the survey system west of the 100th meridian was "a great waste of the public money" because there the markers were not going to survive long enough for whites to want to settle in such "barren conditions...." Wooden corner-posts "yield to decay," while "settlement and cultivation conspire with the elements to obliterate pits and mounds..." He

Report of Surveyor-General Lindsay Russell, Sessional Papers 1879, Volume 6, #7, p. 6.

⁵¹ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of the Surveyor-General of Montana, Andrew J. Smith for 1874, House of Representatives Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 43rd congress, 2nd session, p. 133.

recommended that “indestructible monuments ... of stone or iron” should be erected at the corners of the principal meridian and base lines.⁵² Nearly 10 years later, one of Burdett’s successors was frustrated enough with the impermanence of the survey markers that he called for legislation to protect them.⁵³

Canada’s Surveyor-General Lindsay Russell had similar problems, stating in 1883 that everything from the elements to cattle to First Nations peoples were conspiring against the markers’ survival. Prairie fires burned the posts, cattle demolished the mounds, and then “the melting snows in spring float the posts away and little or no trace of survey remains. They are even subject to being effaced through the ignorance or perversity of the natives of the prairie region, who, if hearsay is to be credited, have when travelling across a stretch of prairie, where other wood for fire could not easily be obtained, been seen provided with a goodly cart load of fuel consisting of township survey posts, gathered on their way.” Iron posts had always been used to mark the corners of blocks of townships, but the “additional expense ... of placing iron posts at every township corner” was now being incurred to try and solve the problem.⁵⁴

Despite the challenges created by great distances, irregular terrain and markers that would not last, the amount of information being produced about northern Montana and southern Alberta increased rapidly. Each government’s satisfaction with the meaningfulness and utility of the information grew accordingly. The increased volume in surveyors’ reports did not just signify that more information was available, but also that the

⁵² United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Commissioner of General Land Office, S. S. Burdett, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 44th Congress, 1st Session, 28 October 1875, p. 13.

⁵³ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Commissioner of General Land Office N. C. McFarland, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 48th Congress 1st session, 29 September, 1883, p. 25.

information was more “accurate” and thus could be used for more complete control over the region. In 1872 for example, Montana’s Surveyor-General John Blaine praised the accuracy of the maps his office in Helena was producing. The territorial map was finished and “no pains or time has been spared to make its compilation as complete, correct, and full as possible for publication.” Patience and skill had been required, as well as “truthfulness” in the “projection and delineation of the ever-varying topography of rivers, mountains, creeks, and valleys.” Accuracy and truthfulness were vital because the Northern Pacific Railroad was sure to bring “thousands of immigrants to our rich Territory, who will settle in our fertile valleys, and wish to obtain titles to their lands and be forever at rest about their homes.”⁵⁵ Maps might be abstract depictions of the land and symbols of national political control, but they had to be “accurate” to attract settlers and their role in the protection of property rights also made them vital tools for promoting economic development.

Blaine’s successor, Andrew Smith, shared this functional view of the concrete economic benefits of the abstract process of surveying, noting in 1877 that earlier skepticism about the value of surveying Montana was being proved wrong, largely as a result of the sheep and cattle industries increasingly demanding “vast tracts” of land.⁵⁶ Six years later Territorial Governor John S. Crosby insisted that still more money for surveys was needed if Montana’s development was to continue because settlement was “already much in advance of the surveys, and will be seriously retarded unless the appropriations

⁵⁴ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report*, Report of Surveyor General Lindsay Russell, Sessional Papers 1884, Volume 7, #12, 31 December 1883, p. 11.

⁵⁵ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of the Surveyor-General of Montana, John E. Blaine, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 42nd Congress, 3rd session, 31 October 1872, pp. 143-44.

⁵⁶ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Surveyor-General of Montana Andrew Smith. House Executive Documents, #1, Part 5, 45th Congress, 2nd session, 1 November 1877, p. 285.

for the public surveys are largely increased.”⁵⁷ American officials had a much harder time than Canadian officials keeping the “legitimate” subdivision of land through surveying ahead of the “illegitimate” division of land through squatting.

Canadian officials had the same faith that a direct link existed between surveying, settlement, and economic prosperity. For example, Minister of the Interior David Laird stated in 1874 that being able to accurately track the progress of western settlement would justify the amount of money and legislation involved “in opening up the country,” and act “as an encouragement to the intending immigrant.”⁵⁸ Nearly ten years later Deputy Minister of the Interior A. M. Burgess was pleased to note that 27 million acres had been surveyed and subdivided in the west that year, “equal to 168,750 farms of 160 acres each.” He calculated that this translated into an area “capable of accommodating a purely agricultural population of 506,250, allowing an average of only three souls per farm -- a result, I venture to submit, never before attained within a similar period of time in the history of any country, and one which is well calculated to exemplify the determination of the Government and the readiness of the people of Canada to spare neither energy nor money in order to open up the fertile lands of the North-West and make them available for settlement.”⁵⁹ His equations turned abstract acres into farms and people, and justified federal efforts in terms of domestic prosperity and international stature.

Burgess’ words demonstrate the lofty opinion some North American officials had of the higher value of surveying. Commissioner of the United States General Land Office

⁵⁷ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Governor of Montana John S. Crosby, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 48th Congress 1st session, 31 October 1883, pp. 542-43.

⁵⁸ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for year ending 30th June 1874*, Sessional Papers 1875, Volume 7, #8, p. 12.

⁵⁹ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for 1883*, Report of Deputy-Minister A. M. Burgess, Sessional Papers 1884, Volume 7, #12, 29 February 1884, p. xviii.

S. S. Burdett wrote eloquently in his 1875 report about the potential of the surveys, linking them with what he saw as a global destiny of “civilized” nations to know and therefore conquer the earth. He stated that “all the civilized peoples of the earth” paid attention to the geographical and geological sciences, for the “love of learning” and “a desire for the mastery of the secrets of nature,” as well as for their “utilitarian purposes.” He went on to declare that “[i]n no country is this more true than in our own.” He called for a greater integration of the land surveys and the geological surveys so that the most complete and scientifically accurate information could “be furnished ready to the hand of the explorer...”⁶⁰ To have “scientific” knowledge about something was to have power over it, and both governments were eager to have that kind of power over western spaces.

Truthful maps and surveys were so crucial to the project of nation-building that in the early 1880s two Canadian officials took particular pains to assert that their survey system was more efficient and accurate than that of the Americans. Inspector of Dominion Lands Agencies William Pearce declared in his report for 1883 that the annual reports of the Commissioner of the General Land Office of the United States, “wholly disprove[d]” the idea that Canada’s laws were inferior to those of the United States. “In no country in the world,” he continued, “and at no time, has there been so much energy, outlay and labour expended in surveys, as in the North-West Territories during the past three years.” The Canadian and American systems were “similar in most respects, and where they differ, the difference is in favour of Canada.”⁶¹ Two years later Deputy Minister Burgess also praised the accuracy and efficiency of the Dominion Survey, insisting that the Dominion’s

⁶⁰ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Commissioner of General Land Office, S. S. Burdett, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 44th Congress, 1st Session, 28 October 1875, pp. 14-15.

emphasis on precision over expediency had forestalled much land speculation and potential “litigation” over property rights. He added that the Director of the United States Geological and Topographical Surveys, Major Powell himself, had testified before a Joint Commission of the Senate and House appointed to discuss ways of improving the efficiency and economy of the surveys, that while Canada had adopted the American system, the Canadian survey had produced “superior work ... at less expense than the corresponding work in the United States.”⁶² Burgess took it as a point of national pride that no less a figure than the head of the American surveys said that the Canadian survey was better and cheaper, and was happy to imply that this was also good news for settlers who chose Canada’s west over that of the United States.

“The settlement of that extreme plain”: making the ‘desert’ arable

Department of the Interior officials in both countries never lost sight of the fact that the bigger goal of the surveys, above and beyond the goal of knowledge for the sake of knowledge, was to “open” and settle distant western land. When Secretaries, Ministers, and other officials wanted to boast about the results of their surveys or justify their cost, they used the language of farming and settlement. They even used that kind of language to talk about the Alberta-Montana borderlands, always trying to make the region fit into national visions of family farms even while they were admitting that its potential lay in ranching. Officials were happy with the information they were getting about the region because most of it could be re-interpreted to support the dominant vision of the west as a place of agricultural bounty, firmly integrated into each nation’s economic agenda.

⁶¹ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for 1883*, Report of Inspector of Dominion Lands Agencies William Pearce, Sessional Papers 1884, Volume 7, #12, p. 4.

Competing visions, of a coherent region with more similarities than differences, or of land that was more suited to stock raising than agriculture, were present in many of the reports but never foregrounded.

A clear shift in federal perceptions of northern Montana and southern Alberta away from arid infertility towards agricultural bounty can be seen by the early 1870s for Montana and the late 1870s for Alberta. Local surveyors were careful to note that although the region was not dominated by fertile land, it was not completely infertile either and had many other advantages. In his report for 1870, for example, the Commissioner of the United States Land Office wrote that Montana's altitude, dry air, rich soil and pure mountain streams gave it "a climate of wonderful salubrity." The dry air "renders the winters more agreeable than many of the climates in lower latitudes."⁶³ The following year Commissioner of Agriculture Frederick Watts noted that while Montana's topography was not perfect for agriculture it did have other useful attributes. There was a strip of well-watered "arable land" along the base of the Rockies "from the British possessions south to the Sun River.... As yet it is wholly unoccupied except by roving Indian bands; hence no experiments in farming have been made." A local resident had informed Watts "that the seasons are not severe, and ... that the hardier cereals and vegetables can be raised without any climatic difficulty."⁶⁴ Watts' comment about "roving Indian bands" was his only acknowledgement that the region he was discussing was still Blackfoot territory, as it was not stripped from the Blackfoot until an executive order in 1875.

⁶² Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report*, Report of Deputy-Minister A. M. Burgess, Sessional Papers 1886, Volume 6, #8, p. xxv.

⁶³ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Commissioner of General Land Office Wilson, House Executive Documents #1, Part 4, 41st Congress, 3rd session, 31 October 1870, p. 132.

⁶⁴ United States, Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture, Frederick Watts, House Executive Documents #327, 42nd Congress, 2nd session, 15 November 1871.

Professor Cyrus Thomas, whose praise for Montana Territory opened this chapter, noted in the same report that the region contained “a much larger area of arable land” than he had anticipated. He conceded that “the agricultural lands are separated into comparatively small areas,” but re-framed this as an advantage by stating that each small area could have its own “ample supply of water for irrigating purposes.” He insisted that the climate was “more favorable for agriculture than would be anticipated from its northern and elevated position”, and the grasses would provide “excellent pasturage for stock...” Nevertheless, he had to admit that the lack of good timber west of the hundredth meridian was “a serious drawback.”⁶⁵ The lack of trees as compared to eastern parts of the continent worried most observers in the 1870s, because of their unspoken assumption that white people needed timber to build homes, and a lack of timber might slow the rate of settlement and limit the number of whites who could live in the area.

Ottawa was not able to get more detailed surveyors’ reports about southern Alberta until after Treaty 7 was signed with the Blackfoot in 1877, and one of the earliest reports dates from the summer of 1878 when A. P. Patrick was in southern Alberta with the purported goal of surveying the Piegan and Stoney reserves. Most of his report, however, deals with the region’s agricultural potential, the farming endeavours of local white settlers, and the frequent coal seams. He wrote that poor soil in some areas was balanced by “very fine” soil in others. Several farms had been established in the region by white settlers, and most of the settlers were “raising some good crops” and were “perfectly satisfied with the result of their farming operations.” He too noted that timber was scarce, but stated that the real economic advantage of the south-eastern portion of the Territory was the frequent coal

⁶⁵ United States, Report on the Geological Survey of Montana, Part II, “Agricultural Resources” by Prof. Cyrus Thomas. House Executive Documents, #326, 42nd Congress, 2nd session, 29 February 1872, p. 205.

seams. One settler was already working a mine and selling the coal to Fort Benton in Montana as well as Fort Macleod.⁶⁶

By the early 1880s Canadian and American views of the borderlands continued to shift towards an imagined future where agriculture could dominate, at the same time as Interior reports were recognizing that ranching was becoming the acknowledged economic activity. New information about the region which was making its way into federal hands seemed to suggest that earlier reports about the relative lack of good land, water, and timber were inaccurate, and that the earlier advantages (like coal seams and healthful winters) were actually the icing on the cake. As a result, the boosterism language in the reports from the 1880s hit new heights. For example, Surveyor-General Roswell H. Mason wrote in 1881 that “the day is not far distant when the wheat fields of Montana will be as famous as those of Minnesota and Dakota.”⁶⁷ In 1883 Territorial Governor John S. Crosby boasted that “Montana has no cause to envy her sister Territories in any respect. She is better watered, has a more healthful and equable climate, richer mines and of greater variety, and a home market for all her bountiful soil can produce.” The residents were “prosperous and peaceful, and ... have a kindly welcome for immigration from the old States and Europe.” He concluded that even “the hardships which met the early settlers at every step are among the things of the past...”⁶⁸ Although the Territory was still six years away from statehood, Crosby’s choice of language made it clear that Montana was no longer at the margins of the nation’s economy or social development, but well established in the mainstream.

⁶⁶ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for year ending 30th June 1878*, Report of Surveyor A. P. Patrick, Sessional Papers 1880, Volume 3, #4, Appendix #8, pp. 45-56.

⁶⁷ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Surveyor-General of Montana Roswell H. Mason, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 47th Congress, 1st Session, 26 August 1881, p. 663.

Official views of southern Alberta also changed significantly in the early 1880s, as “new” information seemed to indicate that the region had more good land, water, and timber than the late 1870s reports had suggested. The 1880 and 1881 reports of Canada’s Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior John A. Macdonald demonstrate how quickly and easily federal visions of the borderlands could change. In the first report he stated that “the portion of the so-called American Desert which extends northerly into Canadian territory, is proved to have no existence as such, for in the very worst parts of the country many tracts of good soil were found, and almost invariably the grass was rich and nutritive, offering excellent facilities for stock raising.” Once again, the only real “drawback” was the lack of wood,⁶⁹ but one year later he was pleased to correct himself: “in districts formerly supposed to consist exclusively of prairie, groves of timber in river bottoms and on certain wooded hills [will] ensure a fair supply to meet the need of in-going settlers for fuel and building timber.”⁷⁰ As long as the amount of fertile land and timber continued to be larger than expected, the Canadian government could hold on to its vision of an agricultural west which was superior to the one south of the line.

A more obvious sign of the government’s faith in the agricultural future of the region came in 1883, when Inspector of Dominion Lands Agencies William Pearce announced that a Dominion Lands Office was to open in Calgary in the near future. He did not expect “a very great rush for lands in that locality for a year or two,” but if the Canadian Pacific Railway Company’s newly-established experimental farms succeeded, “the question of the settlement of that extreme plain will be solved.” Success would also

⁶⁸ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Governor of Montana John S. Crosby, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 48th Congress 1st session, 31 October 1883, pp. 549-50.

⁶⁹ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for 1880*, Sessional Papers 1880-1881, Volume 3, #3.

increase “the productive area of the North-West Territories” by about 40 million acres, far more “than was anticipated three years ago by the persons best informed respecting its agricultural resources.”⁷¹ By 1883, therefore, it seemed as if every part of Canada’s west, including the land in southern Alberta, could indeed play a part in the great agricultural future of the nation.

From homesteads to “cattle kingdom”: conceding to the borderlands

Neither Ottawa nor Washington ever abandoned their overarching visions of the west as a coherent region which should be filled with 160-acre farms and thus contribute to the prosperity and growth of the nation. Improvements in irrigation and dry-farming techniques in the 1890s made that goal seem even more attainable. Nevertheless, both governments had to make concessions to the actual conditions of the various sub-regions within each west, and to the economic interests eager to exploit those conditions. The Alberta-Montana borderlands, far better suited to ranching than farming, demanded some of the more significant concessions from federal land policies. The United States had a longer tradition than Canada of ranching as an acceptable and integral economic activity, yet it was the Canadian government’s ranch leasing system which created the more favorable conditions for an economic activity it rarely talked about.

The fact that the borderlands were too dry for traditional forms of agriculture was turned into an advantage as the region’s potential for stock raising became its chief selling-point in the reports of Canadians and Americans alike. For example, the Surveyor-General of Montana H. D. Washburn predicted in his 1870 report that the territory’s river valleys

⁷⁰ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for year ending 31 December 1881*, Sessional Papers 1882, Volume 8, #18.

would “offer the finest of grazing land,” although he did add “whenever the red man allows it to be settled.” He continued, “[w]ith our winters tempered, as they are, by isothermal laws not yet understood, our Territory must soon be the great stock-growing regions of America. An abundance of good water, pure air, and nature's wild grass, unequalled by the best of timothy or blue grass ... are advantages combined that are found nowhere else.”⁷² The following year Commissioner of Agriculture Watts wrote that north-western Montana contained “probably the best grazing portion of the Rocky Mountain region. Not only are the open plains and prairies covered with excellent grass, but the smooth hills and naked mountain slopes, and even the reaches beyond, far up into the timber, have the same covering.”⁷³ A relative lack of tree cover was acceptable in stock-raising country because of the implicit assumption that fewer people would be living there.

As these earlier “disadvantages” were re-cast in a more positive light, local officials could indulge in more extravagant boasts. Montana’s Surveyor-General, Andrew J. Smith, declared in his 1875 report that the Territory was “becoming widely known as one of the best stock countries in the Union. It is an established fact that stock in this country are not afflicted with diseases so peculiar and common among stock in the Eastern and Southern States; Texas cattle are brought here, and no trace of the disease known as the Texas fever, so prevalent among cattle there, is ever discovered here.”⁷⁴ Some stock raisers were turning their attention to sheep, which required even less care than cattle. Ten

⁷¹ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for 1883*, Report of Inspector of Dominion Lands Agencies William Pearce, Sessional Papers 1884, Volume 7, #12, p. 4.

⁷² United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Surveyor-General of Montana H. D. Washburn. House Executive Documents #1, Part 4. 41st Congress, 3rd session. 31 October 1870, p. 430.

⁷³ United States, 1871 Report of the Commissioner of Agriculture, Frederick Watts. House Executive Documents #327, 42nd Congress, 2nd session. 15 November 1871.

⁷⁴ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Surveyor-General of Montana Andrew Smith. House Executive

years later Secretary of the Interior L. Q. C. Lamar noted that stock raising was second only to mining as “the largest and leading industry” of Montana, boasting 900,000 cattle and 1.2 million sheep.⁷⁵

By the end of the 1870s Canadian officials were also beginning to appreciate the stock-raising potential of southern Alberta, and it became the preferred topic for favourable comparisons to northern Montana. Macdonald wrote in his 1879 Report as Minister of the Interior that the eastern slopes of the Rockies were “said to offer unusual facilities, in the way of both shelter and pasturage,” allowing cattle “to subsist in the open air during the whole winter, and being found in good condition in the spring. A number of people are already engaged in the pursuit of this industry, and with so much success that there is every probability of its further development by gentlemen of experience in stock-farming, and possessed of large capital, both from Great Britain and the older Provinces.”⁷⁶

Macdonald’s classist and nationalist agendas are clear: ranching was a pursuit for “gentlemen” who had greater access to capital than the average homesteader, and by stressing that these “gentlemen” were British and Canadian he could gloss over the well-known influence and presence of American stockmen and retired military men in the southern Alberta ranchlands. Indian Commissioner Edgar Dewdney devoted much of his report for 1879 to the ways in which southern Alberta measured up to northern Montana. The region was Montana’s equal “in every respect for cattle. Its soil (especially in the numerous valleys with the clear mountain streams running through them) cannot be surpassed, and there are large sections” of land further east which will eventually be

Documents #1, Part 5, 44th Congress, 1st Session, 28 October 1875, p. 230.

⁷⁵ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of the Secretary of the Interior for 1885, House Executive Documents #1 Part 5. 49th Congress, 1st session, 1 November 1885, p. 81.

⁷⁶ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for year ending 30th June 1879*, Sessional Papers 1880, Volume 3, #4.

irrigated by those streams, “thereby largely increasing the agricultural area.” He claimed that every western acre he had seen had some value to the government, “and the whole of our dry interior plain will make a most valuable stock country.”⁷⁷ To counter the strong north-south economic relationships in the borderlands, it was important to stress that the land north of the line was equal to or better than whatever could be found south of the line.

The first significant adjustment of federal land policy to the arid reality of the land west of the 100th meridian was the United States’ 1877 Desert Lands Act, although, paradoxically, it was actually intended to further the dream of family farms covering even the most arid portions of the west. By the early 1870s the American government had realized that a 160 acre farm was not going to be sufficient west of the 100th meridian. Commissioner of the General Land Office S. S. Burdett noted in his 1875 report that between that meridian and the mountains, and “from the Mexican line on the south to the international boundary on the north, a totally different set of conditions, geographical, physical, and climatic, are found to exist. Within this vast area agriculture, as pursued in the valley of the Mississippi and to the eastward, has no existence.” Even with irrigation only an “insignificant” portion of this land was ever going to be productive, while a larger proportion of the land could be used “in the pasturage of large herds of domestic animals, sheep, cattle, and horses.” His solution was that, instead of being disposed of under the Homestead Act, the surveyed portions of the “central plateau” be offered immediately for cash sale which would make it easier for large stock-raisers to expand their holdings. He briefly alluded to the leasing systems which had been developed in Australia to make large

⁷⁷ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for 1879*, Report of Indian Commissioner Dewdney, Sessional Papers 1880, Volume 3, #4.

areas of land available for ranchers (the system which Canada adopted) but rejected this option.⁷⁸

It is clear that Burdett wanted United States policy to shift in favour of western stockmen, but Congress was “obsessed with the idea of cultivation” and passed the Desert Land Act instead. The Act was intended to encourage irrigation west of the 100th meridian by allowing a person to buy 640 acres of “desert land” for \$1.25 an acre in return for a commitment to irrigate a portion of it. As a policy designed to encourage irrigation and cultivation it was a failure: applicants were charged for dry land when better-watered land was still available under the Homestead Act; the Act required a larger irrigated area than was actually feasible with contemporary technology; and even when irrigated much of the land was never going to become prime agricultural land.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, 67 entries involving over 17 million acres had been made in Montana under the Desert Lands Act by 1881.⁸⁰

The Canadian government was equally obsessed with the vision of 160-acre family farms blanketing the west, but learned some lessons from the failure of the American

⁷⁸ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Commissioner of General Land Office, S. S. Burdett, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 44th Congress, 1st Session, 28 October 1875, pp. 7-8. The United States did eventually adopt a leasing system in the form of the 1934 Taylor Grazing Act. Worster, *Under Western Skies*, pp. 43-44.

⁷⁹ Dick, pp. 227-228. Interestingly enough, Major J. W. Powell’s infamous “Report on the Lands of the Arid Region of the United States,” which formally entrenched the 100th meridian as the line past which average rainfall was less than 20 inches and thus “successful agriculture” by nineteenth century standards (that is, without such techniques as dry farming and extensive irrigation) was impossible, was not published until the year after the Desert Lands Act. For many historians, that line is still where “the west” really begins. See, for example, Donald Worster’s discussion of Powell’s report and the meaningfulness of the 100th meridian, in *Under Western Skies*, pp. 23-4.

⁸⁰ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Commissioner of the General Land Office N. C. McFarland for 1881, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 47th Congress, 1st Session.

Desert Land Act.⁸¹ Canada's concession to the land in southern Alberta before the various irrigation experiments in the late 1880s and 1890s was to bring in a system like the Australian one whereby ranchers in southern Alberta could lease huge tracts of land from the government for one cent an acre. Early grazing regulations had been ill-defined. The Dominion Lands Act of 1872 expected ranching to be as small-scale as farming, so "unoccupied pasture could be leased only to bona fide homesteaders" and a grazing lease could be cancelled on short notice. The provisions were amended in 1876 to allow grazing land to be leased to non-residents and companies, extend cancellation notice, and eliminate a lessee's obligation to commit to agricultural settlement.⁸² The Conservative government was returned to office in 1878, and there were many close personal and political ties between the party and the men and organizations who played key roles in establishing the "cattle kingdom" in southern Alberta.⁸³ Not until December 1881 did an order-in-council lay out the well-known policy for leases up to 100,000 acres at one cent an acre, for up to 21 years. The leaseholder was obliged to place one head of cattle for every ten acres within three years, a lease could be terminated by the government on two years' notice, and there were vague provisions for a leaseholder to purchase outright adjoining lands.⁸⁴ This policy

⁸¹ Indeed, as late as 1886 Canada's Deputy Minister of the Interior A. M. Burgess wrote that in his opinion it was safe to defer any decisions on irrigating southern Alberta until a later date. He did not believe that the area was going to experience any significant immigration for years to come, and "the irrigation laws of the United States have proved a prolific source of fraud" that Canada should "be able to profit by their experience." Canada, Department of the Interior, Annual Report for 1885, Report of Deputy-Minister A. M. Burgess, Sessional Papers 1886, Volume 6, #8, p. xxiv.

⁸² Breen, *The Canadian Prairie West and the Ranching Frontier 1874-1924*, p. 17

⁸³ The development of Canada's ranch lease system, although the precedent was borrowed from Australia, was largely due to the personal relationships men like Senator Matthew Cochrane had with key individuals in the Conservative government. Cochrane, retired North West Mounted Police officers, and men who had been involved in the cross-border cattle trade all knew southern Alberta's potential for stock raising and made sure they were in position early to exploit it. Breen, *The Canadian Prairie West and the Ranching Frontier 1874-1924*.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 18-19.

opened the door for the large cattle companies to lease huge ranges between the 49th parallel and Calgary, thus making the region the only officially sanctioned non-agricultural portion of Canada's west for a few brief years.

The "cattle kingdoms" in southern Alberta and northern Montana developed at about the same time, but Alberta's grew more slowly, less extensively, and with more federal assistance. Canadian officials were certainly "eager to see the establishment of a large stock-raising industry in a region hitherto considered to be practically a desert." The large ranches brought money and at least some white settlement into the area, and helped solve "the immediate and pressing problem of meeting Indian beef requirements as the last buffalo herds disappeared from the northern plains."⁸⁵ The first large herds to arrive in southern Alberta came from British Columbia in 1875, and Senator Matthew Cochrane's came from Montana in 1876 although he would later import British stock as well.⁸⁶ In 1880 Macdonald was pleased to announce that the Department had already received "numerous applications" for grazing leases in southern Alberta. He described Cochrane as an "experienced Canadian agriculturalist and stock breeder of large capital," who had been promised "that his enterprise would receive every legitimate encouragement from the Government..." Macdonald wanted to stress "how important it is to the future of that country, how intimately connected with the development of its best interest, that this and kindred schemes should be successful, and how much it will contribute to the convenience, profit and prosperity of the settlers in this new land that they should find at once at their

⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 15. A more geographical approach to the development of cattle ranching in the borderlands, and one which argues that the border made little difference to the style of ranching, can be found in Terry Jordan's *North American Cattle Ranching Frontiers: Origins, Diffusion, and Differentiation* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993).

⁸⁶ Ed Gould, *Ranching in Western Canada* (Saanichton, BC and Seattle WA: Hancock House, 1978.) p. 15.

very doors the best breeds of cattle from which to stock their farms.”⁸⁷ The government was quickly coming to appreciate the profitable future of ranching in southern Alberta, while still maintaining its official commitment to agricultural settlement.

By 1885 there were 58 leases in force for grazing lands involving more than two million acres, all of them in southern Alberta, and the large leaseholders reported some 50,000 head of cattle and 5,000 horses.⁸⁸ Not surprisingly, a report on the industry written by D. McEachran, himself the lessee of 30,000 acres, was glowing. The cattle were all disease-free and even mange in horses was usually only found “among Indian ponies...” The overall mortality rate in cattle “from all causes, winter storms included, may fairly be set down at 5 per cent. per annum for the entire district for the past three years.” The region was clearly demonstrating its potential “for successful wholesale cattle production” and was proving “highly satisfactory to the investors.”⁸⁹ Through an omission that put him out of step with the rhetoric of his superiors in Ottawa, McEachran did not mention whether significant benefits were accruing to the local non-ranching population.

As an economic activity, land-use system, and social system, ranching did not share space easily with 160-acre family farms in the borderlands because it involved very different uses of space and different combinations of race and gender. Cattle could thrive on land with relatively little rain and tree cover, meaning even arid, treeless plains could be put to some use by white men and add to the wealth of the nation. As Simon Evans has

⁸⁷ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for 1880*, Sessional Papers 1880-1881, Volume 3, #3.

⁸⁸ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for 1885*, Report of G. U. Ryley, Clerk of Timber, Mineral and Grazing Lands, Sessional Papers 1886, Volume 6, #8, p. 38.

⁸⁹ Canada, Department of the Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1885*, Report of D. McEachran “On Cattle Ranching In North-West Territory,” Sessional Papers 1886, Volume 7, #10, 21 February 1886, p. 190.

noted, ranching “is an extensive rather than an intensive form of land use” because a single animal may require anywhere from 20 to 100 acres of range to support it. It is different from mixed farming in that “it involves cattle grazing ‘unimproved’ grass for a considerable period of the year.” Most of the ranches in the Alberta-Montana borderlands in the late nineteenth century consisted of a small amount of land around the home place which was actually owned or deeded by the rancher, but were completely dependent on access to public land for grazing.⁹⁰ In short, ranching involved a small number of white people taking up a large amount of space, which was exactly what the governments were trying to stop when it came to native people. What made ranching acceptable was not just that white men were taking up that space instead of native peoples, but that ranching was seen as economically productive and profitable for ranchers and governments alike. And while the discourse of “family farms” at least implied the presence of women, the discourse of ranching was fundamentally and overwhelmingly masculine. The Canadian and American governments made concessions to the conditions of the Alberta-Montana borderlands by re-envisioning it as a cattle kingdom, but those concessions remained in sharp contrast to the dominant tone and stated agenda of their western land policies.

“Speculative squatters and spurious homesteaders”: limiting western landholding

While their approaches to ranchland policies were taking different routes in the late 1870s and early 1880s, Ottawa and Washington were also beginning to have different perceptions of western spaces. The United States started to worry about limiting the

⁹⁰ Simon Evans, “Introduction,” *Cowboys, Ranchers and the Cattle Business: Cross-Border Perspectives on Ranching History*, eds. Simon Evans, Sarah Carter, Bill Yeo, (Calgary, AB and Boulder, CO: University of Calgary Press and University Press of Colorado: 2000) p. x.

amount of western land individuals and companies could own, particularly the big ranches which routinely expanded onto the public domain, at the same time as Canada was signing ranch leases covering hundreds of thousands of acres. The United States was coming to the end of its “unlimited” western spaces and feared the repercussions this might have on American democracy. The nation had long since reached the end of its continental territorial expansion, and if the yeoman ideal was to survive and economic growth through agricultural land-ownership continue, federal officials in charge of land policy believed that private individuals and companies could not be permitted to possess particularly large land holdings. Canada, on the other hand, still felt it had room to maneuver because of the slower pace of western migration, and it had never tied its national identity or destiny to the idea of the independent landowner the way the United States had. Even Canadian officials, however, felt that the time had come to start policing homesteaders more closely to ensure that the provisions of the Dominion Lands Act were being met and that no one was holding land unfairly. And by the mid-1880s, just a few short years after instituting the ranch lease system, the government did start restricting the large cattle companies to ensure that the door remained open for agricultural settlement.

The shift in American attitudes towards limiting the amount of land any one person could hold began in the late 1870s, and ended with stricter fencing laws in the mid-1880s. The 1874 invention of barbed wire made it easy to rapidly fence large ranges and water supplies, which led to the “range wars” of the late nineteenth century between ranchers and homesteaders, big ranchers and little ranchers, cattlemen and sheep men.⁹¹ In contrast to the 1860s and 70s, when American officials saw limitless western space, they were now aware that those spaces did have distinct limits. As a result, officials in charge of land policy started worrying about white men, particularly ranchers, who were taking up more

than their “fair share” of western space. While native Americans had taken up “too much” space by remaining mobile, white ranchers did it by fencing off massive portions of the open range, and neither practice was acceptable to bureaucrats in Washington.

The government had two main objections to the ranchers’ practice of fencing large amounts of land: not only did they fence land they were not legally entitled to, but they fenced so much land that it was feared agricultural settlers and smaller ranchers were never going to be able to access land of their own. In his 1883 report, United States Secretary of the Interior Henry M. Teller noted the many complaints about “the illegal appropriation of the public land by parties who for stock purposes inclose vast commons to which they do not pretend to have any right except such as given to them by fencing the same.” He had directed the Commissioner of the General Land Office to give notice that fencing “large bodies of public land beyond that allowed by law is illegal, and against the rights of others who desire to settle or graze their cattle on the inclosed tracts.” Teller observed that the growing wealth of the nation meant more land was in the hands of fewer people, and while the Government could not do anything about land that was already privately-owned, it had a “duty ... to see that the laws intended to secure a fair distribution” of the remaining public lands were “strictly enforced.”⁹² Only actual settlers should be able to access public lands that were suitable for agriculture, to maximize the number of people who owned land instead of renting it from someone else.

A favorite target of land-management critics was the 1877 Desert Lands Act. Intended to make dry (and therefore “useless”) land more attractive, within a few years of its passage the land west of the 100th meridian was looking considerably more useful and

⁹¹ Dick, *The Lure of the Land*, p. 242.

⁹² United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of the Secretary of the Interior for 1883, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 48th Congress 1st session, 1 November 1883, pp. xxxii-xxxiii.

therefore the purpose of the Act was increasingly called into question. In 1883 for example Commissioner of the General Land Office N. C. McFarland criticized the Act for encouraging speculation and making it too easy to claim land that was in fact “naturally productive.” It also allowed “land to be purchased without settlement, and in quantities in excess of the limit established by the settlement laws, thus resulting in the encouragement of monopoly rather than the encouragement of reclamation.” He noted that enclosing large amounts of land “for exclusive use” was a common practice west of the Mississippi, and that many of the huge enclosures “often contain much fine farming land.” He stated ominously that “[f]oreign as well as American capital” was believed to be involved in this “unlawful appropriation of the public lands. Legal settlements by citizens of the country are arbitrarily prohibited, public travel is interrupted, and complaints have been made of the detention of the mails....”⁹³ The government had to reassert its authority over the public lands to safeguard the rights of settlers and civil society itself from domestic and international thieves.

Congress did pass an act forbidding the fencing of public land in 1885, but it proved difficult to enforce and at least one official called for fundamental changes to the government’s entire approach to public lands. William A. J. Sparks, the new Commissioner of the General Land Office under Democrat President Grover Cleveland, used his first report in 1885 to criticize every aspect of more than two decades of Republican land policy. He argued that everything from the Desert Lands Act to the surveying service itself had acted to limit the right of settlers to gain “the homestead of the American farmer.” He accused the surveying service of corruption, wasteful spending, and encouraging the “illegal appropriation” of public land through “the premature survey of

⁹³ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Commissioner of General Land Office McFarland, House Executive

vast bodies of land monopolized by cattle ranges.” By surveying lands that were only needed for the ranching interests the government had guaranteed that the best lands would be unavailable for actual settlers. In the preceding five years the surveys had extended “far beyond the needs of legitimate occupation of the soil.” For example, “large portions of Montana have been surveyed under the deposit system and the lands on the streams fraudulently taken up under the desert-land act, to the exclusion of future settlers...” Additional surveys were not needed to ensure that “the pressing tide of western immigration” would be able to find homes on public lands; instead, “the hundreds of millions of acres of public lands now unlawfully appropriated should be wrested from illegal control.” He reduced the annual appropriation for the surveying service, and in a final dig at the surveyors stated that he was “convinced that it has never been necessary to pay augmented rates” to survey rough terrain.⁹⁴ His concern was not just that the land laws and survey system were facilitating the exploitation of western land for personal profit instead of for the good of the nation, but that the rapidly-diminishing amount of available land in the west was likely to hamper western settlement and development.

Canada could afford to be less concerned than the United States that it was coming to the end of its unlimited western spaces because considerably fewer immigrants were arriving on the East Coast or departing from Central Canada for the prairies. The government did begin inspecting homesteads more closely, however, to see that settlers were fulfilling the terms of their agreement. Deputy Minister of the Interior A. M. Burgess wrote in his report for 1883 that the homestead inspection system which had just been put in place was “operating very markedly to the advantage of the actual settler, and has had the

Documents #1, Part 5, 48th Congress 1st session, 29 September 1883, p. 8.

⁹⁴ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of the Commissioner of the General Land Office William A. J. Sparks,

effect of putting an end to the occupation of the professional ‘homestead jumper’ -- an excrescence upon the free homestead system which, fortunately for the happiness of the people, has disappeared under the new order of things.” He noted that the government had felt it necessary in 1882 to take the step of temporarily freezing pre-emption and homesteading on certain sections of land along the CPR line and south of the line to the “International Boundary,” to slow the activities of “speculative squatters and spurious homesteaders.” The goal of the Department, as always, was “to protect and encourage the *bona fide* homesteader.”⁹⁵ He repeated this assertion three years later, but added that speculators were still a problem because they had managed to claim a lot of land during the land boom of the early 1880s, and the 1885 Rebellion had slowed down the number of settlers taking up western lands. Nevertheless, he concluded optimistically that “there has been a marked improvement in the performance of settlement duties by homesteaders generally.”⁹⁶ Once again, what Canada’s western settlers may have lacked in quantity they made up for in quality.

Not surprisingly, the Canadian government was not in any hurry to start inspecting ranching leaseholds with the same vigour. The ranching establishment had strong ties with the Conservative government and most of the leaseholders were generally doing what they were supposed to be doing, namely stocking “the eligible grazing lands lying along the base of the Rocky Mountains.” More importantly, however, the leases were a significant source of revenue: the Department made almost \$20,000 on the grazing leases during the

House Executive Documents #1 Part 5, 49th Congress, 1st session, 1 November 1885, pp. 168 and 220.

⁹⁵ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for 1883*, Report of Deputy-Minister A. M. Burgess, Sessional Papers 1884, Volume 7, #12, 29 February 1884, p. xiv.

⁹⁶ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for 1885*, Report of Deputy Minister A. M. Burgess, Sessional Papers 1886, Volume 6, #8, 23 February 1886, p. xxi.

1883-84 fiscal year, an amount which greatly exceeded total cash revenues from Dominion Land sales. Burgess also defended the leases as a better long-term land management strategy than simply selling off the land, because when land was leased the Crown retained ownership and could watch it increase in value. And finally, instead of “discouraging settlement,” as the large leases were frequently accused of, Burgess insisted that they actually encouraged it by “inducing an influx of population into regions which otherwise have remained unnoticed for years...”⁹⁷ That is, ranching made the dry land in southern Alberta visible in a way that purely agricultural settlement would not.

Yet only two years later three changes were made to the terms of the grazing leases which suggest that the government felt even more confident about the success of the leases while needing to appear as if it was still protecting the rights of homesteaders. First, a leaseholder was now required to place no less than one-third of the total amount of stock specified in his lease on his land in each of the first three years, a time limit which had not existed before. Secondly, any portion of the leased land could be opened by the Government to “actual settlers” for pre-emption or homesteading without waiting for the lease to expire, although Burgess was careful to note that the leases did not usually include much good agricultural land. He also didn’t think that there had to be any “necessary or natural conflict of interest between lessees of ranges and actual settlers; on the contrary, within certain bounds, their interests are identical” because each could help create a local market for the other’s products.⁹⁸ Nonetheless, in theory the change would allow for more rapid settlement of the region because the Government would not have to wait until the lease was up to allow permanent settlement.

⁹⁷ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for 1883*, Report of Deputy-Minister A. M. Burgess, Sessional Papers 1884, Volume 7, #12, 29 February 1884, pp. xiv-xv.

The third change to the terms of the grazing leases was the doubling of the rent to two cents per acre. The lower rate had served its purpose of enticing “stockholders to test the capabilities of our grazing country” but a higher rate could now be justified as the land had proven its worth. The superiority of Canada’s “grazing lands and ... climate” over those “on the south side of the 49th parallel has now been proven beyond dispute,” and there was “a strong indication that many of the most intelligent and successful stockowners now operating in the United States will, even at the increased rental, transfer a large portion of their herds to our side of the international boundary.” The completion of the CPR would also make it easier for local producers to ship cattle to Europe, a trade which was expected to “attain very considerable proportions.”⁹⁹ Southern Alberta’s natural advantages and the government’s wise and careful management of those resources were now being demonstrated, as the region became an economic centre in its own right.

Although these changes to the leases were aimed at nominally curtailing the growth of the big ranches in southern Alberta and increasing the federal government’s leasing profits, it is clear that they did not represent wholehearted support for the rights of homesteaders in the region. Canadian officials continued to suggest ways of limiting the amount of land homesteaders could or should own. For example, H. H. Smith, the Commissioner of Dominion Lands, recommended in 1885 that additional changes be made to the Dominion Lands Act to limit the amount of land a person could access through the Act. He wanted to abolish “second entry”, or the right of a settler to enter a second homestead claim after he had received the patents on the first entry. It was intended to allow settlers to acquire additional land in the vicinity of their first homestead, but in Smith’s view it was “seldom an actual advantage to them to increase their holdings”

⁹⁸ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for 1885*, Report of Deputy-Minister A. M. Burgess, Sessional Papers 1886, Volume 6, #8, pp. xxvii-xxviii.

because they generally lacked the “capital to properly cultivate even 160 acres... In view of the rapidly decreasing extent of free land now open on this continent to those residents of the older countries who desire to better their condition by emigrating, I do not think it advisable that residents of the country should have it in their power to acquire too easily more land than they can profitably cultivate.” After all, if a settler did possess “the means and ability” to work a larger holding, they could purchase land already alienated from the Crown.¹⁰⁰ What is striking is how much more paternalistic this sounds when compared with some of the American reports – the Canadian system allowed officials to see themselves as being in a position of knowing what was best for settlers, while in the United States officials seemed to see western settlers as equals who tended to get the upper hand.

A similar anti-homesteader tone is evident in the 1885 report of Superintendent of Mines William Pearce. He believed that it only made sense for the Government to frame its policies so as to favour the stockmen because “[f]ew, if any, settle in the ranching country having in view only the growth of grain and vegetables...” There was a limited local market for these products and the distances to larger markets were too great for profitable competition. He did think that a larger number of smaller stock-holders was preferable to a small number of very large holders, however, and wanted to prevent river bottoms, in particular, from being monopolized. One possible solution was for “all lands valuable for watering purposes, hay and shelter” to be reserved by the Government. Pearce concluded that “In conversation with many stockmen from the south of the line I gather that our ranche country will carry very much more stock per square mile than theirs; and further, in

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for 1885*, Report of H. H. Smith, Commissioner of Dominion Lands, Sessional Papers 1886, Volume 6, #8, pp. 10-12.

all of it along the mountains there is sufficient rainfall to prevent the occurrence of the calamity of being 'eaten out.'"¹⁰¹ From his perspective Alberta's cattle kingdom was both better-watered and better-managed than Montana's, once again vindicating the 49th parallel as a border.

“Brought within reasonable distance”: railroads and the borderlands

By the time Pearce wrote his report the railroad era had finally come to the Alberta-Montana borderlands, and the roads would both reinforce and challenge the border. The Northern Pacific arrived in Helena in 1883 and the Canadian Pacific Railroad made it to Calgary in 1884, but their real potential for practical contributions to western development had long been outweighed by their imagined importance in the minds of federal and local officials. The Alberta-Montana borderlands were re-constructed as passively awaiting the settlers who could finally take the train all the way to the edge of the plains. There is no doubt that the land management strategy upon which both governments rested most of their hopes for the borderlands was the railroad. The tools of surveying and mapping and counting had long been deployed in the region, but it was the railroad that was supposed to ensure national visions were brought to fruition. The transcontinental lines were not the first step each government took in consolidating its hold over the region, but they were perceived as the key step for fulfilling national political and economic dreams. By increasing the pace of movement to and from the western edge of the prairies, allowing immigrants to move in and local products to move out more readily, that land began to seem less far away.

¹⁰¹ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for 1885*, Report of William Pearce, Superintendent of Mines, Sessional Papers 1886, Volume 6, #8, pp. 19-20.

Each government had laid the foundations of its railroad land grants policies in the same year as it laid the foundations of its homestead policies, believing that there was a tight reciprocal relationship between the two: the abundance of western lands could be used to tempt the railroad companies, and the railroads' access to western lands could be used to tempt settlers. The United States passed the Transcontinental Railroad Land Grant Act in 1862, and ten years later Canada passed an "Act respecting the Canadian Pacific Railway." The first American grant of nearly 19 million acres went to the Union Pacific Railroad Company, which completed the first transcontinental rail line in North America in 1869. The Northern Pacific received the largest grant of 40 million acres in 1864, and this was the line which would eventually reach Montana.¹⁰² After years of political upheaval and false starts, the Canadian Pacific Railway was granted 25 million acres and \$25 million in 1880, and a route just north of the border finally chosen.

The long-awaited arrival of the railroad in northern Montana and southern Alberta was greeted with enthusiasm by local officials, because it was the rail lines which would confirm that the borderlands were no longer at the fringes of the nation. In his report for 1883 Surveyor-General of Montana John S. Harris noted "that the development and growth of the Territory has been most encouraging in the past year, not a little of which is due to the progress of the Northern Pacific Railroad in opening up this vast section of new country." Construction had reached Helena in June, and the line was due to be completed by the first of September. A branch of the line was also being constructed to Fort Benton for faster connections with the riverboat trade. The "railroad era is at last upon us, and we may reasonably expect a much more rapid growth in the future than there has been in the past..." As a result, "Montana is destined to be one of the greatest and most flourishing of

102 White, *'It's Your Misfortune'*, p. 146

all the Western States.”¹⁰³ Not surprisingly, Governor John S. Crosby shared Harris’ optimism, noting that the Northern Pacific was going to bring “in a large amount of wealth and population from abroad to aid in the work of developing the rich and varied resources of the Territory.”¹⁰⁴ As Cyrus Thomas had imagined in 1872, the long-awaited influx of newcomers could finally travel to Montana at “railroad speed” and the Territory’s population more than doubled between 1880 and 1885.

Canada’s Deputy-Minister of the Interior A. M. Burgess was also very pleased when the Canadian Pacific Railway was finally completed, although his report for 1885 stressed that the key gain for southern Alberta was a faster connection to eastern markets and not a rapid influx of settlers. Because a branch line of the CPR had already been built to Lethbridge, the region’s coal mines and ranchlands had “been brought within reasonable distance of a railway outlet by which ready access is had to the eastern markets.”¹⁰⁵ Once linked to the country’s economic centres and ports, southern Alberta’s coal and cattle were now perceived as safely contained within the Canadian nation.

In their efforts to colonize and nationalize their respective western domains, the Canadian and American governments had struggled to ensure that their maps of western lands and the policies they used to administer those lands accorded with and reinforced their visions for the region’s social, political, and economic future. By the mid-1880s the 49th parallel dividing Blackfoot country had been surveyed and marked and the land on

¹⁰³ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Surveyor-General of Montana John S. Harris, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 48th Congress 1st session, 21 July 1883, p. 248.

¹⁰⁴ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Governor of Montana John S. Crosby, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 48th Congress 1st session, 31 October 1883, p. 541.

¹⁰⁵ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for 1885*, Report of Deputy-Minister A. M. Burgess, Sessional Papers 1886, Volume 6, #8, p. xxvii.

either side of it had taken on a clear shape in the eyes of “its” respective government. Successive generations of explorers, surveyors, and federal officials were determined that even the furthest edge of the plains was going to play a role in national destinies. The Alberta-Montana borderlands had seemed to be far away from centres of government, but surveys, settlers and railroads would weave them into each nation’s imagined community.

Yet these borderlands consistently resisted national visions and categories. A relative lack of rainfall and irrigation meant that the region was better suited for large-scale stock raising than small-scale agriculture and family farms. A national border determined by astronomy could never be experienced locally as a powerful symbolic demarcation. And the people of the Blackfoot Confederacy would add their own challenges to the boundaries drawn around them.

Chapter 2

“Their own country”: Drawing lines in Blackfoot Territory

Canadian and American federal efforts to gain control over the land which made up the traditional territory of the Blackfoot Confederacy demanded that white authorities contain the Blackfoot people themselves. This chapter focuses on the years between the late 1860s and mid-1880s to analyze the methods used by the Canadian and American governments to subdue and contain the people of the Blackfoot Confederacy. Like other Plains people, the tribes that made up the Confederacy were seen by the two federal governments as taking up “too much” space in the west, and they had to be forced to take up less space and clear the way for white settlers. I argue that in addition to direct tools of containment like armed violence and treaties, which have been the focus of much historical study, officials responsible for administering Indian policy also used less direct methods that built upon the ones the governments had used to establish control over the land east of the Rockies. Officials collected as much information as possible about the Blackfoot, surveyed their reservations with the hope that those invisible lines would contain the Blackfoot and open up the rest of their territory for whites, and tried to keep “their” Blackfoot on “their” side of the border. These attempts at physical containment were reinforced by efforts to re-shape the Blackfoot’s cultural and gender patterns. Yet at the same time as the Blackfoot’s persistent cross-border mobility created international problems, that mobility became a way for authorities to reinforce the meaning of the border by blaming the other side’s Indians or legal system for the ongoing problems.

In many ways the Blackfoot’s experiences with the two governments were similar to those of other northern Great Plains nations like the Sioux and the Cree, but in other ways the Blackfoot’s late, rapid colonisation and cross-border culture made them unique. They were the last native group of the American Great Plains and Canadian western interior

to sign treaties with the United States and Canada, and their traditional territory had extended well beyond the border on both sides. Although John Ewers credits the Confederacy's "warlike nature" and reputation as a "hostile and bloodthirsty people" for the treaty-making delay in the United States,¹ it is also clear that the geographical location of Blackfoot territory had a substantial impact on their relationships with the Canadian and American governments. In the middle decades of the nineteenth century their territory was large, straddled the 49th parallel, and removed from the major streams of white transcontinental movement. In 1881 Montana Indian Agent John Young noted that their territory had once included about twenty thousand square miles, "from the forty-seventh degree to the fifty-first degree north latitude, taking in the upper valley of the Saskatchewan and of the headwaters of the Missouri, south and west, at the base of the Rocky Mountains, the lower Saskatchewan plains, or Cree and Assiniboine country, forming their extreme boundary..." He added that "no Indian tribes, either north or west ... have had so little intercourse with the whites in the past as the consolidated tribes of the Blackfeet, Bloods, and Peigans," because of the "out-of-the-way location of their reservation -- no places of interest or importance requiring roads through it -- and the reputation the tribes had for the possession of all the bad qualities of the Indians..."² Historians would add poor land, slow completion of the railways and the distance from the national capitols to the

¹ John C. Ewers, *The Blackfeet: Raiders on the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958) p. 205

² United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Indian Agent John Young, House Executive Documents, #1, Part 5, 47th Congress, 1st Session, 31 July 1881, p. 169. Young held the post of Agent for the Blackfoot longer than any other during this time period: he was appointed in 1876 and stayed for eight years, resigning in frustration as he watched the Blackfoot on the reserve starving to death. Hana Samek, *The Blackfoot Confederacy 1880-1920: A Comparative Study of Canadian and U. S. Indian Policy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987), p. 41.

reasons why Blackfoot country was one of the last pieces of the western interior to be settled by whites.

Federal efforts to enforce the 49th parallel as a political border made the Blackfoot into a bi-national people. In spite of significant differences between the Indian policies of the United States and those of Canada, the Blackfoot on both sides of the line suffered the same fate. Three separate smallpox epidemics between the late eighteenth and late nineteenth centuries greatly reduced their numbers and their ability to resist white incursions.³ They signed no fewer than four treaties, three with the United States (in 1855, 1865 and 1867) and one with Canada (in 1877). They were eventually left with eight small reserves, minute fractions of their former territory. By 1900 racism and poverty had become the dominant features of their relationship with the white settler societies around them. Paul Sharp writes that the North American political development which divided the Blackfoot destroyed “a regional pattern of living confirmed by generations of experiences. And it complicated local problems by making them international.”⁴ However, the people of the Blackfoot Confederacy resisted the lines of division and containment which the federal governments were trying to impose on them and their territory while simultaneously using the line strategically for their own purposes. I argue that the history of the Blackfoot peoples does not simply or neatly divide into “pre-reservation” and “reservation” life as much of the historiography suggests. Blackfoot

³ The first significant smallpox epidemic to hit the Blackfoot was in the late 18th century and is thought to have killed up to two-thirds of the people. The second was brought north up the Missouri River in 1837 by an American Fur Company steamer, and it is also estimated that it wiped out up to two-thirds of the nation. Smallpox hit again in 1869-70, and again was carried by a Missouri River steamboat. This time estimates of the dead ran to nearly 3000 people, with the Piegan accounting for more than a third. See Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, pp. 29, 37, 66, 261 and Hugh Dempsey, *Crowfoot: Chief of the Blackfeet* (Edmonton, Hurtig Publishers, 1972), p. 11, 59-60, for discussion of the epidemics.

resistance challenged the governments' attempts to make the border into a meaningful dividing line, at the same time as it gave the governments a convenient binary opposition ("our Indians" versus "their Indians") which they could use to reinforce the line.

"Without fixed homes": the "problem" of aboriginal mobility

The mobility of northern Great Plains people created two problems for officials in Ottawa and Washington: it undermined national claims to western territory, particularly when native communities crossed the border, and undermined the governments' "civilizing" efforts. As Paul Carter has written about Australia's aborigines, "[t]he refusal to live in one place, and hence to be accountable, was the major obstacle to the process of civilizing." The problem was not that indigenous people were unorganized, but "that their power was distributed horizontally, dynamically." Their mobility represented its own kind of social and political organization and was expressed "as a power over space,"⁵ and this could not be tolerated by colonial nations determined to assert their own power over space. The United States had to address these problems more quickly than Canada, because whites were moving west much faster in the United States, the relationship between whites and aboriginals in the United States had a more violent history, and Canada's system of numbered treaties in the 1870s and the presence of the Mounted Police gave the impression that an orderly and well-managed transfer of land was taking place. Indeed, Canadian officials' concerns were primarily about the best way to manage such a far-away problem as the Indians of the North-West Territories. For example, in his Annual Report for the year ending June 30th 1872 Canada's Superintendent of Indian Affairs Joseph Howe wrote

4 Paul Sharp, *Whoop-Up Country: The Canadian-American West, 1865-1885* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955) p. 133

5 Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) p. 336.

that Indian affairs in “the wide Territories of the North West” had to be managed differently than they had been in the eastern part of the country. In the “vast countries” of the west reserves had not yet been set aside, and less money and missionary labour had been expended. Furthermore, “the distances from Ottawa are so formidable,” that “carrying on Indian Affairs by correspondence” was a hopeless task and could be accomplished more easily if regional boards were set up.⁶ For Canadian officials, western aboriginal communities seemed to be far away and would be dealt with by establishing an appropriate long-distance administrative structure.

The United States did not have this luxury of space and time. The military and political consequences of aboriginal mobility were brought home most strongly by the Lakota or Sioux’s stunning military victory over the United States Army in 1876 in south-central Montana and their deliberate use of the border with Canada in 1877 as a line of safety between them and the Army.⁷ The Lakota had expanded northward from the central plains rapidly in the 1860s and 1870s, fighting other aboriginal groups and the United States Army, and by the later decade were in a position to challenge the Blackfoot’s dominance of north-western Montana. Beth LaDow calls the Sioux’s June 1876 “annihilation” of General George Custer and his men “the most famous defeat of the U. S. Army in the history of the West. It is the most famous Indian military victory. It was also,

⁶ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of Indian Affairs for year ending 30 June 1872*, Report of Superintendent Joseph Howe, Sessional Papers 1873, Volume 5, #23, p. 2.

⁷ There is a wealth of scholarly literature on the Lakota, but this paragraph relies most heavily on Anthony McGinnis, *Counting Coup and Cutting Horses: Intertribal Warfare on the Northern Plains, 1738-1889* (Evergreen, Colorado: Cordillera Press, 1990), and Beth LaDow, *The Medicine Line: Life and Death on a North American Borderland* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001). See also Joseph Manzione, *“I Am Looking to the North for My Life”: Sitting Bull, 1876-1881* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991); and Robert Utley, *The Lance and the Shield: the Life and Times of Sitting Bull*, (New York: Holt and Company, Inc., 1993).

for the last roaming tribes, the beginning of the end of freedom.”⁸ In May 1877, after months of tension, Sitting Bull and about 1000 of his people crossed into what is now southern Saskatchewan seeking food and safety. They spent the next four years receiving grudging shelter from Canadian authorities who urged them to return to the United States, and in 1881 Sitting Bull and the last of his followers did so.

In the years following the Lakota’s victory over Custer at Little Big Horn, American authorities were increasingly on the defensive trying to explain why Canada did not seem to be having the same “Indian troubles” as the United States. Secretary of the Interior Carl Schurz wrote in 1877 and again in 1879 that the United States government’s Indian policy was being compared unfairly to Canada’s, because the latter still enjoyed a large, “empty” buffer zone between white settlers and western Indians. He conceded that “the character of our Indians does not materially differ from that of the Indians in the British possessions on this continent, and that nevertheless peace and friendly relations are maintained there between the Indians and the whites.” However, “the bulk of the Indian population” in western Canada was free to “occupy an immense area almost untouched by settlements of whites. ... The line dividing the Indians and the whites can be easily controlled by a well-organized body of police, who maintain peace and order.” The United States no longer enjoyed this kind of dividing line, and the end result was that whites and Indians were “in one another’s way.”⁹ Two years later his interest in the ways Canadian authorities were managing their Indians had not abated. He noted that as a result of diminishing game and hunting grounds north of the line, “our Canadian neighbours, if we may believe recent reports,” were beginning to encounter “difficulties similar to those we

⁸ LaDow, *The Medicine Line*, p. 43.

⁹ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, House Executive Documents, #1, Part 5, 45th Congress, 2nd session, 1 November 1877, p. ix.

have so long had to contend with,” and are “just approaching the same Indian problem which has been disturbing us for so long a time in various forms. It is to be hoped that they will succeed in solving it with less trouble than it has brought upon us, but they themselves appear to see reason for apprehension.”¹⁰ The “problems” shared by Canada and the United States when it came to aboriginal people made each other’s Indian policy an obvious and frequent point of comparison, and for Schurz space was the key variable that explained Canada’s apparent “success” and the United State’s apparent “failure.”

The belief that western Plains peoples had to be contained quickly dominated the Annual Reports of the United States Department of the Interior throughout the 1870s and 1880s.¹¹ Federal officials agreed on the problem: western aboriginal peoples were taking up too much room and thus threatened to slow down the expansion of white settlement and economic development. United States Commissioner of the General Land Office Joseph Wilson bluntly declared in 1870 that it was not “in accordance with justice and natural right for a small number of persons to monopolize large areas of the earth's surface,” (paradoxically employing the notion of “natural rights” against the people who embodied the nineteenth-century’s “natural man,”) when the land could “support a population many thousands of times greater” if it was cultivated.¹² In 1872 Secretary of the Interior Columbus Delano declared that the government had the right to assume “that our civilization ought to take the place of their barbarous habits. We therefore claim the right to control the soil which they occupy, and we assume that it is our duty to coerce them, if

¹⁰ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 46th Congress, 2nd Session, 15 November 1879, pp. 3-4.

¹¹ The best overview of American Indian policy is Francis Prucha’s two-volume study *The Great Father: The United States Government and the American Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984).

¹² United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Commissioner of General land Office Joseph Wilson, House

necessary, into the adoption and practice of our habits and customs.” Forcing Indians onto reservations removed them “from the direct path of industrial progress, and allows the work of settlement and the extension of our railways to go forward up to the full limit of the capacities of capital and immigration....”¹³ Secretary Henry Teller wrote in 1883 that “[t]he Indian can no longer hide himself in the fastness of the mountains or in the solitude of the wilderness. Contact has come between the settler and the Indian in all parts of the country. Civilization and savagery cannot dwell together,” and Indians “must adopt the ‘white man's ways’ or be swept away by the vices of savage life, intensified by contact with civilization.”¹⁴ As the buffer zone dissolved, officials at the highest levels increasingly defined traditional native uses of space as a national problem.

American authorities also agreed that the solution to their problem was to contain aboriginal people, but they disagreed on how this should be done. Reducing the number and increasing the size of reservations was a common proposition, and one that was seen as the most efficient because it would reduce the number of required supervisory and military personnel, but few of the Secretaries contemplated this solution for long because of the anticipated opposition from neighbouring whites. The more frequent refrain was to recommend repeatedly that existing reservations be cut down in size and the Indians be forced to remain within their limits. Some federal officials took a harsh stance, stating, as Secretary Delano did in his 1872 report, that Indians should be restricted “to an area of sufficient extent to furnish them with farms for cultivation, and no more.” He was certain that “little progress can be made in the work of civilization while the Indians are suffered to

Executive Document #1, Part 4, 41st congress, 3rd session, 27 October 1870, p. 27.

¹³ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 42nd Congress, 3rd session, 31 October 1872, p. 4.

¹⁴ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 48th Congress, 1st session, 1

room at large over immense reservations.”¹⁵ Five years later Secretary Carl Schurz agreed that the way to fix “the evils inherent to the existence of an incongruous population among us,” was “to confine them within the narrowest possible limits....”¹⁶

Their successors tended to take more moderate positions, believing that containment needed to progress more slowly and with more generous land allowances, but the issue of Indians and their space remained a preoccupation. In 1881 Secretary Samuel Kirkwood argued that granting Indians stronger legal title to their land and making some accommodations for cultural differences would improve American Indian policy. He too believed that the size and number of existing reservations should be reduced, but cautioned that Indians should be granted more room than the same number of white men, because “[t]heir attachment to kin and tribe is stronger than among civilized men,” and “the Indian father of to-day” needed “assurance that his children as well as himself could have a home.”¹⁷ White authorities rarely made such positive assessments of the importance of “kin and tribe” among native peoples, and in this instance Kirkwood used the perception to suggest that the government could placate aboriginal communities more quickly if it agreed to let them have more land than an equivalent number of white men.

The next two Secretaries of the Interior, Henry Teller and L. Q. C. Lamar, also proposed that the fastest way to “civilize” Indians was to fix them in permanent homes on

November 1883, p. iii.

¹⁵ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 42nd Congress, 3rd session, 31 October 1872, p. 5.

¹⁶ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 45th Congress, 2nd session, 1 November 1877, p. x.

¹⁷ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5. 47th Congress, 1st session, 1 November 1881, p. v.

individual farms to which they would have a clear legal title.¹⁸ They could not match the rhetoric of Commissioner of Indian Affairs Hiram Price, however, who stressed in 1885 that the key benefit of breaking up the reservations would be that “Every Indian may own a homestead!” This would give them a better position than “millions of white families in the country, to say nothing of the large number of homeless people in the Old World, and the negroes of the Southern States.” And while his liberal extension of the yeoman ideology to all races seemed to contradict the Eurocentrism of federal policy, he made no effort to gloss over the gendered and assimilationist subtext of the plan: “industry and education” would “awaken the spirit of personal independence and manhood, create a desire for possessing property, and a knowledge of its advantages and rights.” Throwing “responsibility upon the Indians” would teach “them self-respect and individuality,” as well as developing “in them a higher manhood.” A masculinity based on property ownership and the accumulation of wealth, the sort of masculinity normally only available to white men, could be made available to aboriginal men with the right combination of coercion and example. If the Government pursued this route systematically, Price declared, within five years few Indians “would refuse to accept so favourable and advantageous a measure.” He supported the bill introduced in the last Congress by Senator Dawes that would make it easier for an Indian to become a citizen and unilaterally break up reserves into individual allotments, although he did caution that it should be a gradual process.¹⁹ The Dawes Act was passed in 1887 and quickly eroded many American Indian reservations. Its provisions

¹⁸ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 48th Congress, 1st session, 1 November 1883, p. iv.

United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, House Executive Documents 49th Congress 1st Session, Document #1, Part 5, 1 November 1885, p. 26.

¹⁹ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Commissioner of Indian Affairs, House Executive Documents 49th

were intended to force aboriginals to become individual land-holders on a portion of land carved out of their own reserve, not allow them to choose any 160-acre portion of the public lands. It thus proved to be one of the most effective pieces of legislation passed by the United States to minimize aboriginal landholdings, but its foundations had clearly been in the works for years.

Not until 1885, in the wake of the North-West Rebellion, did the Canadian government have to confront its own problem with the politicized mobility of western First Nations people, and its still-incomplete knowledge and control over western spaces. During the 1870s the treaty-making process had proceeded uneventfully and reserves were gradually established, thus creating the illusion for federal officials that Canada's western expansion and the containment of western aboriginal groups had been accomplished with a minimum of effort and conflict. Authorities in Ottawa claimed to be shocked when the Rebellion broke out in the spring of 1885 in central Saskatchewan, but the newly-completed Canadian Pacific Railway allowed them to move troops into the area quickly and enjoy what appeared to be a victory for superior knowledge and technology.

There is an extensive literature, both historical and fictional, on the 1885 Rebellion. Where the older scholarship tended to focus on Métis leader Louis Riel, more recent work highlights the roles played by aboriginal leaders like Big Bear, the Cree leader who, along with a party of men and numerous white hostages, managed to elude Canadian authorities for more than two months after the Rebellion was crushed.²⁰ He eventually surrendered in July 1885. Sarah Carter's work has focused on the ways the Canadian government

Congress 1st Session Document #1, Part 5, 5 October 1885, p. 5.

²⁰ See, for example, Sarah Carter's 1997 and 1999 publications, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West* (Toronto and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997) and *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada to 1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), as well as

manipulated images of Big Bear to justify its actions during and after the Rebellion, but for the purposes of this study it is striking to note the ways Big Bear was able to exploit his superior knowledge of western spaces. If the government thought its knowledge of the west after years of surveying and mapmaking was superior to that of aboriginal peoples, Big Bear's escape proved that the federal gaze could still be eluded quite easily. His two months of freedom were vivid evidence that Ottawa's tools of rule were tenuous in the west. Between the late 1870s and mid-1880s, then, Canada and the United States believed they had some important reasons to limit the mobility of northern Great Plains people in general, and the mobility of a cross-border people like the Blackfoot in particular, as quickly and thoroughly as possible.

They “do not all properly belong to the United States”: cross-border mobility and the Blackfoot

As the governments worked to reduce the mobility of and amount of territory occupied by native peoples within their borders, they continued to be frustrated by the Blackfoot's traditional and easy movement back and forth across the border between Alberta and Montana. Unlike the border-crossing of the Sioux or the flight of Big Bear, the Blackfoot's movement did not provoke or result from massive military intervention. American officials were more annoyed about the Blackfoot's border-crossing than the Canadians, particularly during the 1870s when Canada had yet to conclude a treaty with the Blackfoot Confederacy and Blackfoot country still seemed very far away from Ottawa. In 1870 Lieutenant-Colonel Alfred Sully, the Army officer appointed as the first superintendent of Indian affairs in Montana in the late 1860s, wrote from Montana that although the Blackfoot nation was “one of the largest nations of Indians at present in our

country,” they “do not all properly belong to the United States.” Instead, “they claim in common a section of the country from the British line south some miles to the city of Helena, and north of the line to the Saskatchewan River. Being a wild, uncivilized set, they of course do not take into consideration any treaties we have with Great Britain in regard to our boundary line, but look upon the whole of the country both north and south of the line as theirs.”²¹

The Confederacy’s refusal to respect a political boundary that did not accord with their own did blur the line between local and international problems. Paul Sharp notes that if American officials were pursuing them they “simply fled across the boundary into British territory,” and “Indians from north of the boundary” were known to demand annuity payments at Fort Benton. He adds, however, that it was often difficult for authorities to determine the “nationality” of the Blackfoot because their territory had always straddled this new border and they were not inclined to “recognize” it.²² The Blackfoot used the line to their advantage when they could, but were unwilling to treat it as the inviolable line cutting their country in two that white officials wanted it to be.

One Indian agent in Montana in the 1870s noted that while the Blackfoot might not respect the invisible political borders created by the whites, they did have their own. Agent J. Armitage wrote in 1871, with no sense of irony, that the Blackfoot seemed “to be governed by imaginary boundary-lines, and express themselves as perfectly willing to remain in what they consider their own country.”²³ His successor, William T. Ensign

McIntyre, 1984).

²¹ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Lieutenant-Colonel Alfred Sully, Montana Superintendancy, House Executive Document #1, Part 4, 41st congress, 3rd session, 1870, p. 656.

²² Sharp, *Whoop-Up Country*, p. 147

²³ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Blackfoot Indian Agent J. Armitage, House Executive Document #1, 42nd Congress, 1871, p. 844.

noted that only the Peigans regularly came to the agency for supplies, and he shared his political superiors' faith that containment within clear boundaries would improve the situation. The Bloods and Blackfoot proper rarely came because they "range north of the British line, from two hundred and fifty to four hundred miles from the agency, and are kept from coming in by illicit traders..." He hoped that the recent executive order setting aside and clearly defining "a large portion of territory" for the Blackfoot would greatly assist his efforts.²⁴ Only physical containment could ensure that "progress" towards the goals set out by the Department would be made; as long as the Blackfoot were free to move around, it was too easy for them to backslide.

In 1874 Ensign's replacement, R. F. May, also reported that the Blackfoot and Bloods "ranged across the line" and rarely came to the agency, and he too blamed the Indians' lack of progress on their mobility and their experiences north of the line. He had heard that their condition in southern Alberta was "deplorable," the result of "living in a country where there is no law, except that which is administered by bloodthirsty 'wolfers' and whisky-sellers. Both of these tribes, I am convinced, could easily be induced to occupy in part this reserve, and come to the agency if the appropriations were large enough to offer them greater inducements." Unlike Ensign, however, May was quite critical of the reservation which had been set apart for the Blackfoot by executive order in 1874, calling it "an act of gross injustice" because it had cut them off from one of their best hunting grounds "without consultation or remuneration... ."²⁵ Both agents believed that the

²⁴ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Blackfoot Agent William T. Ensign, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5 43rd Congress, 1st session, 31 October 1873, p. 620.

²⁵ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of the Blackfoot Indian Agent R. F. May, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 43rd congress, 2nd session, 10 September 1874, pp. 359-60.

Blackfoot needed to be confined to be helped, but May thought that local conditions and the opinions of the Blackfoot themselves deserved consideration.

Five years later the Indian agency itself had to be relocated, as a result of additional reductions in the southern boundary of the reservation which left the agency outside the reservation. It was relocated northward to Badger Creek, a tributary of the Marias River that was only “60 miles from the Canada line.” John Young was now in charge of the agency, and he observed that the Blackfoot, Bloods and Peigans were “really one people” and were gradually merging into a single tribe “known by the general name of Peigan.” The tribe was different than “another branch of the same family, known as the Northern Blackfeet, who roam almost entirely across the line in the neighbouring Dominion of Canada.”²⁶ Although the agency was now just south of the border and the Blackfoot’s cross-border mobility was far from over, Young’s report tried to reinforce the idea that the border was separating the “family” of the Blackfoot Confederacy into two “branches” which could be distinguished from each other.

Young’s faith that the border was beginning to differentiate one side from the other was reinforced, rather paradoxically, by officials who complained about the border’s inability to stop the actual movement of Blackfoot people. For example, in 1881 Montana Governor B. F. Potts wrote that “British Indians from north of the line, and our own reservation Indians, habitually roam through our northern settlements stealing horses, killing cattle, and robbing unprotected settlers of their scanty supplies.” He pleaded with the Department of the Interior, “on behalf of the settlers of northern Montana,” to force the Indians to stay on their reservations and not allow them to leave except with a military

²⁶ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report from Blackfeet Agency by John Young, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5. 46th Congress, 2nd Session, 15 November 1879, p. 195.

escort.²⁷ By naming “British Indians” and “our own reservation Indians” as two different groups, he invoked two different problems that the federal authorities were supposed to solve: protect ranchers and settlers near the northern border against attacks from foreign Indians, and attacks from American Indians who were supposed to remain on reserves that the American government had laid out for them. The Americans had long suspected that the Canadian government directly or indirectly encouraged the Indians to hunt south of the border where they could still find buffalo, and the suspicions were well-founded. Edgar Dewdney tacitly acknowledged in his 1880 report that the Canadians could not afford to feed all the Blackfoot who were going hungry in Treaty 7, and so if they happened to be able to supplement those supplies with hunting (although he did not specifically indicate that he was aware that they were hunting south of the line) Canadian officials were not going to do much to stop them.²⁸

“For permanent peace and good behavior”: the blunt tools of colonial containment

Scholarship on the Blackfoot has generally foregrounded the roles armed violence, treaties, and legislation played in their containment, and with good reason.²⁹ These tools

²⁷ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of the Governor of Montana, House Executive Documents, #1, Part 5, 47th Congress, 1st Session, 13 October 1881, pp. 985-86. A moderate and a conciliator, Potts was Governor from 1870 to 1883 and his primary goals for the Territory were financial stability and economic development. Malone, et al, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, pp.107-09.

²⁸ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report*, Report of Commissioner Edgar Dewdney, Sessional papers 1880, Volume 4, p. 100.

²⁹ See, for example, Ewers, *The Blackfeet*; Hana Samek, *The Blackfoot Confederacy 1880-1920: A Comparative Study of Canadian and U. S. Indian Policy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987); Prucha, *The Great Father*; Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987); Sharp, *Whoop-Up Country*; Robert Utley, *The Indian Frontier of the American West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984).

were powerful weapons in the governments' struggles to reduce the amount of space the Blackfoot could possess and move through, and enabled Canada and the United States to re-shape many aspects of the Blackfoot culture in a short span of time. The Blackfoot had fewer direct clashes with the United States Army than many other plains peoples, because of their position at the far north-west corner of the Great Plains and the timing of their contact with whites.³⁰ The most shocking exception to this generalization was the January 1870 attack on a Piikuni camp on the Marias River, during which Major Eugene Baker's cavalry and infantry forces killed 173 men, women and children. During the late 1860s the Piikuni had been seen as the most troublesome of the Blackfoot tribes in Montana. Baker was ordered by General Sheridan to attack Mountain Chief's band, which was alleged to contain the worst offenders including the killers of a white rancher. Instead, Baker mistakenly attacked Heavy Runner's camp, one which had always been friendly towards the white authorities and was already suffering from smallpox.

Critics quickly dubbed the attack the Marias Massacre, and it sparked both outrage and action in the east.³¹ The proposed transfer of the Indian Bureau to the War Department failed, "and disgruntled lawmakers seized on the affair to go a step further and outlaw the appointment of army officers to any civil post."³² The event also strengthened public and bureaucratic support for Grant's Peace Policy, and over the next few years Indian agencies across the country were divided up among the nation's main religious denominations.³³

³⁰ See John Tebbel and Keith Jennison, *The American Indian Wars* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960).

³¹ Extensive discussion of the Massacre can be found in Samek's *The Blackfoot Confederacy*, Utley's *Indian Frontier*, Sharp's *Whoop-Up Country*, Prucha's *The Great Father*, and Ewers' *The Blackfeet*.

³² Utley, *The Indian Frontier of the American West*, p. 133

³³ The key facets of Grant's Peace Policy were to reduce the role of the army in Indian administration and increase civilian involvement, particularly the involvement of Christian churches. It also involved refusing to sign any new treaties.

Treaties and starvation were more characteristic of the Blackfoot's dealings with both national governments than direct violence. Canada and the United States had very different approaches when it came to making treaties with aboriginal nations, and the Blackfoot had very different treaty-making experiences in Montana and Alberta. The goal on both sides of the border was the same, however: to minimize the amount of space indigenous people were permitted to occupy, and maximize the amount of native land available for white development and settlement.

The American government signed three treaties with the Blackfoot before abandoning the treaty system altogether in 1871. The Blackfoot were one of several native groups included in the 1855 treaty which Isaac Stevens, Governor of Washington, negotiated to clear the way for a northern rail line which would terminate in his territory.³⁴ The treaty ceded everything south of the Musselshell River, but specified that the Blackfoot and other tribes could hunt south of the river for a period of 99 years. It called for peace between the Blackfoot Confederacy and the American government as well as between the Blackfoot and their aboriginal neighbours. The treaty was ratified in the spring of 1856, by which time the Confederacy had already gone back to war with their aboriginal neighbours.³⁵ The 1865 and 1868 treaties moved the southern edge of Blackfoot territory up to the Teton River in response to pressure from the rapidly growing white population in what was now officially Montana Territory. These treaties were never ratified by the Senate, but the Blackfoot felt the more generous annuities should be forthcoming because they had bargained in good faith. When the United States abandoned the treaty system in 1871, the Blackfoot had little official protection for their rapidly-shrinking land base. Executive orders in 1873 and 1874 further reduced the reservation, moving the southern

³⁴ Prucha, *The Great Father*, p. 407

edge up to where Birch Creek met the Marias River, in spite of protests from the Blackfoot and their agents.³⁶ Additional reductions to the reserve's eastern and western edges took place in 1887 and 1895 through "agreements" with the tribe.³⁷ The 49th parallel remained the constant northern boundary of the reservation, which meant that with a single northward step a person could leave the reserve, leave the United States, and enter Canada.

Treaty 7 was signed with the Piikuni, Kainah, Siksika, Tsuu T'ina and Nakoda of southern Alberta in 1877, and ceded the last corner of Canada's western interior to Ottawa.³⁸ Federal officials were particularly pleased with the treaty because they now had possession of the entire "fertile belt" and whites could settle in Southern Alberta "without fear of being disturbed."³⁹ The government was also pleased because, as Minister of the Interior David Mills wrote, the Blackfoot had been considered "some of the most warlike and intelligent but intractable Bands of the North-West." He held up Treaty 7 as an example of the superiority of Canadian Indian policy over that of the United States, noting that Canada had been able to conclude a treaty "with these warlike and intractable tribes, at a time when the Indian tribes immediately across the border were engaged in open hostilities with the United States troops..." In short, the treaty with the Blackfoot was "conclusive proof of the just policy of the Government of Canada toward the aboriginal

³⁵ Sharp, *Whoop-Up Country*, pp. 142-143. The best discussion of the American treaties and agreements with the Blackfoot is in Samek's *The Blackfoot Confederacy*.

³⁶ Samek, *The Blackfoot Confederacy*, pp. 12-13

³⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 106-108

³⁸ The best discussion of Treaty 7 can be found in *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7*, Treaty 7 Tribal Elders and Tribal Council with Walter Hildebrandt, Sarah Carter and Dorothy First Rider, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996).

³⁹ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for the year ending 30 June 1876*, Sessional Papers 1877, Volume 7, #11, p. xiii.

population”⁴⁰ as well as proof that the Canadians dealt with their least compliant aboriginal wards more effectively and fairly than the Americans dealt with theirs.

Both governments were aided in their efforts to subdue and contain the Blackfoot and other northern plains people by the starvation the tribes faced by the end of the 1870s, as the buffalo disappeared in the face of mass slaughter by white hunters. In spite of clear evidence by the mid-1870s that the buffalo would soon be gone, neither government had contingency plans; they were simply pleased that it would force the Blackfoot to take up a sedentary life more quickly.⁴¹ In 1875 the United States Commissioner for Indian Affairs Edward Smith stated the obvious: “the Peigans and Blackfeet, who are now procuring much the larger portion of their subsistence by hunting, will, before long, be compelled by scarcity of game to depend upon Government rations.” He did warn, however, that “the change from a nomadic to an agricultural life,” was going to require a temporary increase in appropriations.⁴² Three years later Canada’s Deputy Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs L. Vankoughnet wrote that although the Indians in the North West Territories had “not yet learned the value of agriculture,” as the buffalo disappeared they would soon have to “turn their attention to tilling the soil or raising stock to enable them to live.”⁴³

⁴⁰ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for the year ending 30 June 1877*, Sessional Papers 1878, Volume 8, #10, pp. xv-xvii.

⁴¹ Samek, *Blackfoot Confederacy*, p. 38

⁴² United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs Edward Smith, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 44th Congress, 1st session, p. 530.

⁴³ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for year ending 30 June 1878*, Report of Deputy-Superintendent of Indian Affairs L. Vankoughnet, Sessional Papers 1879, Volume 6, #7, p. 5. Vankoughnet spent his entire civil service career in the Indian Department: he joined in 1861 as a junior clerk, was made Deputy Superintendent General in 1874 by close friend and newly re-elected Prime Minister John A Macdonald, and was forced to retire in 1893. While Deputy Minister, Vankoughnet was known for his economizing and for being heavily involved in the day-to-day running of the Department. Douglas Leighton, “A Victorian Civil Servant at Work: Lawrence Vankoughnet and the Canadian Indian Department, 1874-1893,” *As Long as the Sun Shines and the Water Flows: A Reader in Canadian Native Studies*,

Neither government was prepared to spend the amount of money it would have taken to achieve that transition effectively or to keep the Blackfoot from starving. Hana Samek notes that the disappearance of the buffalo precipitated “the first instance of simultaneous failure by the Indian administrations in both countries.” The administrative failure in the United States was more serious than in Canada because the American government already had officials in place in northern Montana to administer relief. By contrast, Canada had few local Indian Department personnel in southern Alberta, which left the Mounties as the only organization available to disburse assistance.⁴⁴ The Blackfoot’s rapid spiral into starvation meant that local and national officials spent the late 1870s and early 1880s pleading for more money in the face of federal budget cuts. While the Indian agents and Mounties were genuinely concerned about the very real potential for mass starvation on the reserves, federal officials were more worried that the Blackfoot would leave the reserves and kill white men’s cattle to survive.⁴⁵

Repeated calls for more assistance for the Blackfoot fell on deaf ears. Historian John Ewers estimates that between 250 and 550 Piikuni starved to death on the Montana reserve between 1882 and 1884, out of a total of less than 7000.⁴⁶ The situation was not much better for the Blackfoot in southern Alberta, although there do not appear to have

edited by Ian Getty and Antoine Lussier (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1983.)

⁴⁴ Samek, *Blackfoot Confederacy*, p. 38

⁴⁵ See, for example, the contrast between the annual reports of Montana agents John Young (1876-1884) and Reuben Allen (1884-86), which openly pleaded for more money and supplies for the Blackfoot, and the 1881 and 1883 Reports of United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs H. Price and Secretary of the Interior Henry Teller, which focussed on preventing the Blackfoot from leaving the reservations to hunt for food. United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report*, Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs H. Price, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 47th Congress, 1st Session, 24 October 1881; United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report*, Report of the Secretary of the Interior and Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs H. Price, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 48th Congress, 1st session, 1 November and 10 October 1883.

been as many deaths from actual starvation. Many of the Blackfoot had spent the winter of 1880-81 hunting in Montana but hundreds moved north in the spring. Newly-appointed Agent Norman Macleod (brother of Colonel James Macleod) had to resist Ottawa's efforts to reduce rations while trying to feed "the nearly 7,000 Indians who ultimately descended on Treaty 7." Macleod resigned in frustration in 1882 and was replaced by former Mountie Cecil Denny.⁴⁷

The Blackfoot's economy finally collapsed just before the long-awaited arrival of the transcontinental railroads in the region, and the American government was confident that the railroads would be the final and deciding factor in the subjugation of the native people of the northern Great Plains. As early as 1872 United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs Francis A. Walker had predicted that the completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad would resolve the problems with hostile tribes across the west, because "the rapid movement of troops along the northern line would prevent the escape of the savages, when hard pressed, into the British Possessions, which have heretofore afforded a convenient refuge on the approach of a military expedition."⁴⁸ In 1881 Secretary of the Interior Kirkwood used similar reasons to explain his support for the numerous applications his Department had received from railroad companies for permission to build lines through Indian reservations. He noted that the applications stressed both "the necessity of supplying the needs of the white people on our frontier, and the civilizing influence of railroads on the Indians, as reasons why their requests should be granted."⁴⁹ The logic of

⁴⁶ Ewers, *The Blackfeet*, p. 294

⁴⁷ Samek, *Blackfoot Confederacy*, p. 45

⁴⁸ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 42nd congress, 3rd session, 31 October 1872, p. 396.

⁴⁹ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, House Executive Documents, #1, Part 5, 47th Congress, 1st Session, 1 November 1881, p. ix.

the second reason was apparently so self-evident that it did not require further explanation: for both countries the roads represented physical and symbolic colonization, and solidified national control over western land. The railroads would physically break up western land and provide a concrete link between eastern governments and their western empires, allowing settlers and troops, goods and information, to move back and forth more quickly. Railroads justified and were justified by the interlocking processes of conquest, colonization, and settlement.

A final factor in the containment of aboriginal peoples which Canadian historians have stressed is Canada's 1876 Indian Act.⁵⁰ The Act set out clear definitions for who was and was not an "Indian," thus creating a legal category which officials could use to police the lines between whites and natives. By defining who could or could not live on a reserve and receive federal funds, the Act gave Canadian officials a significant advantage over their American counterparts. It consolidated all laws governing Indian affairs in the new coast-to-coast Dominion, and gave officials "the power to exercise virtually complete control over the personal, political, social, and economic life of native people." Its key feature was the definition of an "Indian" as a male person of aboriginal blood who belonged to a particular band; any child of that man; and any woman that man married, even if the woman was white. It created the legal distinction between "status" and "nonstatus" Indians, "with the former consisting of native people recognized to be Indians under the terms of the Indian Act, and the latter comprising those who are not considered Indians under the terms of the act, even though they are indeed genetically and culturally

⁵⁰ This section draws on the extensive historiography of Canada's Indian Acts and Treaty system. See, for example, *Sweet Promises: A Reader on Indian-White Relations in Canada*, edited by J. R. Miller (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); Miller's *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens*; Samek's *The Blackfoot Confederacy*; Kathleen Jamieson's *Indian Women and the Law*; Treaty 7 Elders et al, *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7*.

Indian.”⁵¹ For over one hundred years, aboriginal women who married white or non-status aboriginal men were no longer “Indians” under the law and had to leave the reservation. Because Indian-ness was carried in and transmitted through the blood of men, a white woman became an “Indian” by marrying an aboriginal man, while an aboriginal woman became white.⁵²

The United States, on the other hand, did not have a clear legal definition of who was an Indian, and so aboriginal women who married white men could continue to live on the reserve along with their white husbands. What frustrated American officials about this situation was that the white men could then access tribal resources like land and cattle, and these “squaw men” came to be seen as “a disruptive element, causing headaches for many Indian agents.”⁵³ The category “squaw man” will be discussed at greater length below; it was also given to white men in Canada who married aboriginal women, but, while being equally racist in its origins, it had fewer economic implications in Canada and seems to have generated less concern among Canadian officials before 1885. As the preceding discussion has shown, even the bluntest tools of containment relied on discourses of race and gender, and it was these categories which proved more effective in the long run.

“To designate the future boundaries”: regulating space and race

While direct violence, treaties, starvation and legislation were important factors in achieving the governments’ goals of subduing and physically containing the Blackfoot, historians have paid less attention to the other, less visible tools the governments had at their disposal. A striking characteristic of the reports of Indian Agents, Commissioners,

⁵¹ Samek, *The Blackfoot Confederacy*, pp. 19-20

⁵² The most thorough critique of this aspect of the Indian Act can be found in Kathleen Jamieson’s *Indian Women and the Law In Canada: Citizens Minus* (Ottawa: Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1978).

Secretaries and Ministers alike is their obsession with the close supervision of and gathering precise information about native communities across each country, an obsession which paralleled their approach to western land. Intense supervision seemed to be almost as important as physical containment for “civilizing” aboriginal people. Foucault writes that with a system of surveillance “[t]here is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze where each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer... A superb formula: power exercised continuously and for what turns out to be a minimal cost.”⁵⁴ Canada and the United States certainly had a wide range of material constraints they could and did place around native peoples, but they also put great stock in the “inspecting gaze.” For example, in the first Annual Report of Canada’s Department of the Interior in 1875, Minister David Laird suggested that “local superintendents and agents should carefully observe the movements of those under their supervision, and report every sign of material, mental and moral improvement or retrogression. The adoption of this course would, no doubt, tend to mitigate some of the evils under which the Indians labor by bringing them more prominently into notice...”⁵⁵

But bringing aboriginal communities “more prominently into notice” was not easy: those immense spaces which were being used to attract white settlers made it very difficult to watch aboriginal communities closely. In 1873 United States Secretary of the Interior Columbus Delano felt compelled to remind his readers that western migration “has brought the Indians and our frontier population into close proximity over an immense area of

⁵³ Samek, *The Blackfoot Confederacy*, p. 20.

⁵⁴ Michel Foucault, “The Eye of Power,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977) p. 155.

⁵⁵ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for 1874*, Sessional Papers 1875, Volume 7, #8, p. 5.

country hitherto uninhabited by civilized man, and entirely occupied by the Indian and the buffalo.” The government could no longer solve problems “by removing the Indians into a country remote from civilization.” Instead, it now had to preserve

order and security between the Indians and whites through a vast region of country, not less than four thousand miles in length by two thousand five hundred in width, extending from the extreme northern and northwestern limits of Washington Territory to the Gulf of Mexico, and from the line which separates the United States from the British possessions in the North to the line which separates the United States from the territory of Mexico in the extreme southwest.⁵⁶

Similarly, in his Report for 1878 David Laird, now Canada’s Superintendent of Indian Affairs in the North-West, wrote that “it is impossible in this country, where communication is so infrequent and irregular, to give a general report for the Superintendency up to a later date than the 30th June.” He had been “unable to obtain sufficient information” to justify “attempting to give any statistics respecting the property of the Indians, and the crops raised by them.”⁵⁷ It was “impossible” for him, “with the information in my possession, or which I am able to obtain, to fill up the blanks in the tabular statement” created by the Department of the Interior. There was no way one Superintendent and two agents, who had been spending all of their time “paying the Indians their annuities, could furnish a statement, for instance, of the number of fish caught or quantity of furs taken, or the number of shanties and wigwams, or the bushels of grain raised in a district extending from the boundary line of the United States to the Arctic Ocean, and from Keewatin and Manitoba to British Columbia and Alaska.”⁵⁸ Although

⁵⁶ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5 43rd Congress, 1st session, 31 October 1873, p. viii.

⁵⁷ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for year ending 30 June 1878*, Report of David Laird from North-West Superintendency, Sessional Papers 1879, Volume 6, #7, p. 56.

⁵⁸ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Sessional Papers 1878, Volume 8, #10, p. 45.

Laird was more concerned with tracking production and Delano with preserving the peace, their shared nemesis was the size of their domains.

To overcome their problems with too much space, too-mobile aboriginal people and too few staff, authorities responsible for Indian affairs relied on the same tools they and their colleagues had used to managed western spaces. They struggled to get accurate information about their charges and tried to draw lines they could enforce. Every year their reports would stress their continuing efforts to achieve ever-higher standards of accuracy and thoroughness. For example, in 1872 United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs Francis Walker stressed that his report, “whether statistical or descriptive, has been carefully studied, with a view, to securing the highest degree of exactness consistent with the nature of the subject.”⁵⁹ Almost ten years later Secretary of the Interior Samuel Kirkwood wrote that he wanted to produce “a statement showing the acreage of each reservation, distinguishing between farming land, pasture land, timber and waste land, by comparing which with the number of Indians on each reservation, it will be easy to determine whether in justice to the Indians and the public interest any of the reservations could be reduced in size.” He was still waiting for the “necessary information” but was hopeful it would “be in the possession of the Department at an early day.”⁶⁰ In this instance, more information and more accurate information would help the Department to justify reducing the size of the reservations.

As they had before, the great distances between federal officials and the native people being investigated literally stood in the way of collecting accurate information. As

⁵⁹ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 42nd congress, 3rd session, pp. 401-02.

⁶⁰ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, House Executive Documents, #1, Part 5, 47th Congress, 1st Session, 1 November 1881, p. vii.

late as 1885 Secretary of the Interior Lamar complained that one of the biggest problems faced by his Department was “that the service is conducted from the seat of Government at Washington, through different agents, at great distances away.” The system was adequate “for general purposes of administration,” but made it impossible to collect “consistent, intelligent, and accurate information as to the true condition of the respective tribes and bands, such as will lead to a thorough understanding of the needs of each, and to the adoption of the best course for their advancement in the pursuits and habits of civilization.” He wanted to set up a traveling six-man commission which would visit all of the reservations and report on “the condition, peculiar circumstances, and needs of the Indians residing thereon.”⁶¹ In his view, the best way to deal with large spaces and mobile aboriginal communities was to send mobile white men into those large spaces.

The size of a region was not the only obstacle in the path of officials trying to find out exactly how many native people lived in it – once again the Blackfoot’s cross-border mobility hampered official efforts. In 1874 Montana Agent R. F. May reported that his efforts to “ascertain the number of souls comprising the three tribes” were not progressing as quickly or completely as he would like. He had “no reliable information” about the Blackfoot and Bloods because they still spent most of their time north of the line. He did not think that they numbered “over fifteen hundred each, though some accounts place the numbers much higher. Certain it is, that during the past four or five years they have fearfully diminished in numbers, and have become very poor. The unrestricted intercourse they have enjoyed, on British soil, with the worst and most reckless class of white men on earth, has brought its attendant evils -- whisky, powder and ball, disease and death.”⁶² In

⁶¹ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, House Executive Documents 49th Congress 1st Session, Document #1, Part 5, 1 November 1885, p. 27.

⁶² United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the*

his opinion, it was not just their “unrestricted” mobility which was killing the Blackfoot, but unrestricted mobility in a particular place (southern Alberta) which he characterized as one of drunkenness, violence, and disease. The unspoken conclusion was that if the Blackfoot would remain in northern Montana, their immobility would enable them to avoid such risks.

Getting an “accurate” head count of the Blackfoot under their supervision was one of the main concerns of local agents and one of the hardest goals to accomplish. In October 1870 Montana Indian Agent William Pease estimated that there were just over 9000 Blackfoot in his area. One year later Agent J. Armitage put the number at around 7500, and by 1881 Agent John Young estimated that there were around 7,000 Blackfoot on the reservation – striking evidence of the impact of disease and starvation on the Blackfoot tribes south of the border.⁶³

Canada was able to compile more “accurate” numbers by tallying the number of Blackfoot who were paid under Treaty 7. It was hardly a foolproof system, but it was a start. David Laird’s report for 1878 included a report on the ambitiously-titled “Census Return of Resident and Nomadic Indians in the Dominion of Canada,” which indicated that there were 4,928 “Blackfoot” in Treaty 7.⁶⁴ Five years later Minister of the Interior John

Interior, Report of Blackfoot Indian Agent R. F. May, House Executive Document #1, Part 5, 43rd congress, 2nd session, 10 September 1874, p. 568..

⁶³ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report from Blackfoot Indian Agent William Pease, House Executive Documents #1, Part 4, 41st Congress, 3rd session, 31 October 1870, p. 661. In his report for 1871 Blackfoot Agent J. Armitage estimated that there were 7500 people, divided between 3000 Blackfeet, 1750 Bloods, and 2750 Peigans. Department of the Interior, Annual Report, Report of Blackfoot Indian Agent J. Armitage, 42nd Congress, 1871, p. 843.

Department of Interior, *Annual Report*, Report of Blackfoot Agent John Young, House Executive Document #1, Part 5, 47th Congress, 1st Session, 31 July 31 1881, p. 169.

⁶⁴ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for year ending 30 June 1878*, Report of David Laird from North-West Superintendency, Sessional Papers 1879, Volume 6, #7, p. 229.

A Macdonald reported that there were about 5425 “Blackfoot”, divided between the Stonies, Sarcee, Bloods, Peigan and Blackfoot proper. He also went into great detail about the number of houses, barns and stables, acres of land under cultivation, head of stock, and even the number of “farming implements” each group had. These ranged from the 154 dwellings, 7 barns and stables and 186 acres under cultivation of the 2000 Siksika, to the 50 dwellings, 2 barns and stables, and 75 acres of cultivated land of the 425 Tsuu T’ina. He noted that the Stony Indians had made about \$5000 in furs the preceding year, and the Peigan had made about \$500.⁶⁵ Once the state got close enough to count “accurately”, they were clearly determined to count everything to the best of their abilities, and their inability to count the people with any precision did not stop them from assessing the Blackfoot’s economic assets.

Officials on both sides of the border confronted aboriginal resistance to being counted. As Paul Carter has written about white efforts to count and name Australia’s Aborigines, it was necessary not only to count them “but, for future reference, to fix them with names. Names made them facts which could be written down time and again.” A name could be tabulated against other sorts of information governments needed, like tribal designations or family sizes: “Names, in short, made them white history.”⁶⁶ Montana Agent May wrote in 1874 that “Many of the Indians are averse to giving their names, and in many cases they have not named their younger children. To meet this difficulty I avail myself of the ingenuity of the interpreter ... in assisting the parents in naming them.” He estimated it would take four to six more months to complete the census.⁶⁷ In 1880,

⁶⁵ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for year ending 31 December 1883*, Report of John A. Macdonald, Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, Sessional Papers 1884, Volume 3, #4, pp. lv-lvi.

⁶⁶ Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay*, p. 332

⁶⁷ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of the Blackfoot Indian Agent R. F. May, House Executive Document

Canada's Indian Commissioner Edgar Dewdney (who would later become Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West Territories) described the particular problems he had encountered trying to get an accurate count of the Sarcee tribe while making treaty payments. He seemed to be paying more people than were on his lists, and eventually realized that the Sarcee were taking advantage of the white men's inability to tell them apart: "several who would go off with a buffalo robe would return with a blanket pulled over their head, and would take up their positions with those who were unpaid, and it was with great difficulty that I, with a policeman, and Mr. Galt could keep track of them." He believed that the same thing was probably happening "at all the payments, and with all the tribes." To solve the problem he proposed a scheme whereby a ticket would be given to the male head of each family, with the number of people in his family and their location on each ticket: "[n]o Indian shall be paid until he has his ticket; and to receive rations or anything else from the Government, he must understand that he must be in possession of it. They can preserve these tickets if they please. I have known Indians to keep for years a little scrap of paper which they thought of value."⁶⁸

This incident reflects the faith Dewdney and other officials had that accurate counting could and would reinforce the power of the state, that gender norms could be an effective regulatory system in and of themselves, and that each could be used to effect the other. Supervision and counting had distinct limitations as containment techniques, however popular they were as bureaucratic tools in the later decades of the nineteenth century, and the racial and gender categories on which they were based had to be reinforced spatially. Determining the exact boundaries of the reservations, which would then be the dividing lines between native space and white space, was another tool both governments

#1, Part 5, 43rd congress, 2nd session, 10 September 1874, p. 568.

⁶⁸ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for 1879*, Sessional Papers 1880,

used to try and keep the lines clearly drawn between natives and whites. The constantly shifting and diminishing limits of Blackfoot territory in Montana, and the fact that the International Boundary Survey did not reach the area until 1875, meant that local officials often did not know where Blackfoot land (in the form of the reservation) began or ended. In 1870 Lt. Col. Sully of the Montana Superintendency urged the Government to send out someone to “designate the future boundaries” of the Blackfoot reservation. He needed to know where the line was if he was to use troops to regulate it by keeping “citizens” [meaning whites] out and Indians in.⁶⁹

Local and national officials wanted and needed their own demarcations to take precedence in Blackfoot country. In 1873 Montana Agent William Ensign assured his superiors that the recent executive order establishing a reservation for the Blackfoot was going to be “of incalculable importance and benefit to the Indians and to the Department. Heretofore, with no defined reservation limits, a great portion of the work of the agent has necessarily proved futile in its results. ... This laudable change will at once work radical cures for a great many existing evils.”⁷⁰ He never specified precisely why or how “defined reservation limits” were going to cure the evils of the Blackfoot and their agents; it was simply taken for granted that they would.

Ten years later, however, the lines remained invisible to whites and the Blackfoot alike, and therefore were not particularly effective at regulating race and space. In 1881 and again in 1883 Commissioner of Indian Affairs H. Price noted that many reservations in

Volume 3, #4, p. 93 and p. 101.

⁶⁹ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Montana Superintendency under Lieutenant-Colonel Alfred Sully, House Executive Documents #1, Part 4, 41st Congress, 3rd session, 31 October 1870, p. 656.

⁷⁰ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Blackfoot Agent William T. Ensign, House Executive Document #1, Part 5, 43rd Congress, 1st session, 31 October 1873, p. 620.

the country still lacked “a proper and exact definition of the boundary lines ... by plain and permanent marks....” The Indians are “naturally jealous” of their land rights while the whites were eager to ignore those rights, and Price could not think of anything “more fruitful of discord in the Indian country than the absence of proper marks and monuments to indicate the outboundaries of our Indian reservations.”⁷¹ In 1883 he stated that there were “thousands of miles of reservation boundaries that have never been defined and marked by official survey, and the wonder is that the conflicts between the Indians and settlers are not more frequent than they are, when it is considered that in very many instances it is found absolutely impossible to determine which party is in the right.”⁷² The importance of surveying was once again reinforced; property rights required clearly-defined and agreed-upon lines.

Although Treaty 7 was signed with the First Nations of southern Alberta in 1877, the government did not start surveying reservations for the separate bands until 1883 when the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway was imminent. In his report for that year Agent Denny indicated that Mr. Nelson of the Dominion Lands Survey was spending the summer “definitely fixing the limits of the reserves, and also laying out the timber limits for the Indians. Mr. Nelson has taken great pains to take the chiefs with him, and has pointed out to them where the lines of the reserves run.” Denny asked that maps of the reserves be sent to his office as soon as possible, “as many questions arise as to the exact position of the different lines which I cannot answer unless I am made acquainted with the surveys, which

⁷¹ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Commissioner of Indian Affairs H. Price, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 47th congress 1st session, 1881.

⁷² United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs H. Price, House Executive Document #1, Part 5, 48th Congress, 1st session, 10 October 1883, p. 13.

heretofore I have not been.”⁷³ As the local official responsible for policing the lines between whites and Blackfoot, Denny’s authority was seriously hampered by not knowing where those lines were.

“Developing his true manhood”: race, space and masculinity on Blackfoot reserves

Yet even after this full range of direct and indirect colonizing tools was supposed to have contained and re-made the Blackfoot, white officials were still struggling to keep the lines drawn between whites and natives, and were a long way from achieving their “civilizing” mission. After drawing and re-drawing treaty and reserve boundaries to separate “Indians” from “whites,” officials realized that they still had to change what happened behind those lines or else the spatial and racial categories upon which those boundaries were built would become meaningless. Federal containment strategies proved insufficient in Blackfoot country at least in part because of the Blackfoot’s transnational mobility; white officials thus had to find other ways of achieving more complete control over the spatial and racial boundaries. Western peoples, like western lands, had to be bounded by the borders of their reservations, lines which everyone could “see” and in theory agree upon. Those lines were supposed to represent the spatial and racial separation of whites and natives, in theory if not in practice. To achieve this desired effect, however, officials had to try to recast the economic and gender norms of Blackfoot men and women on the reserves.

For example, setting the perimeter of a reservation implied that all natives thus surrounded would stay on the reserve, but this had to be reinforced with other tactics.

⁷³ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for year ended 31st December 1883*, Report of Cecil Denny, Agent for Treaty 7,

Staying on the reserve implied that the Blackfoot would take up stationary lives and economic activities, which meant that houses and farms and fields and corrals had to be situated and then enforced. Enforcing the fixedness of a farm and house required the re-drawing of fundamental economic and gender patterns of Blackfoot culture. Blackfoot men resisted farming because their masculinity and male status were defined through the mobility of hunting and horse raids; farming was not hunting and did not generate wealth through the accumulation of horses, and therefore farming was not seen as particularly masculine by Blackfoot men. Nor was ranching a particularly good substitute for hunting because tending cattle in an enclosed space required none of the courage or mobility of the hunt.

The rationale behind the policies aimed at plains people followed this tautology: “Indians” couldn’t be civilized until they were immobilized permanently, nor immobilized until they were “civilized,” both of which required a fundamental change in gender norms. As Dolores Janiewski writes of the United States, “the expansionist republic promoted gender transformation to create possessive, patriarchal households in which self-sufficient Christian male farmers would live in nuclear family households while women, excluded from treaty negotiations and leadership positions, would occupy themselves with domestic duties.”⁷⁴ Canadian and American officials stated frequently and explicitly that to be like white men, native men had to become farmers or ranchers, marry one woman and support her children, and feel an individual bond of possession with a small, individualized piece of land. The rarely-mentioned corollary was that to be like white women, native women had

Sessional Papers 1884, Volume 3, #4, 10 July 1883, p. 83.

⁷⁴ Dolores Janiewski, “Gendered Colonialism: The ‘Woman Question’ in Settler Society,” in *Nation, Empire, Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race*, eds. Ruth Roach Pierson and Nupur Chaudhuri, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998) p. 62.

to become dependents of their husbands and concern themselves exclusively with children and a household.

Every mark of “progress” was gendered. For example, aboriginal women were not part of treaty discussions or named on treaty rolls. Agents were also pleased to note when Blackfoot “headmen” indicated a willingness to settle down on a particular piece of land and build a Euro-North-American-style house, inside of which would reside (in an unspoken assumption) one (and only one) wife who would keep it clean according to Euro-North-American norms. Polygamy was common among the Blackfoot in the early nineteenth century. Their transition to a horse culture in the eighteenth century, their role in the buffalo robe trade in the early nineteenth, and almost constant warfare in both centuries, had all contributed to increasing the number of wives a prominent man would have. Women greatly outnumbered men because of the constant warfare, and the increased importance of buffalo robes for trading meant that it was an asset for a man to have multiple wives to prepare robes for trade.⁷⁵ Wearing “civilized” clothes was also praised in agents’ reports because such clothes were sharply gender differentiated and covered more of the female body. Sending native children to a fixed place to receive racially- and gender-appropriate education became a particularly cherished goal of white officials, on the assumption that fundamental and lasting change was going to have to come from the younger generations.

Until recently ethnographers and historians paid little attention to the gendered processes behind the uneven transition from independence to reservation life for the Blackfoot, and the intimate connection those processes had to the constructions of space.

⁷⁵ Historian Robert Utley notes that while a prominent man in the 1820s might have had three or four wives, by the 1850s that number had risen. A man could not afford to have several wives, however, unless he had significant herds of horses, which “in turn

Older works, like John Ewers 1958 study *The Blackfeet*, focus on the “pre-reservation” period to paint a now-outdated portrait of native women as “drudges” and note that Blackfoot men balked at white efforts to change them into farmers because they saw it as “women’s work.” In a similar vein, Esther Goldfrank’s 1945 study of the Kainah reserve in southern Alberta also paints a bleak picture of the lives of native women, and concludes that reserve life improved their status. More recent Canadian scholarship questions whether pre-reserve life was as harsh for plains women as Ewers and Goldfrank suggest. Historians like Pamela White and Sarah Carter have analyzed the experiences of aboriginal women after the transition to reserve life was largely complete across the West, and paint a more complicated and less positive picture of the impact of reservation life on First Nations women.⁷⁶ Less attention has been paid to the impact of reservation life on native men, or to understanding how the transition from independence to reservations took place and the role gender played in that transition. For example, federal efforts to limit the mobility of aboriginal men by making them into farmers or ranchers unintentionally created a greater need for aboriginal women to leave the reserves to find food or trade with local whites. As will be discussed below, stopping women from leaving the reserves became an objective shared by white and aboriginal men alike.

gave horse-stealing raids against other Indians a prominence in warfare absent in earlier times.” Utley, *The Indian Frontier of the American West*, p. 29-30.

⁷⁶ Ewers, *The Blackfeet*; Goldfrank, *Changing Configurations in the Social Organization of a Blackfoot Tribe during the Reserve Period* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1945); White, “Restructuring the Domestic Sphere – Prairie Indian Women on Reserves: Image, Ideology, and State Policy, 1880-1930” (1987 PhD dissertation, McGill University); Carter, *Capturing Women*. See also Sarah Carter’s excellent historiographical discussion of the treatment of gender in Canadian native history in “First Nations Women of Prairie Canada in the Early Reserve Years: A Preliminary Enquiry,” in *Women of the First Nations: Power, Wisdom and Strength*, edited by Christine Miller and Patricia Chuchryk, with Marie Smallface Marule, Brenda Manyfingers, and Cheryl Deering, (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 1997), pp. 51-76.

Regulating the spatial limits of aboriginal mobility was connected at a fundamental level with a desire to regulate every aspect of the social and racial boundaries between natives and whites. Each successive re-drawing of the racial and spatial boundaries created the need for still more lines, even as the whole process became increasingly contradictory. After all, Canadian and American Indian officials shared the goal of eventually rendering such lines meaningless by assimilating “Indians” so completely that they would eventually disappear as a group. In the meantime, however, those officials wanted to believe in the utter separateness of “the races” and the lines between whites and Indians to be clearly drawn to reinforce their supposed obviousness.⁷⁷ American officials seemed to care more about white men intruding on the reserves and “degrading” themselves and their race by “going native”, while the Canadians got more upset by Indian women heading into white towns. Canada’s Indian Act ensured that an aboriginal woman who married a white man had to leave the reserve anyway, and therefore her white husband could not access the land or resources on the reserve. American officials had no such legislation to fall back on, and perceived white men living on the reservations as economic and political threats. Because of these different national constructions of racialized masculinity and the threats posed by inter-racial mobility, the phrase “squaw man” had different implications depending on which side of the border that man was on.

One of the dominant stereotypes of plains people in the nineteenth century was that they were lazy. Whites viewed the life of nomadic hunter-gatherers as easier than that of the sturdy white homesteader and his wife because farming required steady year-round labour.⁷⁸ Officials believed that the best and fastest way to make “Indians” into whites was

⁷⁷ One of the best discussions of late-nineteenth century constructions of race and gender can be found in Gail Bederman’s *Manliness and Civilization*.

⁷⁸ While both governments said that they wanted aboriginal communities to be self-sufficient as quickly as possible, different steps towards that end were taken in each

to make them into farmers, and thus make their lives more sedentary and more labour-intensive. During the 1870s various American officials suggested allowing individual Indians to access land under the provisions of the Homestead Act because, as one phrased it, homesteading “corrects the roving instinct by requiring a residence in the same place for five years.”⁷⁹ This recommendation was never acted upon, however, due to the prevailing assumption that Indians weren’t really “developed” enough as a race to handle actual homesteading.

American and Canadian officials were determined to make aboriginal communities do as much Euro-American-style work as possible because of their firm belief that such work was “essential” for “producing civilization.” In a telling indication of the gendered nature of white “civilization,” United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs H. Price stated in 1881 that the “greatest kindness the government can bestow upon the Indian is to teach *him* to labor for *his* own support, thus developing *his true manhood*, and, as a consequence, making *him* self-relying and self-supporting.” He concluded that “[s]avage and civilized life cannot live and prosper on the same ground. One of the two must die.”⁸⁰

Officials in Washington and Ottawa recognized that some reservations, like those of the Blackfoot, were never going to be any good for farming, so their next option was to stock those reservations with cattle. Ranching was considered less effective than farming

country. Sarah Carter’s *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* focusses primarily on the Plains Cree and analyzes the ways Canada’s Department of Indian Affairs actually took steps to ensure that aboriginal prairie farmers at the end of the nineteenth century were prevented from becoming self-sufficient or profitable. Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s, 1990).

⁷⁹ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, House Executive Document #1, Part 5, 43rd congress, 2nd session, 31 October 1874, p. 5.

⁸⁰ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs H. Price, House Executive Documents, #1, Part 5, 47th Congress, 1st Session, 24 October 1881, pp. 1-2.

for turning Indians into whites because it was not as sedentary and required less constant year-round labour, but it was better than nothing. Refashioning Blackfoot men into white men through farming and ranching became a more pressing concern in the late 1870s and early 1880s as the buffalo disappeared. The general containment of the Blackfoot seemed to be at hand but so was starvation, and both governments were reducing the amount of money they were spending on aboriginal communities.

Convincing Blackfoot men to give up the hunt was a struggle for local Indian agents because the men resisted the change to a sedentary life as long as possible and objected to taking up what they deemed to be less masculine pursuits. In his 1877 report Montana Agent John Young wrote that he was finding it “difficult to prevail even on the more sensible and reflecting” men of the community “to give up their nomadic life and settle down to farm or raise cattle. They admit the time approaches fast when the buffalo will disappear, but until then the excitement of the chase and the notion that labor is only for women will prevent the change to a more certain and civilized life.” A few of “the headmen” had traded their horses for cattle and were “talking of selecting locations and asking help to build cabins, which of course at the proper time will be gladly afforded.”⁸¹ Two years later growing numbers of the Blackfoot were following the “example of the few who had built cabins and given up their wandering mode of life... . The inclination to wear civilized costume is also on the increase; labor is held in better estimation by the men, more are willing to take part in it, and the number of men and women who work regularly, and not by fits and starts, is increasing.” Given that only two years earlier “no civilized labor of any kind had been performed by any of the Indians at this agency, and that any kind of

Emphasis added.

⁸¹ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Blackfoot Agent John Young, House Executive Document #1, Part 5, 45th Congress, 2nd session, 1 August 1877, p. 527.

labor except that of the hunt was held to be degrading and despicable by the men, the altered state of feeling in this regard is very remarkable. Now some of their most influential chiefs set an example to the rest by going into the field and working themselves, instead of simply standing by and seeing their squaws work.” Young admitted that the rapid disappearance of buffalo and other game, and the fact that the Indians were expected to work for their supplies, had helped bring about “this rapid and commendable change of disposition and habit, which only needs to be wisely and patiently fostered in order to make these Indians self-supporting in a very few years.”⁸² Blackfoot men were not eager to give up their traditional way of life because it represented masculinity and freedom, and their agents could only ask their superiors for more time and support.

In the meantime, the agents were pleased to note every “improvement” in the spatial and gendered behaviour of Blackfoot men and women. In 1881 Young praised the Blackfoot’s progress, stating that they showed “a disposition to meet the altering conditions of their surroundings, keep friends with the white man, gradually give up their nomadic habits, and adopt a civilized mode of living and obtaining support.”⁸³ Achieving that “civilized mode” involved more than just the kind and volume of work done by the men however: Young was proud to announce that there were now 80 cabins on the reservations, twice that of the previous year, and the women’s housekeeping had improved: “no untidiness; floors swept; beds neatly made up; the walls often covered with brown muslin, and in many cases ornamented with pictures from illustrated papers.” The agency’s herd was now up to about 600 head, had “suffered little from the severe winter, are not molested

⁸² United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report from Blackfeet Agency by John Young, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5. 46th Congress, 2nd Session, 15 November 1879, p. 197.

⁸³ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of United States Indian Agent John Young, House Executive Documents, #1, Part 5, 47th Congress, 1st Session, 31 July 1881, p. 169.

by our Indians, and in due time will furnish a needed addition to the beef supply.” More of the local Blackfoot were wearing “citizens’ dress; they make progress in the management of teams and wagons; in plowing, harrowing, and hoeing crops; in fence building, cutting timber, and in building their own cabins; appear to take pride in keeping up their reputation for obedience, and are anxious to be instructed in what is required of them.” He repeated his belief that within a few years the Blackfoot would be “self-sustaining and prosperous,”⁸⁴ as long as they continued to advance towards Euro-American gender and economic norms.

And the Blackfoot in Montana did continue to “advance” according to this standard, even in the face of the rapid onset of starvation between 1881 and 1883. Nearly 200 “substantial and comfortable” cabins had been built by the time Young made his report in 1883, and most of them had “small patches of cultivated ground attached. They are scattered over the reservation where there is tillable land....” Unfortunately, the farms were “so far apart” that they could not be properly supervised, and widespread starvation on the reserve in the preceding two years meant that seed potatoes had to be eaten and a night guard posted for the cattle herd. Young was not too critical of the fact that some of the cattle had been killed because he knew it had been necessary for the Blackfoot to feed themselves. He added that the two “impediments to the success of Indian farming” were that the Indians needed stronger horses and more skill to break up the ground, and that “more supervision and instruction” was needed “while planting, caring for, and reaping crops than it is possible for the limited agency help to give. The Indian will work if shown how, and he understands the benefit resulting. His imitative power is great.”⁸⁵ The

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 170-71.

⁸⁵ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Blackfoot Agent John Young, House Executive Document #1, Part 5, 48th Congress, 1st session, 6 August 1883, pp. 154-55.

Blackfoot might never achieve truly independent manhood, but Young believed that they were capable of coming close.

Canadian authorities were also trying to reshape Blackfoot masculinity by making the men into farmers and ranchers, with the same limited success. In 1878 Lieutenant-Colonel James Macleod, Commissioner of the North-West Mounted Police, wrote to his superiors at the Department of the Interior that a shipment of cattle had not arrived at Fort Macleod in time to be distributed to the Blackfoot with the annual treaty payments. He believed this was probably for the best, however, because all of the tribes “show a decided disinclination to receive them at present, fearing that on account of their wandering habits they would not be able to take care of them. I do not think they are as yet ready to undertake their charge, and it would be very unfortunate if such a valuable herd of cattle should be lost to them.” He had tried to convince them “that their true interest lay in their undertaking the herding of them at as early a date as possible,” but they had asked him to make other arrangements for the cattle until the following spring.⁸⁶

Three years later Indian Commissioner for the North-West Territories and Manitoba Dewdney noted that “the bulk of the Indians” in Treaty 7 “are still very unsettled and have not yet realized their position.” Progress was evident on the Blood reserve where the “houses are built with some regularity, more so than on any of our reserves, but they are too close to one another.” He reported that the Peigan west of Fort Macleod had “proved themselves to be very good Indians, and have never given us any trouble.” He included the usual statement “showing the whereabouts of our Indians in the North-West Territories, on the 31st December, 1881.” Most of them were on their reserves or belonged to a reserve which was “already located,” but he feared that the Government was going to have

⁸⁶ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for year ending 30 June 1878*, Letter from Lieutenant-Colonel Macleod, Commissioner of the North West Mounted

to provide up to another 1,000 square miles to accommodate all of them.⁸⁷ “Good Indians” were the ones who had already relinquished most of their mobility, even if they did then build houses which were too close to each other, but at the end of 1881 it was clear that the numbered treaties across the prairies had not yet contained the western First Nations.

Two years later Cecil Denny, the agent for Treaty 7, was able to report that most of the Blackfoot were spending most of their time on their reserves, and the men were generally working as directed. The preceding winter had “passed off very quietly among the Indians on the different reserves on this Treaty, with a very few exceptions. They remained quietly on their reserves, and our Farm Instructors had little difficulty in keeping them quiet, and getting them to do what work was required, such as cutting fence rails for their fields for the coming spring.” The men on the Blood and Peigan reserves had worked particularly well during the winter “cutting and hauling rails.” Cutting fence rails was a sign of improvement because fencing property indicated ownership, but the rails also had to be replaced because the women would use the fencing for firewood during the winter, in spite of efforts by “the chiefs and head men” to prevent it. Some Blood men had also been paid to work in the mountains, “assisting white men to cut timber to be used for a new Agency on that reserve the following summer.” The Peigan “are well behaved and are now building new and better houses. Mr. Begg, the Instructor, manages them well, and deserves credit for the improvement in the tribe since he has had charge.”⁸⁸ By the mid-

Police, Sessional Papers 1879, Volume 6, #7, p. 67.

⁸⁷ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for 1881*, Report of Edgar Dewdney, Indian commissioner for the North-West Territories and Manitoba, Sessional Papers, Volume 5, #6.

⁸⁸ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for year ended 31 December 1883*, Report of C. E. Denny, Agent for Treaty 7, Sessional Papers 1884, Volume 3, #4, 10 July 1883, pp. 78-79. Alexander Begg was also the local rancher who had written favourably about ranching and the lease system in southern Alberta in the mid-1880s (see chapter 1), and wrote and distributed the questionnaires for the CPR’s 1885 survey of women settlers in the North-West

1880s, such “improvement” was evident among the Blackfoot on both sides of the line. At the very least, the men were starting to behave more like white men, and they were demonstrating at least some willingness to modify their uses of the borderlands by building houses, cutting fence rails, and limiting their mobility. However, these reports also indicate that Blackfoot men and women, their economic activities and their use of space, were still refusing to conform to the patterns white authorities were trying to set out for them.

“Squaw men” and “the worst possible errands”: challenging the boundaries of race, space and gender

Containing the Blackfoot on small patches of land with herds of cattle and European-style dwellings was only one set of goals Canadian and American officials shared. They also wanted to alter the gender norms of adults at a more fundamental level. Officials wanted to end polygamous marriages, make aboriginal women behave like submissive, domesticated Euro-North-American women and aboriginal men behave like farmers, all of which involved imposing their own ideas of appropriate femininity and masculinity. In 1876, for example, the Indian Commissioner in Winnipeg J. A. N. Provencher stressed that “[t]he best means to induce the Indians to give up their nomadic habits, is, that they should find home-comfort, a well-brought-up family, and all the peace and contentment given by an industrious wife and an intelligent mother.”⁸⁹ United States Commissioner of Indian Affairs E. A. Hayt wrote in his 1879 report that Congress should

Territories. Susan Jackel, ed. *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty: English Emigrant Gentlewomen in the Canadian West, 1880-1914* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982) p. 65.

⁸⁹ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for 1875*, Report of Indian Commissioner in Winnipeg J. A. N. Provencher, Sessional Papers 1876, Volume 7, #9, p. 36.

ban Indian polygamy and insist that Agents “marry all the Indians cohabitating together upon the various reservations, giving them a certificate of such marriage; and after the beginning of next year no Indian should be permitted to marry more than one wife.”⁹⁰ Four years later United States Secretary of the Interior Teller devoted a significant portion of his report on Indian Affairs criticizing the “lax character” of aboriginal marriages and suggesting remedies. A native man, having chosen a wife, “should be compelled to continue that relation with her, unless dissolved by some recognized tribunal on the reservation or by the courts.” He “should also be instructed that he is under obligation to care for and support, not only his wife, but his children,” and if he failed to do so he should be punished “either by confinement in the guardhouse or agency prison, or by a reduction of his rations.”⁹¹ In an effort to impose the standards of patriarchal gender norms on aboriginal communities, Teller wanted native men to face stiffer punishments for non-compliance than a white man would have.

Yet official concerns about the state of aboriginal marriages and gender norms paled in comparison to their concerns about relationships between aboriginal women and white men.⁹² White men who married or lived on reserves with native women were assumed to

⁹⁰ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Commissioner of Indian Affairs E. A. Hayt, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 46th Congress, 2nd Session, 15 November 1879, p. 77.

⁹¹ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report*, House Executive Document #1, Part 5, 48th Congress, 1st session, 1 November 1883, p. xi.

⁹² Sarah Carter’s *Capturing Women* and Adele Perry’s *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001) offer excellent analyses of this dynamic in other times and places in the Canadian west. Carter’s work on the post-1885 prairie context also sets up a fascinating contrast with the pre-1885 period discussed here by noting that in the later period the purity of white women was increasingly constructed as vulnerable and the sexuality of aboriginal women increasingly constructed as dangerous. Fears about the purity of white women were also more common when the “other” was black, as many historians of American race relations have observed. Peggy Pascoe’s “Race, Gender, and Intercultural Relations: The Case of Interracial Marriage” includes little discussion of marriages between aboriginals and whites but does offer an intriguing cultural

degrade themselves and were seen as a dangerous source of discontent on the reserves. Canada dealt with the problem by passing the 1876 Indian Act, and by the mid-1880s American officials were calling for a similar act after years of complaining about being unable to stop white men with native wives from living on reserves, but reports on the issue reveal somewhat different emphases on either side of the line.

Canada's Indian Act was intended to make it easy for officials in southern Alberta to maintain the racial and spatial boundaries between aboriginal and white people, because it gave them the authority to force aboriginal women with white husbands off the reserves. However, they were unable to completely stop First Nations individuals from leaving their reserves, and they particularly objected to aboriginal women, particularly the Tsuu T'ina whose reserve was close to Calgary, leaving their reserve and heading to town where it was assumed they would engage in prostitution. Prostitution was not mentioned at all by Blackfoot agents in Montana, perhaps because the reserve wasn't close enough to any sizeable white settlements and perhaps because their concern was the denigration of white masculinity.

It is not surprising that Canadian concerns about the morality of Tsuu T'ina women in particular (and by extension the morality of aboriginal women in general) were not articulated until the early 1880s. By that time all aboriginal people in southern Alberta were supposed to be confined to their reserves, Calgary was growing rapidly, and the Canadian Pacific Railway was nearing completion. The on-going mobility of aboriginal women, for what white authorities assumed were "immoral" reasons, was thus challenging the fixity of

analysis of the ways in which opposition to interracial marriages in the United States was always as much about gender relations as race relations. Pascoe, "Race, Gender and Intercultural Relations," *Writing the Range: Race, Class and Culture in the Women's West*, edited and with introductions by Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Armitage, (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), pp. 69-80.

the physical, gender, racial and sexual boundaries which were supposed to be in place to keep whites and natives apart.

When it came to restricting the mobility of Tsuu T'ina women, white authorities received some surprising assistance from Tsuu T'ina men. Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs John A Macdonald regretfully declared in his 1883 report that the Sarcee "are probably the least promising of any of the Bands within the territory covered by Treaty No. 7. The proximity of this Reserve to Calgary operates detrimentally ... as they are continually visiting the latter place and neglecting their fields. The demoralization of their women from the same cause is very great." He had asked the Indian Commissioner for the North-West Territories and the Commissioner of the North-West Mounted Police to come up with a plan to stop Indians from even camping near any white settlements, "as it has been represented to me that these places are made the resorts of depraved Indians for the worst purposes." Deputy Minister Vankoughnet had spoken with the Chief and Councillors of the Sarcee about the frequency with which Sarcee men and women went to Calgary, and his report of the discussion indicates that both sides agreed that the women's mobility was the bigger problem:

[T]he Chief replied that he had done his best to check the evil so far as the women were concerned; that he had even gone in carts and forced them to return to their reserve; but that they would no sooner arrive than they would be followed by evil disposed persons from Calgary and induced to return to that place. The Chief stated that unless his efforts were supported by the authorities they would, as they had done in the past, prove futile to prevent the continuance of the evil.

As a result, the farm instructor on the Sarcee reserve had been ordered to stop working on his home farm "and to devote his entire attention to the Indians; and it is hoped that by adopting this plan and taking proper measures to suppress the evil of the Indians resorting so frequently to Calgary, there will be sensible improvement in the condition of this Band

in a short time.”⁹³ Once again, officials hoped that closer supervision would mitigate their ongoing problems with Blackfoot mobility, and if it failed physical restraint was always an option.

These two problems, the mobility of Tsuu T’ina women and the short distance between the Tsuu T’ina reserve and the small town of Calgary, constantly overlapped in the reports of local officials. In his report for 1883 Sub-agent for Treaty 7 W. Pocklington complained that the Sarcee had given him “constant trouble” during the previous winter. The real problem was “that they are too close to Calgary, and take every possible opportunity of going there, more particularly the women, who, I am sorry to say, go on the worst possible errands. There is, and will continue to be, a great amount of disease among them, as they are, without doubt, the dirtiest Indians in the territory.” He asked to be allowed to move his headquarters to Calgary because the “troublesome” band “conducted themselves better” when he was closer to them. The move to a more central location would also save him “a good many hundred miles driving” over the course of a year.⁹⁴ For Pocklington, the proximity of the reserve to Calgary was the root cause of the Sarcee’s mobility and “immorality,” and closer supervision would not just increase his chances of containing them on their reserves but also be more convenient for him.

In response to these calls for change the Department of Indian Affairs grouped the Nakoda reserve west of Calgary and the Tsuu T’ina reserve south-west of the town into their own agency in 1885. The goal was to provide the more intense supervision which

⁹³ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for year ended 31 December 1883*, Report of John A Macdonald, Minister and Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, Sessional Papers 1884, Volume 3, #4, pp. lii-liii.

⁹⁴ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for year ended 31 December 1883*, Report of W. Pocklington, Sub-Agent for Treaty 7, Sessional Papers 1884, Volume 3, #4, 10 July 1883, p. 86. Sarah Carter notes that these efforts to restrict the mobility of aboriginal women hampered “not only their traditional strategies for survival but also

could not be achieved while they were sharing an agent with the Siksika reserve at Blackfoot Crossing, and which their proximity to Calgary's "temptations" demanded.⁹⁵ A subsequent report stated that the new acting agent and his family were residing on the Sarcee reserve, and their presence and example was proving to have a positive effect: "The men are more orderly, the women more cleanly, and this year, for the first time, I have seen the men engaged in regular farm work."⁹⁶ In general Canada and the United States wanted Indians and whites to be separate, but some whites were needed in close proximity to aboriginal communities to act as models of appropriate gender and work norms.

American reports from the 1870s and 1880s provide an interesting contrast, in that they were more concerned about white men visiting or living on the reserves than they were about aboriginal women leaving their reserves. Federal reports on Indian affairs in these years reveal overlapping fears about white men creating dissent on the reserves, gaining an economic advantage over other white men in the area, and abdicating their whiteness and masculinity by choosing to live with aboriginal women on aboriginal land. Indeed, it is striking to note that when authorities responsible for Indian Affairs objected to the behaviour of these men, it became convenient to portray native people as passive and easily manipulated instead of as violent and resistant to change. In 1875 for example the United States Commissioner for Indian Affairs Edward Smith noted that it was not just the Indians' "constitutional disrelish for toil" that would make it difficult to make them work for their annuities: "They will also be incited to such resistance by half-breeds and squaw men, traders, and other interested parties, who always turn up as champions for the rights

their search for new jobs and resources." Carter, *Capturing Women*, p. 188.

⁹⁵ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for year ended 31 December 1885*, Report of John A. Macdonald, Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, Sessional Papers 1886, Volume 4, #4, p. xlvi.

⁹⁶ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for year ended 31st December 1885*, Report of Inspector of Indian Agencies, Sessional

of an Indian whenever any measure is proposed which threatens to disturb their peculiar relation as his next friend..." He wanted "this low class of whites" expelled from the reservations.⁹⁷ Smith and his successors had fewer legislative provisions than their Canadian colleagues to fall back on, but still shared the belief that their problems would be solved if they could keep natives and whites in separate spaces.

Official fears about the breakdown of the separate racial and economic spheres which they were struggling to create and enforce led them to construct native land as places where certain whites were not entitled to tread. In 1879 Commissioner of Indian Affairs E. A. Hayt also complained about "intruders" who "resort to all kinds of devices and schemes to obtain a foothold on Indian soil, and offer ready and varied excuses for their continued unlawful occupancy of the same." The biggest problem was the "great influx" of "squawmen, or white men married to Indian women.... In most instances the man is penniless and depended for subsistence on the rations which his wife draws from the government, but it is not long before he has a herd of cattle ranging over the reservation." Hayt suspected that the men stole government-issued cattle and changed the brands to build up their own herds, assuming "that by marriage they have all the rights of full-blooded Indians, and they endeavour to exercise these rights not only in possession of cattle themselves, but also in ranging and pasturing upon Indian reservations large herds belonging to other white men." He wanted white men who were "cohabitating with Indian women" to be forced "to marry them or quit the reservation."⁹⁸ The government might not be able to stop the men from living on the reserves and accessing resources which were

Papers 1886, Volume 4, #4, 31 December 1885, p. 158.

⁹⁷ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs Edward Smith, House Executive Document #1, Part 5, 44th Congress, 1st session, 1875, p. 527.

⁹⁸ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Commissioner of Indian Affairs E. A. Hayt, House Executive

intended to help aboriginal communities, but they could at least try to force mixed-race couples to legalize their relationships.

By the mid-1880s objections to the presence of white men on reserves had reached the highest level. Secretary of the Interior Lamar wrote in 1885 that it was a “cherished purpose” of his Department to “suppress” the “great evils arising from the presence of bad and vicious white men within the reservations,” particularly from the “class known as ‘squaw men,’ who marry or act as husbands with Indian women. The evil influence of these squaw men is said to be very great.” They “foment discord among the Indians themselves, disturb their peaceful inclinations towards the settlers in the country surrounding the reservation, and incite opposition on the part of the Indians to the measures adopted and regulations prescribed by the Department for their advancement and civilization.” Lamar was still waiting for a satisfactory explanation as to “how these men could evade the laws against intruders upon Indian reservations by being in the character of husbands to Indian women,” and so recommended that a law be passed “that any Indian woman who shall hereafter marry a citizen of the United States shall be deemed a citizen, and that all children born of such marriage shall be deemed citizens. There should be no exception to the law which makes the wife and children follow the state and condition of the father in favor of men whose low instincts make them abandon civilization and hide themselves from the restraints of law and free themselves from social ordinances and observances.”⁹⁹ Although he did not mention the provisions of Canada’s Indian Act, it is telling that he wanted the United States to pursue an identical course of action.

Documents #1, Part 5, 46th Congress, 2nd Session, 15 November 1879, p. 104, 77.

⁹⁹ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, House Executive Documents 49th Congress 1st Session, Document #1, Part 5, 1 November 1885, pp. 28-29.

“Securing the continued attendance”: Schooling Blackfoot children

Given how difficult it was to change the ways of Blackfoot men and women, it is not surprising that white authorities put their faith in education as the way to permanently change every aspect of aboriginal culture.¹⁰⁰ What is more surprising is that officials in charge of Indian Affairs did not substantially modify tactics which were working so slowly with native adults: they wanted aboriginal children to go to school and stay there, impose “gender-appropriate” education on them and remove the vestiges of their own cultures and languages, and get them to submit to the authority of white adults. Getting the children to go to school and stay put for the required amount of time was the biggest challenge, and one that was handled very differently by American and Canadian officials in Blackfoot country.

In northern Montana a day school had been opened on the reserve in the early 1870s and the agent believed that the children were more likely to come to school if they lived nearby. In his report for 1873 Agent William T. Ensign noted that the school had opened but had taken a while to catch on. Hundreds of children had stopped by, but left as soon as their curiosity about the place was satisfied. This situation did not change until the white children of agency employees started attending regularly, providing an “example” for the Blackfoot children to follow, “and around this little nucleus others have been gathering, until at present there are twenty-eight or thirty regular scholars...”¹⁰¹ Those numbers

¹⁰⁰ For an extensive discussion of First Nations education in Canada see J. R. Miller, *Shingwauk’s Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996). Indian education as one aspect of the relationship between aboriginal communities and the United States government is discussed in Prucha’s *Great Father. A more focussed monograph is Michael Coleman’s American Indian Children at School, 1850-1930* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1993), which relies on autobiographical accounts of aboriginal children’s experiences.

¹⁰¹ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Blackfoot Agent William T. Ensign, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5 43rd Congress, 1st session, 31 October 1873, pp. 620-21.

changed very little over the next twelve years because, as Agent John Young noted in 1881, “the roaming habits of the parents” made it impossible to secure “the continued attendance of the same children.”¹⁰² A further step was taken when a boarding school was built on the reserve in 1885, and opened with twenty students. The day school still existed but Agent Allen reported that it was never well-attended because the Blackfoot were “scattered over a large amount of territory, the great majority of these located several miles from the agency; hence the attendance at the day school is not as large as it would be if they were settled in close proximity to the agency.”¹⁰³ Agents in northern Montana believed that the way to overcome the mobility of the children was to establish schools close to their homes, thus encouraging them to attend and stop their wandering.

A very different approach was taken in southern Alberta. Although schools were operated by Protestant missionaries on the Piikuni, Kainah and Siksika reserves between 1879 and 1884,¹⁰⁴ the first government-sponsored “industrial” school for plains people was opened in southern Alberta 1883 and deliberately placed away from the Blackfoot reserves to make it harder for children to leave the school. In his capacity as Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs John Macdonald noted that the school had been established near High River “in the Blackfoot country.” He was pleased with the school’s location because “it is sufficiently far from any Reserve to prevent the Indian parents from resorting too frequently to the school, which would tend to interrupt the children in their studies.”¹⁰⁵ Father Lacombe, the Catholic priest who ran the school, spent most of his

102 United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of United States Indian Agent John Young, House Executive Documents, #1, Part 5, 47th Congress, 1st Session, 31 July 1881, p. 170.

103 United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Blackfeet Agent R. A. Allen, House Executive Documents 49th Congress 1st Session Document #1, Part 5, 15 August 1885, p. 344.

104 Samek, *The Blackfoot Confederacy*, p. 142.

105 Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Department of Indian*

July 1885 report urging the government to allow the school to forcibly remove children from the reserves and keep them at school because the parents “seem determined not to give up their younger children, unless compelled to do so.” Even when the school had managed to get some children “the squaws - their mothers -- came here a month or so afterwards, and demanded their children, pretending they were taken away without their consent.” Lacombe insisted that if the school had the power to force the children to stay and follow a regular routine, “most certainly we should succeed, because we have found, by experience, that when these boys apply themselves ever so little they make wonderful progress in their lessons and seem to have a special aptitude for the trades.” He justified the school’s use of corporal punishment by declaring “that it is impossible to control and manage these Indian boys by mere advice and kind reprimand.” Coercion and discipline were needed “to enforce order...”¹⁰⁶ In sharp contrast to northern Montana, in southern Alberta the government school became a place away from home to which Blackfoot children were forcibly removed.

“Going across the line”: Resistance and cross-border mobility in 1880s

Despite the Canadian and American governments’ best efforts to immobilize and reshape the Blackfoot, those efforts were never completely successful and official white control was never absolute. The Blackfoot continued to resist both national and local boundaries, remaining more mobile and less passive than the governments wanted. Women left their reservations to get their children out of school, headed into local towns for economic reasons, and burned fence posts when they needed firewood. Communities

Affairs for year ended 31st December 1883, Report of John A Macdonald, Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs, Sessional Papers 1884, Volume 3, #4, p. lvi.

¹⁰⁶ Canada, Department of the Interior, Report of Father A. Lacombe, Sessional

resisted official efforts to get accurate head counts, children ran away from residential schools or refused to attend day schools, and the men continued to cross the 49th parallel in search of liquor, guns, and horses.

This cross-border movement physically challenged the 49th parallel but discursively reinforced it. Canadian and American officials kept trying to stop the cross-border traffic of people, horses, liquor, and guns, but their efforts were never completely successful and they always blamed the problems on the other side's Indians or poor law enforcement or unscrupulous traders. In 1871, for example, the Agent in Montana, J. Armitage, wrote that as the "British lines" were only "seventy miles north of the agency and one hundred miles from Fort Benton, the whisky traders are afforded a safe harbor should they be pursued...."¹⁰⁷ The following year the Montana Superintendent of Indian Affairs, J. A. Viall, stated that the whisky trade was declining "and what little is done with Indians belonging to this superintendency is confined to the British possessions."¹⁰⁸ A few years later, Canada's Department of the Interior was pleased to report that the Mounted Police had cleared southern Alberta of the "bands of outlaws and desperadoes from Montana and the neighbouring territories" who were supplying liquor and guns to the Blackfoot and other First Nations.¹⁰⁹

In the early 1880s the United States Army stepped up their efforts to stop the Canadian Blackfoot at the border. In his report for 1881, Indian Commissioner for the North-West Territories and Manitoba Edgar Dewdney noted that "Nearly 4,000 of the

Papers 1886, Volume 4, #4, 13 July 1885, p. 77.

¹⁰⁷ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Blackfoot Indian Agent J. Armitage, House Executive Document #1, 42nd Congress, 2nd session, 1871, p. 845.

¹⁰⁸ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, House Executive Document #1, Part 5, 42nd congress, 3rd session, 1872, p. 659.

¹⁰⁹ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Department of the Interior*

Indians absent from their reserves are south of the line, and may at any moment be driven back by the American soldiers, who are instructed to do so, at any rate they will be on our hands early in the spring.”¹¹⁰ Paul Sharp argues that “[t]his drastic policy finally made the forty-ninth parallel a barrier to the northern Indians. From that time onward the Blackfeet were truly one people divided by an invisible line.”¹¹¹ Sharp overstates the effectiveness of the policy, however, because it only worked if the army caught the Blackfoot every time they came south, and the border was simply too long and porous. An international pass system was discussed but never materialized, although local agents on both sides had their own pass systems by the late 1880s.¹¹²

Local agents showed more sympathy towards and understanding of the emotional and economic reasons why the cross-border movement continued. For example, Montana Agent Young wrote in 1883 that when the “division line” was established between the United States and Canada, it “left about equal numbers [of Blackfoot] in charge of each government, and as children of the same family or nation the intercourse has been continued and has its effects on their habits and civilization.” Some used family connections “to gravitate towards the agency that issued food and annuities, thus swelling the number on the agency roll and drawing from its supplies.” He felt that the reduced American rations of recent years gave the northern Blackfoot less reason to drift south. Some “artfully” tried “to belong to and draw rations from both sides of the line, but without

for year ending 30 June 1875, Sessional Papers 1876, Volume 9, p. ii.

110 Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for 1881*, Report of Edgar Dewdney, Indian Commissioner for the North-West Territories and Manitoba, Sessional Papers, Volume 5, #6.

111 Sharp, *Whoop-Up Country*, p. 156

112 Samek, *Blackfoot Confederacy*, p. 156

much success. From these causes a steady reduction of the numbers on our record has been going on.”¹¹³

By the mid-1880s the Blackfoot’s cross-border horse raids were becoming a bigger headache for white authorities because of the problems they created for the local legal system. However, the raids and legal problems were also used by local authorities on both sides to reinforce the differences between “our” side and “their” side of the line. Samek notes that horse raids and inter-tribal conflict were a key “part of plains Indian culture” which “continued even after the tribes had settled on reservations.” The raids “became an international problem,” however, “when raiders took advantage of the ‘medicine line’ to dispose of property stolen on the other side” and two different legal jurisdictions then had to sort out whose horses belonged to whom.¹¹⁴ In 1883 Treaty 7 Agent Cecil Denny was pleased to report that although there hadn’t been many cases of horse-stealing that year, the Bloods “were the principal Indians going across the line” for raids, usually accompanied by some members of the South Peigan (the Montana Blackfoot) reservation. As usual, the problem was a lack of spatial separation: “The close vicinity of the South Peigan’s Reserve to that of the Blood’s causes some trouble, as these Indians being all of the same tribe join each other in horse stealing, and as the South Peigans are, and have been in an almost starving condition, war parties have been frequent during the spring and summer.” He later noted that of the Blackfoot tribes the Bloods were still the main problem when it came to cross-border horse theft, but they “have shown a greater disposition to work this year than last, and I think that their habit of going across the line is almost broken.” Two

¹¹³ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Blackfoot Agent John Young. House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 48th Congress, 1st session, 6 August 1883, p. 154.

¹¹⁴ Samek, *Blackfoot Confederacy*, p. 154

Bloods had been arrested for stealing a band of horses in Montana, but the horses were returned and the men imprisoned.¹¹⁵

Two years later the “habit” clearly had not yet been “broken,” because in 1885 Montana Agent Allen complained that horse raids were still taking place. He insisted that most of the stealing was “done by the Indians from British America, but the blame is largely laid upon” the Peigan of Montana when they retaliate. The behaviour was largely “confined ... to the young men who will not listen to the counsels of their fathers,” but he admitted that “when the Indians fail to capture horses belonging to other Indians, they steal from the whites, and thus the country is kept in a constant state of excitement...” As a result, most of his time was spent hearing the complaints of white settlers who claimed to have been robbed and trying to help them recover their horses.¹¹⁶

In the same year, Canadian Commissioner Dewdney continued to blame “unscrupulous traders” for most of the “unrest” among the Blackfoot tribes closest to the border. The traders sold them alcohol and ammunition “at points on or near the international boundary” and upset “their minds with ill advice.” He did concede that some of the unrest could be traced to the presence of “stolen horses” in Blackfoot camps, “most of which they had purchased south of the ‘line,’ and were in dread of their being taken from them, and in connection with which they were in constant fear of arrest or aggression.” He noted that the “chiefs and old men” were “strenuously opposed” to the liquor trade “and have promised to aid in preventing it.” Dewdney wanted “strong patrols” established “along the international boundary, as both liquor and ammunition are brought

¹¹⁵ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for year ended 31st December 1883*, Report of C. E. Denny, Agent for Treaty 7, Sessional Papers 1884, Volume 3, #4, 10 July 1883, pp. 78-79.

¹¹⁶ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Blackfeet Agent R. A. Allen, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 49th Congress 1st Session, 15 August 1885, p. 344.

from the States,” in the hope that this would stop “the entrance of traders, and decrease that constant intercourse between our Indians and the South Peigans of Montana which has led to so much trouble and annoyance.”¹¹⁷ He believed that both problems, the traders and the horse raids, could be stopped if the international border was policed more forcefully.

He also believed that because officials in Alberta and Montana were facing similar challenges while trying to enforce the border, greater cooperation was called for. He specifically mentioned the complaint of the Bloods and Blackfoot that if they stole horses from south of the line Canadian officials made them give the horses back, but if their horses were stolen by American Indians they never got the animals back. Dewdney was sympathetic to their objections, and concluded “[o]ur interests and those of the United States are mutual in this matter, and mutuality of action would be beneficial to our western Indians and settlers, as well as those of Montana; and if some steps are not taken to secure it, the question may arise: Can we continue to make our Indians submit to an exercise of power which makes them yield a justice to others which they cannot obtain for themselves?”¹¹⁸ While calling for cooperation, his veiled inference that Canada might cease to return stolen horses was unmistakable. As Brian Hubner has observed, Canadian and American law did differ over the issue of stolen horses, and the North West Mounted Police would arrest Canadian Indians for possessing horses stolen south of the line but American authorities would not arrest Indians for possessing horses stolen from north of the line.¹¹⁹

117 Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for year ended 31st December 1885*, Report of Edgar Dewdney, Commissioner of Indian Affairs for North-West Territories, Sessional Papers 1886, Volume 4, #4, 17 December 1885, p. 144.

118 Ibid.

119 Brian Hubner, “Horse Stealing and the Borderline: The NWMP and the Control of Indian Movement, 1874-1900,” *Prairie Forum*, Vol. 20, #2, Fall 1995, p. 287.

Officials in southern Alberta and northern Montana did make an effort to cooperate with each other in the mid-1880s, and the number of raids dropped dramatically by the end of the decade.¹²⁰ Even though the raids and other instances of Blackfoot border-crossing did not cease altogether, by the late 1880s the Blackfoot on both sides of the line seemed to be considerably less mobile and threatening than they had been in the 1860s. The Blackfoot in southern Alberta did not get involved in the 1885 North West Rebellion, largely due to the efforts of their head chiefs to prevent it and the timely arrival of added rations from white officials eager to placate. Federal containment efforts, while never as complete or effective as officials might have hoped, had at least managed to create a dense discursive terrain of lines the Blackfoot were not supposed to cross. For all the differences between the coercive strategies deployed by the Canadian and American governments against the Blackfoot, such strategies relied upon common efforts to establish the boundaries of meaning between aboriginal and white people, Indian land and white land. The ideological result was the same, as the Alberta-Montana borderlands could finally be seen by federal authorities as a sub-region passively awaiting the arrival of white settlers.

120 Ibid., pp. 292-295.

Chapter 3

“A land where there is room for all”:

Immigration, nation-building, and non-aboriginal communities

Federal efforts through the 1860s, 70s and 80s to create a known and mapped west were intended to facilitate both nations' real goal: to settle the west with white people who would claim and develop it 160 acres at a time. As Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock observe of Canada, simply acquiring the North West Territories was insufficient, because “a successful union depended upon commercial and industrial growth... .”¹ For both Canada and the United States, that kind of growth depended on immigration. Neither government was ever completely happy with all of its new arrivals, but there was no doubt that immigrants were needed to achieve each country's nationalistic goals.

There is a sharp gap between the amount of authority Canada and the United States had over immigration matters. Immigration was a federal responsibility in Canada, and the government had complete authority and a strong motive to get involved directly in attracting immigrants bound for the west. In the United States, immigration was not firmly established as a federal responsibility until 1876, and only gradually did the American government gain the amount of power over immigration that Canada had. Both governments thought that white men were the ideal settlers, but had different notions about how to construct that whiteness and about the role female immigrants should play in western development. In spite of these differences, however, there are remarkable similarities between their perceptions of immigrants and the role newcomers should play in the development of the nation. For example, the kinds of colonial, information-management tools each government had used to manage land and native peoples were put

to use solving the “problem” of immigration, and the same kinds of assumptions about space, race and gender came into play. In addition, discourses about “the west” were central to federal visions of the future of the Canadian and American nations. These similarities speak to deeper nineteenth century colonial discourses of nation, race and gender, and highlight how central the west was to these discourses in North America. This chapter analyzes these differences and similarities between Canadian and American approaches to immigration policy at the federal level, and then discusses the small non-aboriginal communities that were established in the borderlands before the 1890s. I argue that not only was the region more racially and ethnically diverse than federal officials wanted “the west” to be, but the dominance of ranching placed the region outside of official discourses of western migration and settlement.

“The power to regulate immigration”: Different federal approaches

Between 1861 and 1880 just over 5 million immigrants came to the United States, more than 4.3 million from Europe and over 537,000 from Canada and Newfoundland.² In 1878 and 1879, for example, Canada was third behind the United Kingdom and Germany on the list of countries of last permanent residence, providing just over 56,000 immigrants to the United Kingdom’s 88,000.³ By comparison, total immigration to Canada between 1867 and 1892 was the much smaller figure of 1.5 million, and many of these people were only passing through on their way to the United States.⁴ Canada’s annual figures varied enormously in the 1870s and 1880s, from a low in 1876 of just over

¹ Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic: A History of Canadian Immigration Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998) p. 61.

² United States, Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, *Report of the Select Commission on Western Hemisphere Immigration* (Washington, D. C.: January, 1968), p. 27.

³ United States, *Report of Chief of Bureau of Statistics*, House Executive Documents #7, 46th Congress, 2nd Session, 8 November 1879, p. xxiii.

35,000 newcomers to a high of nearly 207,000 in 1883. Numbers slumped again in the late 1880s, a decline which officials blamed on the 1885 Rebellion.⁵

The Canadian and American governments were not passive bystanders to this massive influx; these newcomers were too important to the futures of the nations for Ottawa and Washington to just watch them arrive. As Susan Smith has argued, by attempting to “regulate the movement of people across political boundaries – determining who can enter their jurisdiction and on what terms, and deciding who must leave and when,” governments implicitly and explicitly construct and deploy “a concept of what their nation is and/or should be. Immigration policy and nation-building therefore must be two sides of a single coin.”⁶ Because each government had such different powers and responsibilities, a cursory glance would suggest that very different nations were being built.

The Canadian government had the power to get directly involved in attracting immigrants, and felt the pressure to do so given that the country seemed unable to attract newcomers as readily as the United States or Australia. Many scholars have highlighted the significant effort made by federal authorities to recruit newcomers, particularly after the 1896 election brought Laurier’s Liberal party to power and Clifford Sifton to the position

4 Kelley and Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic*, p. 63

5 Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Reports 1870-1886*. In his report for 1885 Minister of Agriculture J. Carling wrote, “The breaking out of disturbances in the North-West, of which the most exaggerated and sensational reports were published, both in the United Kingdom and on the Continent, had a very serious effect in hindering the immigration movement. And this was particularly the case as these disturbances took place just at the time the booking season for immigrants was about to begin, and lasted during the whole of the active or spring season. The effect thus produced was disastrous to the immigration interests of Canada, as a whole, as was not by any means confined to those of the North-West.” Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, Sessional Papers Volume 7, #10, p. xxvii.

6 Susan Smith, “Immigration and nation-building in Canada and the United Kingdom,” *Constructions of Race, Place and Nation*, eds. Peter Jackson and Jan Penrose (London: University College London Press, 1993) p. 50.

of Minister of the Interior.⁷ The groundwork for Sifton's initiatives was laid by nearly three decades of active federal involvement in immigration policy and promotion. During the 1870s and 80s the government felt that it needed to consolidate its claims to western land as quickly as possible, and thus invested a great deal of time and energy trying to attract immigrants. The government sent immigration agents overseas and to the United States, published information about the country for distribution through these agents, held strategic planning conferences and passed legislation to encourage immigration. The Dominion passed its first Immigration Act in 1869, and it was "designed primarily to ensure the safety and protection of immigrants en route to and upon arrival in Canada." Until the 1880s the only restrictions were aimed at poor immigrants or those with "criminal tendencies," but these provisions "were not consistently enforced" because Canada sought as open an immigration policy as possible in this period.⁸

By contrast, the American government had much less authority over immigration policy, and could enjoy the unrelated phenomenon of being able to attract hundreds of thousands of immigrants each year without really trying. Between 1868 and 1882 in particular, there was very little federal bureaucratic involvement. An 1864 Act which gave the President the power to appoint a Commissioner of Immigration under the State Department was repealed in 1868 largely because of concerns about corruption and states' rights. Efforts were made throughout the 1870s to bring in some kind of legislation, and in 1876 the Supreme Court ruled that "state laws regulating immigration were

⁷ Two monographs which take 1896 as their starting place for an examination of American immigration to Canada's west are Karel Bicha's *The American Farmer and the Canadian West, 1896-1914* (Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press, 1968), and Harold Troper's *Only Farmers Need Apply: Official Canadian Government Encouragement of Immigration from the United States, 1896-1911* (Toronto: Griffin House, 1972). 1896 also serves as an important chapter demarcation in books on the Canadian west and Canadian immigration policy; see, for example, Chapter 4 of Howard and Tamara Palmer's *Alberta: A New History* and Chapter 4 of Kelley and Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic*.

unconstitutional.” The court decided that “Congress alone has the power to regulate immigration” because Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution “empowers Congress ‘to regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several states, and with Indian tribes.’”⁹ Like the Canadian mandate, early American immigration legislation tended to focus on assisting immigrants in transit with “passenger and steerage acts.” The United States’ first general immigration law was not passed until 1882.¹⁰ Even with this Act the federal government still did not have anywhere near the amount of authority wielded by the Canadian government to spend money actively recruiting immigrants, but the 1882 act did include provisions for collecting a small head tax to pay for immigration services, excluding criminals, paupers and lunatics. These decisions and Acts did not limit the rights of individual states and territories to spend their own money to hire immigration commissioners to promote the state or territory in other parts of the country or overseas. Further amendments and a subsequent Act in 1891 strengthened Washington’s hand, and the office of the superintendent of immigration was created. The 1891 Act also provided for the inspection of immigrants entering from Canada and Mexico, indicating a growing desire on the part of the Americans to regulate their continental borders as well as their coastal ones.¹¹

⁸ Kelley and Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic*, pp. 62-63

⁹ Charles B. Keely, *U. S. Immigration: A Policy Analysis* (New York: The Population Council, 1979), p.11.

¹⁰ Marion T. Bennett, *American Immigration Policies: A History* (Washington, D. C.: Public Affairs Press, 1963), p. 15.

¹¹ Philip Davis, ed. *Immigration and Naturalization: Selected Readings* (Boston and New York: Ginn and Company, 1920) p. 331-332, and 337. See also Bennett, *American Immigration Policies*, pp. 15-21 for an overview of this period in American immigration policy.

“Their errors and deficiencies could be disclosed”: counting North America’s newcomers

A closer look at the two governments’ attitudes and approaches towards immigration reveals that, in spite of their differences, they shared many common features. First, both sets of officials used similar tools for managing the flow of people. Federal authorities struggled to get precise head counts of the hundreds of thousands of people who arrived at their borders in the nineteenth century, and tried to collect the other key pieces of information, particularly race, gender, and nationality, by which they judged those new arrivals and plotted them on their maps of the nation’s future.

As I have argued in earlier chapters, collecting and producing accurate information was both an end in itself and a critical management tool for federal officials in both countries in the late nineteenth century. Authorities responsible for counting the heads of newcomers were constantly striving for greater efficiency and more complete information, just as their counterparts had tried to do with information about western land and First Nations peoples. Counting immigrants and collecting other kinds of statistical information about them served several purposes: it was an attempt to regulate who got in and thus would reinforce the external borders of the nation; it was a way to judge the country’s popularity; and it was an indicator of future national prosperity. Michel Foucault has noted that the idea of “population” as a “technique of power” and “an economic and political problem” emerged in western Europe in the eighteenth century, and would develop as such for North American governments in the nineteenth century.¹² Immigrants were not just people, they were becoming a part of a national “population,” an economic, political, and social entity which needed to be managed and developed. Proper management depended on knowing how many people were in your population, and when immigration outpaced

natural increase (as it did for both countries in the nineteenth century) it was very important to keep track of all newcomers.

For American officials, trying to count accurately the massive influx of new arrivals was one of the few ways the government could play a managerial role in immigration, particularly during the 1870s. In 1871, for example, the Bureau of Statistics and the General Land Office both published information for prospective immigrants. Chief of the Bureau of Statistics Edward Young's "Special Report on Immigration" included information for prospective immigrants on land acquisition, staple products, access to markets, the cost of farm stock, the kind of labor in demand in the Western and Southern states, and so on. A largely statistical report, it also provided figures on the nationality and sex of immigrants who had arrived in the United States during the first quarter of 1871.¹³ Commissioner of the General Land Office Willis Drummond reported that his office had prepared a pamphlet to be distributed in Europe, which provided "a succinct description of our form of government, its political divisions, the peculiarities of the soil and climate, a brief statement of our public-land system" and "a synopsis of the naturalization laws." The pamphlet included a map "showing the principal railroads travelling the American continent, from the Atlantic to the Pacific."¹⁴ This publication and Drummond's report represent one of the few instances of the Department of the Interior using its information about western land to attract immigrants to that land; the majority of American federal activity around immigration was conducted by the Treasury Department.

¹² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley, (New York: Vintage Books, 1990) p. 25.

¹³ United States, Department of the Interior, Chief of Bureau of Statistics Edward Young, "Special Report on Immigration," House Executive Document #1, 42nd Congress, 1st Session, p. 200.

¹⁴ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of the Commissioner of the General Land Office, Willis Drummond, House Executive Document #1, 42nd Congress, 2nd session, 1871, p. 68.

In 1873 the responsibility for generating reports on immigration was shifted from the State Department to the Treasury Department, because the Bureau of Statistics and its customs officers were already attached to the Treasury and generated an annual report on immigration. Edward Young, Chief of the Bureau of Statistics, had lobbied for the move because he thought immigration statistics could be collected “more promptly, completely, and accurately” by the Treasury Department than by any other Department. The Bureau of Statistics could apply a “rigid system of scrutiny” to the returns, under which “their errors and deficiencies could be disclosed by the aid of facts more immediately accessible to it, and their correction be more promptly obtained.” In addition, the reports of the customs officers “on the northern frontier” enabled the Department to obtain statistics of immigration into the United States “from or through the Dominion of Canada, by cars and other land-vehicles, which would not, under existing laws, be accessible to other Departments.”¹⁵ In short, the Treasury would be more accurate and thorough than any other federal department. The overwhelming majority of immigrants to the United States were landing on the east coast, but Young was aware that the border with Canada was porous and easily crossed, and he wanted to ensure that those new arrivals were not bypassing the watchful eye of his department.

In the early 1870s the American government debated legislation which would allow it a greater regulatory role in the transportation of immigrants, but the proposals were always rejected. In May of 1872, for example, President Grant sent a message to Congress recommending legislation regarding the transportation of immigrants to and within the United States. He justified his proposal and tried to counter the states’ opposition by saying that “Such legislation will be in the interests of humanity.... The immigrant is not a citizen of any State or Territory upon his arrival, but comes here to

¹⁵ United States, Letter by Edward Young, Chief of Bureau of Statistics, House

become a citizen of a great republic.” He would never “advise legislation in affairs that should be regulated by the States, but I see no subject more national in its character than provision for the safety and welfare of the thousands who leave foreign lands to become citizens of this republic.”¹⁶ The President who decisively shifted the tone and approach of American Indian policy towards more rapid assimilation also had strong opinions about federal responsibilities towards immigrants.

As proof of the need for legislation Grant’s message included a “Report on Immigration, and the Proper Transportation of Immigrants to and within the United States” written by J. Fred Myers of the Treasury Department in November 1871. Myers insisted that the best justification for federal involvement was the fact that the annual immigration of 250,000 people was sure to be a permanent trend for at least another 50 years. He argued that the government could in fact “safely estimate that the annual average will increase to upward of 300,000 souls for the next twenty years.” He was highly critical of the poor conditions on board the trans-atlantic steamers which brought Europeans to the United States and on the trains which took them across the country, and insisted it was only logical that the government “should see to the proper transportation, care, and distribution of this precious tide of humanity, the greater portion of which, upon their arrival, are ignorant of our customs, process, geography, and also of the English language.” After all, he observed, if the federal government had the right to regulate the importation of cattle and a population of 300,000 Indians, surely it had the right to be more involved with immigration.

Myers added that newcomers were “less self-reliant than Americans” and needed “the protecting arm of the General Government, which alone has adequate power and

Miscellaneous Documents #75, 43rd congress, 1st session, 19 March 1872.

¹⁶ United States, “Message from the President recommending Legislation in relation to the transportation of immigrants to and within the United States,” Senate Executive

jurisdiction. It is time, therefore, that this colossal yet peaceful people's movement," upon which rested "the very character of the American nation, should become the object of carefully matured legislation." He concluded that greater involvement on the part of the federal government would be reassuring for immigrants and their home governments alike, and would "greatly stimulate the emigration of the best elements of European society."¹⁷ It is hard to tell if Myers deliberately underestimated immigrants' language skills or intended to liken them to cattle to strengthen his arguments in favour of legislation, but his nationalist agenda is clear – when "the character" of the nation was at stake, the federal government had a duty to step in.

Only a year and a half later Secretary of the Treasury William A. Richardson submitted another report on the treatment of immigrants, this time to the Senate. In another attempt to forestall opposition to expanding the role of the federal government, he noted in his covering letter that "Great Britain and other countries" had already passed legislation dealing with a range of issues dealing with immigration, and thus any legislation passed by the United States "should follow, so far as proper, the regulations already established by those countries, or regulations which by common consent are considered necessary." His report included a "Report on the Immigration Service" written by John M. Woodworth, Supervising Surgeon of the U. S. Marine Hospital Service, based on his observations of the ports of New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Baltimore in 1873. Woodworth was very critical of the immigration service, citing everything from the overcrowding and poor conditions on board ship to inaccurate record-keeping at the ports. He stated that it was time to introduce new legislation which could be written without infringing on the states' rights or duplicating existing organizations. Such a bill should address the amount of space allotted per person on the trans-oceanic voyage; the size of the berths and quality of the

food; hygiene; penalties for on-board deaths; the separation of the sexes while on board and better protection of female passengers.¹⁸ The Supreme Court supported the intent of these reports and proposals by ruling in 1876 that the federal government did have the constitutional authority to regulate immigration, and the handful of bills passed in the years leading up to the immigration acts of 1882 attempted to improve the living conditions on the immigrant ships.

Canada's federal government did not have to contend with provincial governments challenging its authority over immigration because the provinces had fewer powers than the states and happily supported federal efforts in increasing immigration. With a wider range of authority and a smaller number of newcomers arriving at its eastern ports, officials tried hard to count accurately who was arriving and where they were going. As in the United States, Canada's Department of the Interior had little to do with immigration; instead, the Department of Agriculture was responsible for attracting and managing immigration, which indicates how closely related immigration and agricultural development were in national discourses. Indeed, the topic of immigration preceded agricultural subjects in the Department's annual reports throughout the 1870s. In his report for 1869 the Minister of Agriculture Christopher Dunkin indicated that although more than 57,000 people had passed through Canada's ports on their way to the United States, only about 18,600 had said they planned to stay in Canada and only 1800 of the latter group said they were heading "west of Toronto." Nevertheless, Dunkin concluded with the optimistic assertion "that the immigrants who have settled in Canada during the year 1869 have been readily and easily absorbed, to the mutual advantage, I have every reason to believe, of the country

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ United States, "Report on Treatment of Immigrants," Senate Executive Document #23, 43rd Congress, 1st Session, 21 January 1874, pp. 11-12.

and themselves....”¹⁹ Given that both countries worried about the “absorption” of newcomers into their population, this was a creative way for Dunkin to cast the small numbers in a positive light.

The number of immigrants who stayed in Canada instead of proceeding to the United States climbed dramatically between 1869 and the 1885 Rebellion. In 1869 only about one-third of the approximately 32,000 newcomers told agents that they were going to stay in Canada and “remain British subjects” instead of going to the United States.²⁰ In 1873 that proportion climbed to just under one-half of the nearly 100,000 immigrants to Canada. Ten years later, during the peak year of 1883 when 207,000 immigrants arrived in Canada, almost two-thirds said they were going to stay.²¹

Canadian officials had various strategies in the 1870s and 1880s for countering the negative impression these numbers seemed to give about Canada’s ability to attract and retain immigrants compared to the United States. Beginning in 1873, for example, agents tried to keep track of the number of Canadians who returned to Canada from the US.²² Immigration agents stationed west of the Great Lakes did their best to track the number of people entering Canada from the south and where they were originally from. In 1879 the agent stationed in Duluth, Minnesota, William Grahame, reported that 7401 migrants had passed that point en route to Manitoba. That total included 4600 people from Ontario and Quebec, more than 350 from New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, and 788 Americans.

¹⁹ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1869*, Report of the Minister of Agriculture, Sessional Papers 1870, Volume 6, #80. p. i.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1883*, Sessional Papers 1884, Volume 8, #14, p. xxv.

²² Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1873*, Sessional Papers 1874, Volume 6, #9.

Grahame estimated that an additional 3500 people had entered Canada by way of Chicago and St. Paul, for a total of about 11,000 entering Canada's west from the south in 1879.²³

Those numbers continued to climb in the early 1880s, and officials took particular pains to refute numbers which suggested that more people moved south than came north.²⁴ In his report for 1883 the Minister of Agriculture was pleased to note that just over 20,000 immigrants had entered Canada from the United States, including 1406 who had entered "along the frontier from Emerson to Fort Benton."²⁵ The following year another report suggested that some of the influx from the United States was actually made up of Canadian-born people who had gone to the American west and were coming back to Canada. William Pearce, Inspector of Dominion Lands Agencies, wrote in 1884 that too little attention had been paid to the number of immigrants who had come from the United States to the North West Territories. He "had no idea that there were such numbers of these arrivals until within the past few months, when ... it became necessary for me to ascertain who were and who were not British subjects." He said he had met many people who had been born in Canada or whose parents were Canadian who had spent time in the midwest before moving north.²⁶

Sometimes Canada's efforts to bolster its image were aided by an unrelated decision on the part of an American official. In 1886 the Department of Agriculture published a

²³ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1878*, Report of Minister of Agriculture for 1878, commenting on report of William Grahame in Duluth, Minnesota, Sessional Papers 1879, Volume 7, #9, p. xxxii.

²⁴ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1873*, Sessional Papers 1874, Volume 6, #9.

²⁵ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1883*, Sessional Papers 1884, Volume 8, #14.

²⁶ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for 1883*, Report of William Pearce, Inspector of Dominion Lands Agencies, Sessional Papers 1884, Volume 7, #12, p. 5. It is not clear from his report why he was trying to determine who was or was not a British subject. One possible explanation is that, although a person did not have to be a British subject to homestead under the Dominion Lands Act, a person did have to be a

“Report on Alleged Exodus on Western Frontier” written by John Lowe, Secretary for the Department of Agriculture. The report tried to challenge the widespread belief that significant numbers of Canadians and immigrants slipped south across the border west of the Great Lakes. It indicated that in February of 1886, the United States Secretary of the Treasury Daniel Manning had instructed his customs officers to stop collecting statistics on immigration “from British North American possessions and Mexico” because it was “impracticable to procure under existing laws, accurate statistics of immigrants arriving in the United States....” Lowe noted that he had kept track of the “statements of a large, alleged, emigration” which the Washington Bureau had been publishing monthly, “but as these figures have been entirely omitted from the general returns in the December quarterly report of the chief of the Bureau of Statistics ... I think it is better not to enter into any detailed criticism of statements thus discredited.” He couldn’t resist including his own numbers for 1885, however, which showed that when one took into account all the different ports and various ways of moving from east to west or back again, Canada was not losing as many people to the States as was believed, and in some periods had actually made a net gain. Lowe closed by stating, “in view of the not always pleasant nature of the controversy to which [these statistics] have led with United States officials,” he was satisfied that his efforts to correct the American figures were “so thoroughly vindicated” by Manning’s instructions to American customs officials.²⁷

It was simply not possible for either country to get a completely accurate count of the number of newcomers crossing their borders, particularly the 49th parallel between the Great Lakes and the Rockies, because there were too many people coming and going in too

British subject if they wanted to claim land for timber culture. Canada, *Dominion Lands Act*, 1876 revisions.

²⁷ Canada, Department of Agriculture, “Report on Alleged Exodus...” by John Lowe, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, Sessional Papers 1886, Volume 7, #10, 29 March 1886, p. xlvii.

many places. This failure highlights both the volume of migration to and between the two countries, and the inability of either state to exert truly national control over its borders. Canadian and American officials were aware of these realities but retained their faith that their continued efforts would eventually be successful. Those numbers represented people who had a role to play in national destiny, and the effort to categorize and rank them had to be made. The west also had a role to play in national destinies, and it is not surprising, therefore, that the west was so frequently invoked during discussions of immigration. The governments had high hopes for their western lands, and the Canadians, in particular, had very clear ideas about who should get to live there.

“Grand openings to individual enterprise”: western lands and western settlers as the linchpin of the nation

The second telling similarity between Canadian and American discourses of immigration was the absolute centrality of the west. Ottawa and Washington relied on their huge western empires above all else to attract newcomers, and it was those western spaces which distinguished these new North American nations from their European roots. As a result, the west was constructed as central to both countries' national destinies, and occasionally portrayed as vital for a particular kind of global destiny. Although immigration officials also acknowledged their need for certain kinds of workers, it remained a minor theme compared to the importance they placed on getting certain kinds of people to settle the west. Each nation had a core vision of itself as agricultural and western, not urban and eastern. At the same time, officials in Ottawa and Washington used their open western spaces to differentiate themselves from their own European antecedents. The superiority of Canada and the United States over the nations of western Europe was demonstrated by the fact that so many immigrants were choosing to leave Europe and come to North America, and immigrants who were perceived to be of the highest quality made

the additional choice to settle in the west. The enormous spaces and economic potential of the west made Canada and the United States North American nations by distinguishing them from less-expansive European nations, and both countries relied on their immigration policies to shore up this impression of themselves.

Officials in Ottawa and Washington kept one eye on their western spaces when they thought and wrote about immigration because the west was central to their notions of national destiny and to their colonial discourses of space, race, and gender. Even the relatively few comments that American officials made about immigration were dominated by concerns about the west. The large spaces which were to lure immigrants from across the sea and away from crowded eastern cities were the key to national and international destinies. In 1870, for example, Joseph Wilson, United States Commissioner of the General Land Office, wrote that “the masses of Europe and the settled populations of our own older States are especially interested in the grand openings to individual enterprise now developing in the Great West.” Europeans were particularly attracted to “Our free institutions, practical social equality, facilities for acquiring a subsistence, and for accumulating wealth....” An increase in taxation revenues was one positive result from immigration, but was only a small part “of the higher functions of this noble system. The enlargement of the area of civilization and the inexpressible relief which has been afforded to the crowded millions of European society, groaning under the evils of a state of transition from feudalism to civil and religious freedom, can be measured by no aggregates of financial value created.”²⁸ In March 1878 the Commissioners of Emigration of the State of New York complained that “for the most part ... the strong and vigorous immigrants” headed to the west, to “become the bone and sinew of the agricultural population. The

²⁸ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of General Land Commissioner Joseph Wilson, House Executive Documents #1, Part 4, 41st Congress, 3rd session, 27 October 1870, p. 43, 181.

poorer, weaker, and less enterprising remain behind, at or near their port of arrival.”²⁹

While their complaint contains a degree of nativist sentiment, they inadvertently reinforced the idea that the best immigrants chose to go west, a choice that could save Europe as well as secure a future of greatness for the United States.

Canadian officials were equally enthusiastic about what their west meant for the country’s destiny and for the Dominion’s place within the British Empire – at the time, these were seen as complementary goals by federal authorities. The Minister of Agriculture J. H. Pope proclaimed in his report for 1879 that a farmer who emigrated from Britain to Canada would have “the satisfaction of feeling that he is assisting to build up a great British Empire, having for its seat the northern half of the continent of North America, occupying a space as large as the whole of Europe, and containing agricultural, mineral, and commercial resources to be developed in the immediate future of almost illimitable extent...”³⁰ Three years later he wrote that not only would the settlement of Canada’s North-West provide “homes for millions of the redundant population of the United Kingdom and Europe,” it would “settle the question of the supply of breadstuffs for the mother country by making it entirely independent of foreigners.”³¹ In Pope’s opinion, when European immigrants left their diverse but crowded homelands and settled down on western Canadian land, they were no longer non-British foreigners. Homesteading made them Canadian, and gave

²⁹ United States, Commissioners of Emigration of the State of New York, “Memorial on Protection of Immigrants,” House Miscellaneous Documents #22, 45th Congress, 2nd Session, Volume 1, 4 March 1878, p. 3.

³⁰ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1879*, Sessional Papers 1880, Volume 7, #10. See James Sturgis, “Learning about Oneself: Canadian Nationalism, 1867-1914,” in *Kith and Kin: Canada, Britain and the United States from the Revolution to the Cold War*, ed. C. C. Eldridge, pp. 95-117 (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997) for a good discussion of the ways Britishness and Canadianness paralleled each other as frames of reference for national identity between Confederation and World War I, and the ways in which Canadianness as something distinct from Britishness came to dominate.

³¹ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1881*, Sessional Papers 1882, Volume 7, #11.

them a “mother country” that might not have been theirs in the first place. As they added to Canada’s population and wealth, that prosperity could be directed back to England, thus benefitting everyone.

In short, Canada and the United States viewed their seemingly limitless western land as the chief attraction for and chosen destination of newcomers. Being able to offer large parcels of land at minimal cost was the key federal strategy for encouraging western immigration, and increased immigration meant that more land could be developed more quickly. As a result, the boosterism which was evident in federal reports about the size and potential of western lands easily carried over into reports about the land’s potential for settlement and development. Surveyor General of Montana John Blaine wrote in his 1871 report that the territory had “ample room for millions of settlers of all occupations, who are cordially invited to come and make their homes with us, and grow up in wealth and usefulness, as the country expands its latent productions and power.”³² Five years later, Blaine’s successor, Andrew Smith, wrote that Montana needed “men and women” even more than it needed capital, and he believed that 1877’s immigration was going to “equal the present population of the Territory.” Smith was concerned that the Territory was at a disadvantage compared to other western states and territories by not having its own “commissioners of immigration to disseminate information and attract the attention of those meditating immigration, or direct wavering thoughts and steps.” Much as Canada had to compete with the United States and Australia for immigrants, so too did Montana have to compete with other parts of the United States. Smith stated that the Territory could offer “more substantial inducements . . . than many of the Western States and Territories,” including “quick and cheap” transportation up the Missouri River. He was still able to

³² United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of the Surveyor-General of Montana, House Executive Document #1, 42nd Congress, 2nd session, 1871, p. 203.

conclude that “[e]very year witnesses steady advancement in the comforts and advantages of civilized life” in Montana, so the lack of an immigration commissioner was not slowing its growth too much.³³

Unable to boast about “quick and cheap” transportation until the mid-1880s, Canadian immigration officials focussed on the size and fertility of their western lands. In 1872 for example the Agent for the North-West, J.A.N. Provencher, reported that Manitoba and the North West Territories had “room for millions of inhabitants.”³⁴ The following year Minister of Agriculture J.H. Pope emphasized “the existence of millions of unsettled acres of prairie lands in Manitoba and the North West Territory, of the richest productive capacity ... which at no distant day it is believed and hoped will become the homes of many millions of men from the old world.” Winnipeg Agent Mr. McMicken stressed that “there need not be any apprehension on the ground of too numerous arrivals.” Recent arrivals were making “rapid progress towards comfortable settlement” and there was “ample room for all who may go.”³⁵ In 1881, Agent William Grahame, in Duluth, Minnesota, wrote that “farmers and peasants of the older countries, have naturally sought with eagerness to better their condition in a land where there is room for all, and where the soil yields a hundred-fold for the efforts expended in its cultivation.”³⁶ Canada’s west was

³³ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Surveyor-General of Montana, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 45th Congress, 2nd Session, 1 November 1877, p. 285. Encouraging immigration does not seem to have been a priority for the Territorial government of Montana in the 1870s. During the 1869-70 and 1876 sessions, acts to promote immigration were proposed by the Council, passed first and second reading and the committee stage, and yet were not passed by the House. Council Journals of the 6th and 9th Sessions of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Montana, Montana Historical Society Legislative Assembly Records.

³⁴ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1871*, Report of Agent for the North-West J. A. N Provencher, Sessional Papers 1872, Volume 2, #2A, p. 77.

³⁵ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1872*, Sessional Papers 1873, Volume 6, #26, p. 12.

³⁶ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1880*, Report of Duluth Agent William Grahame, Sessional Papers 1880-1881, Volume 7, #12.

not just big enough to provide land and homes for “millions” of newcomers, the key word these officials used to quantify what they hoped would be a large number of newcomers, but the land still had the fertility of “untouched” (i.e. never-cultivated) soil.

Because the Canadian government was responsible for managing immigration as well as its western spaces, and had a stronger need to shore up its nationalistic agenda in the face of more rapid immigration to the United States, its officials invested a great deal of thought into the best ways to manage newcomers and spaces and the best kinds of newcomers to fill up those spaces. The overriding theme of reports of the Departments of the Interior and of Agriculture during these years was that the prairie west had enough room for everyone, and that the state should do as much as possible to get it settled by white farmers. As Kelley and Trebilcock note, “[t]he fact that so much of the country remained to be settled was used to tout the enormous possibilities awaiting those interested in tapping its mineral and agricultural wealth.”³⁷ Every year, the bureaucrats confidently predicted that “next year” would bring the long-awaited massive influx of new immigrants. In his report for 1876 the Surveyor-General commented that in spite of the general depression, the preceding year’s large crop and “entire immunity from grasshoppers” had generated a great deal of interest “in Ontario and in the Western States respecting Manitoba and the North-West Territories, and there is every probability of a very large immigration into the country next year.”³⁸ In the same year Dufferin, Manitoba agent J. E. Tetu boasted of the “immense extent of excellent lands open to colonization and still unoccupied.” He too believed that “next year, we shall have from all the Provinces, and from the United States, an immense tide of immigration.”³⁹ That immense tide did not

³⁷ Kelley and Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic*, p. 82.

³⁸ Canada, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for year ending 30 June 1876*, Sessional Papers 1877, Volume 7, #11, p. 7.

³⁹ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, Report of Dufferin Manitoba Agent J. E. Tetu, Sessional Papers 1877, Volume 6, #8, p. 83.

develop for another 25 years, but it was not for a lack of effort and optimism on the part of these officials.

As the above comments indicate, the immigrants Canada wanted most were farmers. A government-sponsored conference on immigration in September 1871 proposed several initiatives to help attract the right kind of immigrants. These included calls for the Dominion to “maintain an efficient system of immigration agency in the United Kingdom, on the continent of Europe, and if deemed necessary, elsewhere beyond Canada;” maintain “a liberal policy for the settlement and colonization of Crown lands in Manitoba and the Northwest Territories;” and disseminate whatever information was necessary about Canada in general and the prairie west in particular.⁴⁰ A similar conference three years later restated these goals and gave the Minister of Agriculture “sole responsibility for promoting immigration to Canada from abroad.”⁴¹ In keeping with these objectives, every year the Minister would stress that the Department’s efforts were concentrated on encouraging farmers and labourers.

In spite of their best efforts and optimistic predictions, every Canadian official connected in any way with promoting Canada as a destination for immigrants faced two significant challenges: Australia and New Zealand offered more generous financial assistance for immigrants, and most Europeans thought Canada was part of the United States - the northern, frozen, inhospitable part. In the mid-1870s three different agents noted the latter complaint. Special Immigration Lecturer for Great Britain Rev. Lachlin Taylor wrote that “[t]he great bug-bear, even with men of intelligence and reading, is our climate, of whose cold *especially* they have the most extravagant and absurd views.”⁴²

⁴⁰ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1871*, Sessional Papers 1872, Volume 2, #2A, p. 12.

⁴¹ Kelley and Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic*, p. 77.

⁴² Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, Report by Special Immigration Lecturer for Great Britain Reverend Lachlin Taylor, Sessional Papers 1877, Volume 6,

Thomas Grahame was stationed at Carlisle, England, and lamented the “astonishing ... ignorance which still prevails regarding our country, large numbers not knowing that there is any difference between us and the United States, and also thinking that the whole country to be a thinly settled, frozen region, the greater portion of the population being semi-barbarians.”⁴³ And the Agent General in London Edward Jenkins insisted that “[t]he important thing is to fix distinctly in the Continental mind the distinction between Canada and the United States.”⁴⁴ Many Europeans, in short, did not “see” the border between Canada and the United States, did not see the differences between the two countries which each set of officials was trying hard to emphasize. When prospective immigrants did see the border they gave it a meaning the Canadian officials had to challenge and American officials could use to their advantage.

American officials were certainly aware of their advantage, although they framed it as one of political and social institutions and not climate. Joseph Wilson, Commissioner of the United States General Land Office, declared bluntly in 1870 that the “United States is the favorite land of the emigrant. Other countries present equal attractions in the natural advantages of soil, climate, and position, but have never yet attracted immigration.”

Canada, for example,

lies in much closer proximity to Europe, offering advantages for settlement to its northern races, perhaps, equal to those of some of our Northwestern States, but in spite of every effort of the British Government, the large majority of the immigrants directed to this point are soon attracted to the more genial nationality of the United States of America. The reason of this preference is found in the freedom of our political and social systems, and the superior development of natural resources which that freedom secures.

#8, p. 76. Emphasis in original.

⁴³ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1875*, Report of Agent Thomas Grahame in Carlisle England, Sessional Papers 1876, Volume 7, #8, p. 8.

⁴⁴ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1875*, Report of Agent General In London Edward Jenkins, Sessional Papers 1876, Volume 7, #8, p. 125.

The United States “thus appeals to the self-reliance of the citizen calling forth his latent energies, the exercise of which upon the obstacles of the external nature do not fail to result in the accumulation of wealth and in the development of personal independence of character.”⁴⁵ In Wilson’s opinion, the political and social freedoms offered by American republicanism could not be matched by those offered by Canada’s constitutional monarchy, and were more appealing to immigrants than economic opportunities.

Although Canadian officials would not have agreed with Wilson’s explanation of their inability to attract equal numbers of immigrants, they were aware of the problems they faced and hoped that more accurate information about the country would overcome those problems. But Canada’s immigration agents also had to play the role of intermediary between their own grand rhetoric of unlimited western space, and the more pragmatic demands of nation-building. While federal ministers stressed the need for agricultural labourers and domestic servants who would work for other people, overseas agents used western lands and the possibility of independent land ownership as their main lure. In spite of the rhetoric, there wasn’t really “room for all” and not everyone was welcome in the west, so the agents had to temper their praise of western spaces with efforts to ensure that only the right kind of immigrants actually made it there. The first categories they reached for were ones of race and gender.

“The best pioneers”: Constructing whiteness, ethnicity, and nation

Officials in both countries struggled to articulate and defend the particular kind of European whiteness which they wanted to be able to take for granted as an essential characteristic of desirable immigrants. Whiteness was so fundamental to the bureaucrats’

⁴⁵ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of the Secretary of the Interior, House Executive Document #1, Part 4, 41st Congress, 3rd session, 27 October 1870.

visions of the west that they normally refused to see the people of colour who were already living there, and yet at the same time the purity of the white race had to be defended from such “threats” as native-white relationships and Chinese immigration. While the two governments had defined themselves as being western and not-European, they also paralleled what Edward Said has described as the desire of western European nations to define themselves as not-Oriental.⁴⁶ The strongest example of this is that both countries passed legislation specifically aimed at reducing or eliminating Chinese immigration. The United States had made various attempts to limit Chinese immigration in the late 1870s, and in 1882 finally passed the Chinese Exclusion Act to try and stop all future Chinese immigration.⁴⁷ Three years later Canada passed the Chinese Immigration Act, imposing a \$50 head tax on most Chinese immigrants and sharply restricting the number of Chinese people who could enter the country at all.⁴⁸ Chinese immigrants were never thought of as potential agricultural settlers, and indeed their main opponents were often the white urban

⁴⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

⁴⁷ Bennett, *American Immigration Policies: A History*, p. 301. Between 1870 and 1881 more than 123,000 Chinese people had entered the United States, although few had the intention of staying. From 1881-1890 only 61,000 immigrated and in subsequent decades the decline continued. The Exclusion Acts would be renewed in various forms until after World War II. The historiography of Chinese immigration to the American West includes Shih-Shan Henry Tsai's *The Chinese Experience in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), and Ronald Takaki's *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1989). Two articles which discuss the Chinese in Montana include Robert Swartout Jr.'s "From Kwangtung to the Big Sky: The Chinese Experience in Frontier Montana," *Montana Heritage: An Anthology of Historical Essays*, edited by Robert Swartout Jr. and Harry W. Fritz, (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 1992), and Larry D. Quinn's, "Chink, Chink, Chinaman: The Beginnings of Nativism in Montana," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, Number 58, (April 1967).

⁴⁸ Kelley and Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic*, p. 97. The historiography of Chinese immigration to Canada includes Kay Anderson's *Vancouver's Chinatown: Racial Discourse in Canada, 1875-1980* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), Peter Li's *The Chinese in Canada*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998) and Patricia Roy's *A White Man's Province: British Columbia Politicians and Chinese and Japanese Immigrants, 1858-1914* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1989). On the Chinese in Alberta see Palmer's *Patterns of*

working classes, but their very presence within the political boundaries of the nation as a whole was enough of a threat to each country's future that the governments wanted them kept out.

There are several reasons why the United States and Canada thought only about particular groups of white Europeans when they thought about desirable immigrants. Western and northern Europeans comprised the bulk of nineteenth century immigrants to North America; they were firmly established at the top of the racial hierarchies of the day and were seen as more valuable than other people no matter what the endeavour; and it was assumed that they could thrive in colder climates and overcome the challenges of settling the continent's wide-open western spaces.⁴⁹ The Canadian government's greater involvement in immigration meant that its agents could explicitly spell out these hopes and assumptions in their annual reports.

Canada's goal was to attract as many white farmers as possible, preferably those with at least some resources and experience. Agents also tried to encourage female domestic servants and male labourers who, along with farmers, were the only groups to receive assisted passage. Immigration agents never mentioned trying to encourage stockmen to immigrate. Although ranching had ancient roots in European pastoral practices, large-scale ranching was unique to North America and yet outside of Canadian and American views of national development.

Prejudice and Howard and Tamara Palmer, eds., *Peoples of Alberta: Portraits of Cultural Diversity* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1985).

⁴⁹ There are several excellent monographs which discuss the historical construction of "whiteness" as both a personal attribute and a racial/cultural good. This study has relied most heavily on David Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), and Vron Ware's *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London: Verso, 1992).

Different nationalities and ethnic groups were weighed against each other for their suitability, and whiteness alone was not sufficient.⁵⁰ Even the preferred groups of white immigrants, such as the British, Scandinavians, Swiss, and Euro-Americans, were ranked according to their assumed ability to cope with the size of Canada's western lands. The main concern in agents' minds seems to have been whether a particular group of people could handle the challenges inherent in working hundreds of acres of land, even though few of the preferred European groups would have had any experience with farms as large as the ones in Canada's west.

The English were, of course, a favoured group to settle the new Dominion's western territories. In 1877 J. W. Downs, Agent for Colonisation in Manitoba, advised "English tenant farmers and others who have any desire to immigrate and better their circumstances thereby, and that of their family, who have say at least from £150 to £200 at their command" to come to Manitoba, "where the land is good, the climate healthy, and the advantages offered unequalled in any colony or country." The province was "only 20 days journey from England, you will be still under the old flag, and you, sons of Britannia, may build up another greater England, the Dominion of Canada."⁵¹ Two years later Minister of Agriculture Pope wrote, "the farmer who migrates from the British Island to any part of Canada does not change his flag; nor does he, except to a very slight degree, change his mode of life or his companionship. He goes among his own people to conditions of life

⁵⁰ The Canadian historiography of "white" but non-anglophone immigration to the prairies is extensive, and includes Howard Palmer's *Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982); Frances Swyripa's *Wedded to the Cause: Ukrainian-Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity, 1891-1991* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Royden Loewen's *Family, Church and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and New Worlds, 1850-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

⁵¹ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report, Report on Colonisation in Manitoba* by J. W. Downs, Sessional Papers 1877, Volume 6, #8, p. 70.

and society the same as those he leaves behind.”⁵² While these officials stressed the nearness and familiarity of Manitoba, their counterparts in the Department of the Interior responsible for western surveys and native people were still grappling with how to overcome the distance between Ottawa and southern Alberta. And if Alberta still seemed so far away, by comparison Manitoba seemed (or could be made to seem) that much closer to Ottawa and to England.

But being English was not automatically enough to entitle a man to his own piece of Canadian land. In 1871, for example, agent William Dixon in London, England wrote that although the free grants of land in Ontario “possessed a wonderful charm in the minds of many of these people,” their “practical knowledge of agriculture in most instances, consisted in the growth of a slip of geranium in an earthen vessel or a few sprigs of mignonette in a pan full of mould.” Gentlemen farmers were clearly not quite masculine enough to handle “real” farming. Dixon advised “those in poor circumstances” to work for “a respectable farmer, for a year or two, before venturing to commence for themselves,” while “those with small means at their disposal” should “purchase lands which have been partially improved...”⁵³ His message was clear: being English made a man a desirable immigrant, but did not automatically mean that he had the masculine skills to “improve” 160 acres of land in Ontario or further west.

Swiss and Scandinavian immigrants were universally popular with Canada’s immigration agents. The Agent in France, Paul De Cazes, wrote in 1875 that he thought that “the population of Switzerland would adapt themselves better than any other to Canada” because of “the manners of the people and the nature of the country they

⁵² Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1879*, Sessional Papers 1880, Volume 7, #10.

⁵³ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, Report from Agent William Dixon, Canadian Government Emigration Offices in London, England, Sessional Papers 1871, Volume 6, #64, 31 December 1869, pp. 77-78.

inhabit.”⁵⁴ A year later he added the opinion that the Swiss offered “the most earnest guarantees.” They were “strong, laborious and peaceable,” and “could not fail to acclimatize themselves easily in our country, between which and their own there are so many points of analogy.”⁵⁵ Minister of Agriculture L. Letellier de St. Just agreed that “Swiss settlement is suitable for Canada, and steps have already been taken to endeavour to attract it during the coming season.”⁵⁶ They did not evoke sentimental ties with England, but their Northern European whiteness and reputation for settled, peaceful labour more than compensated for their ethnic difference.

Scandinavian immigrants were even more favoured because they had already proven themselves in the American midwest and were regarded as having many of the same ethnic characteristics as the Swiss. Agent H. Mattson noted in 1875 that in the western United States, Scandinavians were regarded “as the best pioneers. They are all producers, are law-abiding, orderly, sober, industrious, hardy, frugal, and generally successful. They are not shiftless or roving, but remain where they go, under reasonable advantages, and improve the country.” In addition, they produce fewer “paupers and criminals than any other European nation in proportion to their number.”⁵⁷ More than a decade later Winnipeg Agent William Grahame wrote that he thought Canada should be able to attract a large number of Scandinavian immigrants as Minnesota had done – if not from their home countries, then perhaps from the United States itself. Grahame noted that “Large numbers of Scandinavian railway employees” had been in Canada over the summer “but most of them have returned to their homes in the United States. We can offer them better land, a

⁵⁴ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1875*, Report of Agent P. De Cazes in France, Sessional Papers 1875, Volume 8, #40.

⁵⁵ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1876*, Report of Paul De Cazes in France, Sessional Papers 1876, Volume 7, #8, p. 113.

⁵⁶ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1875*, Sessional Papers 1876, Volume 7, #8, p. xv.

larger area of unsettled country from which to select, equally as good transportation facilities, better prices for their produce, and the protection of the most liberal Government in the civilized world.”⁵⁸ Attracting these particular immigrants, therefore, would meet two of Canada’s nationalist goals: get the right kind of white immigrants to settle the west, and prove that Canada could use its superior spaces, services, and “liberal Government” to lure top-quality immigrants away from the United States.

Irish immigrants were not as desirable as English or Scandinavian immigrants, and the agents who reported from Ireland stressed that they were more selective about encouraging emigrants. In 1876 Agent J. S. Talbot wrote from County Cork that he had “always been most careful as to the class of people I recommend to emigrate; had I been willing to sacrifice quality for quantity, I could have induced many to leave Ireland for Canada, but not to the advantage of the latter country.”⁵⁹ Belfast Agent Charles Foy explained the relatively small number of Irish farmers who emigrated to Canada by noting that “the thriftless, [and] the unenterprising” tended to stay home, waiting “Micawber-like” for something better to come along. By contrast, those who chose to emigrate were “the energetic, the enterprising, the thrifty, the man of forethought, who are not afraid of ‘a lion in the path;’ ... Better have a hundred emigrants of this class than thousands of paupers who would be a burden, instead of wealth, in any country.”⁶⁰ It is not surprising that the agents in Ireland emphasised that they were not encouraging the poverty-stricken (and

⁵⁷ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1874*, Report of Agent H. Mattson in Scandinavia, Sessional Papers 1875, Volume 8, #40, p. 137.

⁵⁸ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, Report by Winnipeg Agent William Grahame, Sessional Papers 1886, Volume 7, #10, p. 67.

⁵⁹ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1875*, Report of Agent J. S. Talbot in Cork, Ireland, Sessional Papers 1876, Volume 7, #8, p. 95.

⁶⁰ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1879*, Report of Belfast Agent Charles Foy, Sessional Papers 1880, Volume 7, #10. “Micawber” is a character in Charles Dickens’ novel *David Copperfield*, and the adjective is used to describe a person “perpetually idling and trusting that something good will turn up.” *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, Seventh Edition, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1982).

predominantly Catholic) multitudes to emigrate, or that class considerations took precedence over spatial ones when it came to evaluating this ethnic group. In spite of the small communities of Irish Protestant farmers in Ontario the Irish were still perceived as urban immigrants, and agents needed to stress that they had not forgotten Canada's preference for farmers.⁶¹

Other western Europeans received even more mixed reviews from the overseas agents, who used the criteria of space and climate to rationalize their opinions. European Agent Edward Barnard Jr. commented in 1873 that while the people of the "Rhenish Provinces" along the western edge of the newly-united German Empire were "industrious, economical, and far advanced in the practice of agriculture, yet they would find themselves here in circumstances entirely different from our own." They could sustain "a whole family on a few acres of ground," but their "mode of farming" required too much manual labour to be practical in Canada. Immigrants from this area would give Canada "able gardeners, excellent farm and other servants, clever mechanics, etc.; but it might be a mistake to expect them to manage our farms, or to settle with some advantage on our wild lands, until they have acquired experience by a residence of some years in this country."⁶² Once again, an ethnic group was to be discouraged because it was assumed it could not handle the size of Canadian farms.

Agent De Cazes wrote from France that he thought the residents of the eastern, western, and northern sections of the country "would afford us the best materials in every respect." Winter in northern and eastern France, "though not precisely so rigorous, is in many respects similar to that of Canada... ." The people were "sober, economical, and

⁶¹ On the Irish in Ontario see Donald Akenson's *The Irish in Ontario: A Study in Rural History* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984), and Bruce Elliott's *Irish Migrants in the Canadas: A new approach* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1988).

⁶² Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1872*, Report of Agent in

laborious,” and those who were already “part of the agricultural class” were generally “accustomed to the arduous work of clearing land... .” The central and southern portions of the country, however, had little potential for emigration because of “the easy circumstances enjoyed by the inhabitants of certain districts, from the fertility of the soil,” and for other reasons upon which he did not elaborate. Paris “and the other great centres” were not likely to produce “emigrants of a kind to amalgamate easily with the rest of our population.”⁶³ And in his 1876 report Agent General in London Edward Jenkins recommended that the northern portion of Italy receive more consideration because the men he had seen “working in the streets at Berne were large and powerful.... They are not debilitated by a hot climate, and I believe would be well adapted to some parts of Canada.”⁶⁴ Although agents may have objected to Europeans’ exaggerated notions about Canada’s cold climate when such notions were believed to be discouraging the “right” kind of immigrants, those agents were not above using the climate to discourage the “wrong” kind of immigrants.

Euro-American immigrants were greatly desired by Canadian officials because it was assumed that such immigrants would be whites with some capital and experience with frontier agriculture and settlement. Attracting those immigrants would also prove that Canada could attract Americans as well as the United States was attracting the immigrants of the world. Three different agents discussed immigration from the United States in their reports for 1878, one based in Michigan and two in Manitoba. Detroit Agent Robert Whiteford noted that immigration into Canada from the United States was on the rise, “and judging from the numerous letters I am constantly receiving from all parts of the United

Europe Edward Barnard Jr., *Sessional Papers 1873*, Volume 6, #26, p. 116.

⁶³ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1874*, Report of Agent P. De Cazes in France, *Sessional Papers 1875*, Volume 8, #40.

⁶⁴ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1875*, Report of Agent General in London Edward Jenkins, *Sessional Papers 1876*, Volume 7, #8, p. 64.

States, from persons wishing to emigrate, I have no doubt but that double the number will seek homes in our fertile prairies of the North-West during next year.”⁶⁵ Winnipeg Agent William Hespeler wrote that the new arrivals from the US “were, more than previously, of a good farming class, bringing with them implements and stock.”⁶⁶ And the Agent at Dufferin indicated that many people had arrived from the midwestern states, and “the greater part of these immigrants have been essentially practical farmers, and as a rule, having sufficient means, they may be considered a valuable class.” Unlike immigrants who had come directly from Europe, those who had already spent time in the United States were often able to bring “horses, cattle, vehicles, [and] farming implements...” and thus establish themselves and their farms more quickly.⁶⁷

The high value placed on American immigrants was a common theme in the reports of Agent William Grahame, first when he was stationed in Duluth, Minnesota and later once he had been transferred to Winnipeg. In an 1880 report from Duluth, Grahame was pleased to report that “the *immigration from the Western States* into Manitoba has been considerable in 1879.” Former residents of Iowa and Wisconsin in particular were helping to populate “our great North-West ... and a more desirable people as settlers in a new country cannot be found...” They are immune “to all inconveniences attendant on frontier life; a people whose fine physique and long experience enable them to make light of the thousand and one little difficulties that people from an older country would consider hardships almost insurmountable.” Not only did midwesterners come with experience and fortitude, they brought practical farming skills and “sufficient means to stock and operate

⁶⁵ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1878*, Report of Agent in Detroit R. Whiteford, Sessional Papers 1879, Volume 7, #9, p. 38.

⁶⁶ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1878*, Report of Agent in Winnipeg William Hespeler, Sessional Papers 1879, Volume 7, #9, p. 49.

⁶⁷ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1878*, Report of Agent in Dufferin J. E. Tetu, Sessional Papers 1879, Volume 7, #9, p. 58.

their farms as soon as they get possession of them.”⁶⁸ In his next report Grahame declared that “immigrants from the Western States” were “superior in many respects to those coming from abroad. They are self-reliant, steady and persevering, know exactly what to do and how to do it.” As a result, he thought that “no efforts should be spared in securing such a class of citizens.” He was forced to concede, however, that the American railroads were offering cash rebates for western settlers and no such rebates existed in Canada at that time, so the latter was likely to keep losing the majority of western-bound settlers.⁶⁹

Two years later Grahame was stationed in Winnipeg but continued his advocacy of American immigration. He explained that Canada was becoming increasingly popular among residents of the western states because they wanted “to come where the ‘young folks’ will not only have plenty of room, but will receive bountiful returns for labour expended on these fertile lands.”⁷⁰ By praising American immigrants in this manner, Grahame was able to emphasize the superiority of these New World whites as compared to those from Europe, and simultaneously suggest that these high quality immigrants were choosing Canada because the United States was running out of room for future generations.

**“Determined to face manfully difficulties that they might be called upon to meet”:
gendering immigration**

These interconnected assumptions about space, race, and ethnicity which both governments used to structure their perceptions of immigrants and the west were also fundamentally connected with their assumptions about gender. That the Canadian and

⁶⁸ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1879*, Report of Duluth Agent William Grahame, Sessional Papers 1880, Volume 7, #10. Emphasis in original.

⁶⁹ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1881*, Report of Duluth Agent William Grahame, Sessional Papers 1882, Volume 7, #11.

American wests were supposed to be masculine spaces is obvious: large-scale agriculture was seen as a masculine enterprise even when described as “family” farming, and the desired characteristics of hardiness and self-reliant independence are associated with masculinity. Cecilia Danysk’s work has shown that the economic demands and skewed sex-ratios in Canada’s west allowed for a significant amount of re-working of masculinity.⁷¹ Still, small-scale “gentlemen” farmers were not deemed sufficiently masculine for the hard work of colonizing and nationalizing western spaces. Maleness and a certain kind of masculinity were necessary because ranching and large-scale agriculture were seen as masculine enterprises, and the desired characteristics of hardiness and rugged self-reliance were associated with masculinity. Doug Owrarn notes that Canadians and Americans shared the belief that white, agricultural settlement had a greater right to western lands than indigenous peoples because the “ideal society envisaged for the future was one based on the independent rural landowner. ... Terms such as 'yeomanry' and 'industrious husbandman' were used to describe the kind of man who, it was hoped, would form the basis of society in the North West.”⁷² What Owrarn does not stress is how critical gender was to this vision of the future. Women were almost never mentioned in American officials’ reports that touched on immigration; the country was receiving enough immigrants every year that it did not have to worry about how to attract more, but the infrequent references to women leave the impression that United States authorities saw their west as an essentially masculine place with little room for women. Canadian officials, on the other hand, did have to spend time and energy trying to encourage the immigration of

⁷⁰ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1883*, Report of Winnipeg Agent William Grahame, Sessional Papers 1884, Volume 8, #14, p. 84.

⁷¹ Danysk, “‘A Bachelor’s Paradise’: Homesteaders, Hired Hands, and the Construction of Masculinity, 1880-1930,” *Making Western Canada: Essays on European Colonization and Settlement*, eds. Catherine Cavanaugh and Jeremy Mouat, (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1996). See also Danysk, *Hired Hands: Labour and the Development of Prairie Agriculture, 1880-1930* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1995).

white women, both as part of their general campaign to increase immigration and to ease their fears over a growing Métis population in the west.

Officials on both sides of the border did agree that western development was a job for men. J. W. Downs, Agent for Colonisation in Manitoba, called to the “sons of Britannia” to settle Canada’s west for the greater glory of England.⁷³ St. Paul, Minnesota agent G. R. Kingsmill wrote that of the 17,000 people (including women and children) to whom he had issued tickets for Canada in 1880, the majority seemed “prepared and determined to face manfully difficulties that they might be called upon to meet.”⁷⁴ Agent William Grahame noted “that only the most energetic and self-reliant men have pluck enough to leave their homes and seek to better their condition in an unknown land.”⁷⁵ Likewise in the United States, Roswell H. Mason, Surveyor-General of Montana, wrote in 1881 that the Territory offered “great inducements” to “men who are accustomed to work and work hard... There is a good demand for miners, mechanics and farm hands. Wages are high and the necessaries of life are cheap. Montana needs capitalists and workingmen to develop her great natural resources. Such men are always welcome...”⁷⁶ These writers were not just using the word “men” in some generic sense to imply “people;” it is clear that they were thinking and writing about a particular kind of man.

But even white masculinity had to have some additional standards, as the Canadian agents’ comments about different ethnic groups demonstrate. English men who were more

⁷² Doug Owsram, *Promise of Eden*, p. 137.

⁷³ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1876*, Report on Colonisation in Manitoba by J. W. Downs, Sessional Papers 1877, Volume 6, #8, p. 70.

⁷⁴ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1880*, Report of St. Paul Minnesota Agent G. R. Kingsmill, Sessional Papers 1880-1881, Volume 7, #12.

⁷⁵ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1880*, Report of Duluth Agent William Grahame, Sessional Papers 1880-1881, Volume 7, #12.

⁷⁶ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Surveyor-General of Montana, House Executive Documents #1, Part 5, 47th Congress, 1st Session.

accustomed to growing geraniums, for example, were not thought manly enough to handle Canada, while men from southern France or southern Italy had enjoyed too favourable a climate to develop a robust masculinity, and had a more tenuous claim to whiteness than northern Europeans. White masculinity also required specific protection from other kinds of men who were immigrating to North America: Chinese men had been recruited by the tens of thousands to build the transcontinental railroads for example, but once the roads were complete both countries wanted these sojourners to go back to China and, as discussed above, did their best to restrict further Chinese immigration. The west coast of Canada and the United States is seen as the hot-bed of anti-Chinese sentiment, but white officials and white communities across Canada and the United States clearly shared a determination to protect whiteness and its privileges.

Female immigrants, if they were discussed at all, were a problematic afterthought for the United States and a problem to be solved for Canada. Officials were not concerned about women's ability to cope with North America's large, outdoor western spaces, because women were already assumed to be confined within domestic spaces. Even being white did not quite compensate for being female, because from the perspective of federal officials being female meant that at best a woman had three economically insignificant roles to play in taming western frontiers: domestic servant, wife, and mother. Yet their shared investment in these nineteenth century assumptions about femininity did not mean that the United States and Canada saw white women immigrants the same way.

American officials rarely mentioned female immigrants, and when they did it was in reference to their negligible economic potential or the complications involved in transporting single women. In 1870, for example, Commissioner of the General Land Office Joseph Wilson noted that although one-fifth of the annual immigrants were younger than 15, "this deficiency is more than compensated for by the immense preponderance of

the males over the females."⁷⁷ Young people were not immediately valuable to the government as economic producers, but at least boys would grow up to be useful men. Two years later, during the discussion over proposed legislation to protect immigrants en route to the United States, the poor conditions on board ships from Europe were framed as posing particular dangers to female passengers' respectability. In his "Report on Immigration, and the Proper Transportation of Immigrants to and within the United States," J. Fred Myers of the Treasury Department was particularly critical of the effect that overcrowded conditions on board ship had on "the chastity of the female passengers.... It is true a compartment is provided for single unattended females who may choose to avail themselves of the privilege; but, according to the testimony of the ship's officers, very few remain therein until the close of the voyage, while the majority join the males without hindrance. In fact, every possible inducement is held out to demoralize female emigrants."⁷⁸ Myers' statements are typical of the few references American officials made about women as immigrants. Federal authorities only discussed single female immigrants and perceived them as liabilities in need of special, paternalistic protection, but spent little time or energy addressing the issue. Women were a particular kind of immigrant but were not seen as settlers.

The Canadian government devoted more time and resources to encouraging female immigration than the United States, but even then it was never a high priority. After farmers, "domestic servants" from European countries were the preferred occupational group Canadian agents were supposed to target, and they were the only two groups which

⁷⁷ United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Joseph Wilson, Commissioner of General Land Office, House Executive Document #1, Part 4, 41st Congress, 3rd session, 27 October 1870, p. 9.

⁷⁸ United States, "Message from the President recommending Legislation in relation to the transportation of immigrants to and within the United States," Senate Executive Document #73, 42nd Congress, 2nd session, May 1872

were consistently granted assisted passage, admittedly at a different rate.⁷⁹ Single women who specifically immigrated as domestic servants were supposed to work in the homes of central Canadians, but some agents based in western Canada also mentioned the need for domestics in the west and the greater opportunities which awaited them. Another rarely-stated factor which motivated officials to encourage white women to head west was that the Riel Rebellion of 1870 had given the Canadian government a higher level of anxiety about relationships between white men and aboriginal women in the west. Ottawa still did not view white women as independent economic actors, but as social and racial ones.⁸⁰

If the general tone of the agents' reports is any indication, overseas immigration agents did not feel like their efforts to attract female immigrants were receiving much support. The government did have a designated female agent in Germany in the 1870s, and supported the efforts of British and Canadian women's groups to increase the number of domestic servants who emigrated to Canada, but few additional initiatives are mentioned in the annual reports. The agent in Germany, Elise Von Koebner, pushed for more female emigration, particularly of domestic servants, and also urged the creation of all-female groups and associations to manage international women's immigration.⁸¹ She sounded despondent in her 1879 report, and one gets a clear sense that she did not feel that her efforts were being supported or taken seriously by the government: "All I ask you, before retiring from this work, is to support such arrangements as I may propose for the closing

⁷⁹ In 1881 for example, the Minister of Agriculture's report indicated that the Department was giving 5 pounds to the right class of male agricultural labourers and 4 pounds to female domestic servants to assist with the cost of their transportation. Canada, Department of Agriculture, Annual Report for 1880, Sessional Papers 1880-1881, Volume 7, #12.

⁸⁰ The scholarship around this perceived need for white women to marry white men in the west includes Sylvia Van Kirk's *Many Tender Ties*, Sarah Carter's *Capturing Women*, and Adele Perry's *On The Edge of Empire*.

⁸¹ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1875*, Report of Agent in Germany Madame Elise Von Koebner, Sessional Papers 1876, Volume 7, #8, pp.156-164.

of the work here, so that the faithful labour of years past and the amount of money spent, *should not be lost to the country*. *General emigration* will follow, and when the Ladies' Emigration Protective Committees have the work in hand, *Canada can at all times ask for the supply of women she needs*.⁸² Three years later Belfast Agent Charles Foy indicated that he was willing to “advertise” for servant girls if he was told what was needed. He had seen in “the Montreal papers that the ladies of that city were proposing an association to bring servant girls to that city. I should be glad if I received early in the month of March a list of the servants required, and the wages offered.” With such a list in hand, he “would get a large number whom otherwise I could not.”⁸³ Ottawa might have wanted to encourage more women immigrants, but does not seem to have supported the efforts of its only female immigration agent or assisted agents who were conveniently placed in urban centres that could provide the desired domestic servants.

This lack of support of its agents was not the only reason why Canada was not able to convince as many women to immigrate as it wanted. As with other kinds of immigrants, the country faced stiff competition from countries such as Australia, and the government did not have a clear administrative framework in place in the 1870s and 80s to actively assist single women who did want to immigrate. Instead, officials appeared to be relying on the efforts of individual agents and overseas women’s groups to do the work. Susan Jackel notes that a strong London-based organizational framework to encourage British middle-class women to emigrate to Canada and other British colonies “came into its own” around 1880. During the 1860s and 70s efforts had been made to encourage the emigration of Britain’s “surplus” women, but in the 1880s several new and more active organizations

⁸² Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1878*, “Report on Female Emigration from Germany and Switzerland,” by Elise Von Koebner, Sessional Papers 1879, Volume 7, #9. Emphasis in original.

⁸³ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1881*, Report of Agent Charles Foy in Belfast, Sessional Papers 1882, Volume 7, #11.

were founded.⁸⁴ The High Commissioner for Canada in London, Alexander Galt, wrote in 1882 that he was pleased to announce “in connection with the demand for female domestic servants in Canada, that a ‘Women’s Emigration Society’ has been formed in London to help females who are anxious to settle in the colonies, and to provide for their reception and supervision on board the various steamships.” He believed that the two reasons why more women did not emigrate to Canada were the lack “of adequate supervision and protection on the voyage and after arrival” and insufficient funding. He hoped that the Women’s Emigration Society would overcome the first problem, and that increased funds would soon be forthcoming to remedy the second problem.⁸⁵ Galt’s successor as High Commissioner, Charles Tupper, wrote in 1886 that Canada was going to have “to offer greater advantages than those now in force” if it wanted to compete.⁸⁶ The government did eventually take steps to protect female immigrants while in transit, appointing a superintendent of female immigration in 1887, and amending the Immigration Act in 1892 to prohibit seduction and sexual intercourse between female immigrants and ship personnel.⁸⁷

Only certain groups of European women were considered as possible domestic servants and no effort was made to attract domestic servants from the United States, but the agents did not rank different European ethnicities against each other as they had done when

⁸⁴ Susan Jackel, *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty: British Emigrant Gentlewomen in the Canadian West, 1880-1914* (Vancouver and London: University of British Columbia Press, 1982), p. xviii. Jackel’s work remains the most useful text on the emigration of British women to Canada’s west after 1880. The first chapter of Eliane Leslau Silverman’s *The Last Best West* focusses on the migration experiences of women from a range of ethnic backgrounds. Silverman, *The Last Best West: Women on the Alberta Frontier 1880-1930* (Montreal and London: Eden Press, 1984).

⁸⁵ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1881*, Report of High Commissioner for Canada, Alexander Galt, Sessional Papers 1882, Volume 7, #11.

⁸⁶ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1885*, Report of High Commissioner in London Charles Tupper, Sessional Papers 1886, Volume 7, #10, p. 295.

⁸⁷ Kelley and Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic*, p. 85

describing men. Instead, the additional criteria for white female immigrants were respectability and morality. In his 1884 Report, Winnipeg Agent Grahame stated that “[o]f the female help that arrived in this country during the past season, I would say, that I had little or no difficulty in finding good places for all worthy applicants.” He cautioned “the good people who are interested in female emigration societies, in the mother country, that they cannot exercise too much care in the selection of young women, for servants, for the colonies.” The unfortunate notion that young girls could “find ready employment, at high wages, in this country, no matter what their qualifications” had to be dispelled because “[t]he day for employing untrained domestics is past.” Some new arrivals were refusing to take the lower-paid jobs, even if they had no training. He added that “the morals of young women ... sent out to this country should be of such a nature that the Agent would have no hesitation in recommending them to respectable families. There has, unfortunately, been some exceptions to this rule during the past season.”⁸⁸ Immigration agents had different sorts of expectations for white masculinity and white femininity: above all else male immigrants should be able to cultivate large farms, while female immigrants should be respectable.

When the agents moved beyond discussing women as domestic servants, they cast white women in the roles of the reluctant emigrant and even more reluctant homesteader. In 1879, for example, the agent in Carlisle, England was pressuring the Canadian government to set aside land for a group colony from British border counties, in the same way that land had been reserved for groups settlements of Mennonites and Icelanders. He used women's fears as one of his justifications for such a move: “[o]ne of the greatest fears among many of the best classes for settlers in this country, and especially among females, is that they would get into a new and wild country where they would know

⁸⁸ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1883*, Report of Winnipeg

nobody, and that the people of the country would not be inclined to be friendly to them.”⁸⁹ If Canada wanted to get “the best classes” of settlers, he believed that it was going to have to make some accommodations for women’s social needs.

The following year Agent William Grahame used women's fears to justify his recommendation that men and women should emigrate to Canada separately and at different times of the year. During a spring visit to Emerson, Manitoba, which was on the border with the United States where the Red River entered Canada, he had been “very much struck with the disappointed look that was plainly visible on the faces of many of the new arrivals, especially the female portion of them.” Such disappointment was easily understood, he said, when one considered that these newcomers had left behind “comfortable homes in a country where everything was in an advanced state of improvement, and then imagine them on their arrival in this ‘promised land,’ their first step from the platform at the railway car being almost knee deep into mud.” It was his opinion that a man should arrive in the fall “and make provision for the sheltering of his family, who should not arrive in Manitoba before the middle or end of the following May.”⁹⁰ Grahame clearly did not believe that women had any role to play in the hard work associated with the first year of homesteading, and in fact needed to be shielded from it.

Only occasionally did the agents suggest that encouraging white women to work as domestics in Canada’s west would serve larger racial and national goals when they married white homesteaders, and it was always the western agents who did so. They believed that by working as domestic servants in respectable western households, women would marry quickly and provide domestic services to white homesteaders, and thus provide an

Agent William Grahame, *Sessional Papers 1884*, Volume 8, #14, p. 86.

⁸⁹ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1878*, *Sessional Papers 1879*, Volume #7, #9.

⁹⁰ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1879*, Report of Duluth Agent William Grahame, *Sessional Papers 1880*, Volume 7, #10.

invaluable domestic service to the nation. Grahame wrote in 1879 that the Department of Agriculture should help “a good healthy class of domestic servants” to come to the North-West, because “it is a very difficult matter to get them at any wages.” He believed that there were two obvious benefits for the women: wages for domestics were higher in Winnipeg than in Montreal, and they would not have to stay in those jobs for very long. Women were guaranteed to find “good comfortable homes in the future” because

so many of our young Canadian farmers are settling alone in the North-West, and are compelled to lead a bachelor's life, or inter-marry with the Indian women, while the introduction of a number of good healthy young women into the Province and North-West, would have a tendency to elevate the morals of our young men, who would be very ready to embrace all the responsibilities of matrimony, were it possible to find good helpmates.⁹¹

In Grahame's opinion, personal fulfillment as wives and mothers and a role in the nation's future were the intertwined attractions waiting for white women in the North-West, but it was to be a different kind of nation-building than the role played by white men.

Two other western agents repeated this theme several years later. Brandon, Manitoba agent Thomas Bennett noted in 1886 that he had fielded numerous requests for female servants and thought that more of an effort should “be made to send out strong, healthy young girls or women, accustomed to house work, to this country. Wages are good and employment certain.” In addition, their presence would “ultimately lead to their filling more important positions, as the wives of the many young farmers who are now suffering the miseries and inconveniences of bachelorhood, on their prairie farms in Manitoba and the North-West.”⁹² In the same year, Emerson, Manitoba Agent J. E. Tetu had the following explanation for the chronic shortage of domestic servants in the west. In a “new country,” he wrote, “[y]oung men anxious to start out in life for themselves, and

⁹¹ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1878*, Report of Duluth Agent William Grahame, Sessional Papers 1879, Volume 7, #9.

fathers with sons to provide for, are in the majority. When females arrive the attractions presented by a home of their own prove irresistible, and marriage quickly follows.” As a result, the demand for domestic servants was going to exceed the supply for some time, “for scarcely is a girl comfortably settled in her new place before a wedding takes place.”⁹³ Respectable homes in Canada’s west needed domestic servants, but the nation needed white wives and mothers even more.

“Give the face of the country a very different appearance”: immigration and the borderlands

As the preceding sections have shown, Canadian and American officials shared a set of interlocking conceptual categories that they used to structure their thinking about immigration. They believed that counting was the way to manage immigration, that the west was central to immigration as well as the futures of their nations, and that particular kinds of whiteness and masculinity were necessary characteristics because of the role immigrants were to play in the nation’s future as western settlers. Federal authorities responsible for immigration were not thinking about the borderlands when they discussed immigration, because the region was still too far away, and there was a great deal of “empty” space still to be filled in west of the 95th meridian. By the time most immigrants made it far enough west to be in sight of the Rockies, they were not really considered “immigrants” anymore because they generally had already had one home in North America. In addition, the dominance of ranching in the borderlands meant that the region did not fit national visions of yeoman farmers and independent homesteaders. Ranching dictated a different set of assumptions about space, race, and gender: white men and their ability to

⁹² Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1885*, Report by Brandon, Manitoba Agent Thomas Bennett, Sessional Papers 1886, Volume 7, #10, p. 87.

take up space mattered more, and white women mattered less, all of which served to set this sub-region apart from the rest of “the west” when it came to immigration.

Nevertheless, local white officials tried to employ the same set of categories to come to grips with the influx of newcomers, at the same time as the borderlands posed specific challenges to each of those categories.

The historiography of western settlement has tended to emphasize the lack of people in the borderlands before the large influx of white settlers around the turn of the century, and accounts for it, as Rex Myers does in his article on farming communities in eastern Montana after 1900, by explaining how “marginal” the region was for agriculture.⁹⁴ Canadian historian Howard Palmer adds several other factors to the list of reasons why southern Alberta had few settlers before the late 1890s: “[f]ears of drought and frost and of Indian and Métis uprisings, the absence of Canadian Pacific branch lines ... the lack of suitable farming techniques and unfavourable markets and prices” as well as the large landholdings of the Hudson’s Bay Company and Canadian Pacific Railway.⁹⁵ John Bennett and Seena Kohl argue that the “northern plains were the most deliberately promoted and organized of all western North American settlement areas,” but note that immigration did not begin “in earnest” until the 1890s.⁹⁶ Only historians whose focus is something other than settlement, such as the development of ranching in the borderlands, have noted that small white communities were present 20 to 30 years before the 1890s

⁹³ Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1885*, Report by Emerson, Manitoba Agent J. E. Tetu, Sessional Papers 1886, Volume 7, #10, p. 100.

⁹⁴ Rex C. Myers, “Homestead on the Range: The Emergence of Community in Eastern Montana, 1900-1925,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 10 (Fall 1990), p. 219.

⁹⁵ Howard Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), .p. 21

⁹⁶ John Bennett and Seena B. Kohl, *Settling the Canadian-American West, 1890-1915: Pioneer Adaptation and Community Building* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), .p. 30

rush.⁹⁷ Fewer still mention the presence of non-aboriginal people of colour unless it is in reference to outbreaks of racist violence.⁹⁸

Yet there was a rich and complex mix of people and communities in the borderlands before the 1890s, and these communities laid the foundations for the ones who followed. It is true that the Alberta-Montana borderlands were barely on the horizon for officials in Ottawa and Washington who were concerned about immigration before 1890, and the number of non-aboriginal inhabitants was small, but local authorities did their best to count and categorize the non-aboriginal communities in ways that both reinforced and inadvertently challenged national goals. By tracking the number of men and women in different racial and ethnic categories, local officials buttressed federal visions of who could and could not belong. At the same time, the human diversity revealed in local census figures complicated federal visions of an “empty” west containing only aboriginal peoples contained on reserves and white agricultural communities.

As was the case with all other federal information-gathering exercises in the late nineteenth century, precision was of the utmost importance even when counting small numbers of people in a relatively small region in each country. While local Indian agents were having a hard time getting accurate head counts of the Blackfoot communities, the census takers were managing to be more successful. Figures from northern Montana and southern Alberta in the 1870s and 80s reveal what Benedict Anderson calls “the census-makers' passion for completeness and unambiguity.” They were intolerant “of multiple, politically 'transvestite,' blurred, or changing identifications... The fiction of the census is that everyone is in it, and that everyone has one - and only one - extremely clear place.”

⁹⁷ See for example David Breen, *The Canadian Prairie West and the Ranching Frontier 1874-1924*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983) and Terry Jordan, *North American Cattle Ranching Frontiers: Origins, Diffusion, and Differentiation* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993).

⁹⁸ See Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice*, on the Chinese in southern Alberta.

What the census figures challenge, however, is Anderson's subsequent assertion that the census could not tolerate "fractions."⁹⁹ In the colonial landscape of the borderlands each government had its own distinct way of counting heads, and the people doing the counting did in fact create and count fractional identities according to how much aboriginal blood a person was thought to have. The region was far away from the seats of government but central to what those governments wanted their futures to look like. As a result, racial categories had to be scrutinized and counted differently than they did in eastern ports.

The key difference between the United States Census of 1870 and 1880 and the Canadian Census of 1881 and 1885 is that, while both used a combination of racial and ethnic categories and origins to create their census categories, the American census tended to rely more on racial categories and the Canadian census on racial origins. For example, the 1870 census of Choteau county, the large north-central county on the border with Alberta, stated that 361 whites, 16 "coloured" people and 3 Chinese males helped to make up the total number of 517 "non-Indians" in the district.¹⁰⁰ Ten years later Choteau county's non-aboriginal population had increased considerably and now included 2448 whites, 71 "coloured" people, 18 Chinese people, and 521 non-reserve Indians.¹⁰¹ The 1881 census of southern Alberta recorded approximately 180 people of English origin and 100 of French origin in the southern-most district of Bow River, out of a total of about 400 non-aboriginal people.¹⁰² Four years later the census takers counted 1185 people of

⁹⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Revised ed. London: Verso, 1991. 1st ed 1983), pp. 165-6.

¹⁰⁰ United States, 1870 Census, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872). The total numbers for the Territory were listed as 19,457 Indians, 18,306 whites, 1936 Chinese, and 137 "coloured" people.

¹⁰¹ United States, Census, 1880.

¹⁰² Canada, 1881 Census, Volume 1, (Ottawa: Maclean, Roger and Company, 1882), pp. 300-01. The fact that all of the numbers from southern Alberta seem to have been rounded off suggests that they were approximate at best.

various European origins, 4 people of “African” origin, and 2 of “Chinese” origin.¹⁰³ At the simplest level, each country wanted to be able to count exactly how many white people were in the area and compare those numbers to other supposedly self-evident and clearly defined racial groups. By attempting to subdivide those whites according to particular European origins, Canada also wished to credit some, and not others, with a place in the national myth of England and France as the country’s two founding nations.

By counting the number of whites or the number of whites with particular ethnic origins, the census takers for each country staked out the basic categories of belonging or not belonging to the national majority. The goal of census-taking was to ensure that everyone was counted and thus assigned their one place in the national population. As a result, the census takers had to create a range of additional categories to account for people who were not clearly of one race or another. In Choteau county in 1870, this meant counting two “mulatto” males, 36 male and 63 female “half-Indians,” 13 male and 4 female “fourth-Indians,” and 125 males and 5 females “of foreign birth.” So important was it to maintain (at least discursively) the racial divide between whites and aboriginals, that even one aboriginal grandparent could get a person removed from the “white” column. The census also indicated that there were 473 “Indians and mixed blood living among whites,” but did not record the number of whites who were living among Indians. Similarly, by creating a separate category for people of “foreign birth,” the census gives the impression that all duly-counted “whites” are American-born, and there is no way of telling whether the foreign-born residents might have been considered “white” by their neighbours.¹⁰⁴

In the Bow River census district of southern Alberta, anyone who was not of “English” or “French” origin in 1881 was grouped into two other categories: 100 people

103 Canada, 1885 Census of North-West Territories, Volume 1, pp. 10-11.

104 Census figures for Choteau county duplicated in United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report for 1871*, Report of the Surveyor-General of Montana, John

were listed under “various other origins” and 20 under “not given.” There were no less than 14 additional non-aboriginal ethnic and racial origins provided in the census tables, yet these 120 people could not be clearly classified.¹⁰⁵ Not until the 1885 census of the North-West Territory are numbers recorded for the number of “Half-Breeds” in southern Alberta, and then this group of 26 people was further divided into “English,” “French,” “Scotch,” “Irish,” and “Undefined” half-breeds.¹⁰⁶ Neither the American nor the Canadian census allowed for the fact that many of the people which the census labelled “half-Indians” or “fourth-Indians” or “half-breeds” may well have identified as Métis, a distinct and uniquely North American ethnic group and one which had its own long history of cross-border and cross-continent trade and mobility. Indeed, as recent scholarship on the Métis has shown, by the mid-nineteenth century a distinct identity had been forged and members of Métis communities migrated as far west as the Rockies for trade, farming, or buffalo hunting.¹⁰⁷ What is striking in the Canadian and American records is that both counting systems insisted on framing mixed-race people as subsets of “Indians,” and this perception was shared by the white women whose personal papers are discussed in the next chapter: they recognized the existence of “half breeds” and would describe individuals as such, but did not appear to perceive any significant differences between aboriginal and Métis people.

Blaine, House Executive Document 1, 42nd Congress, 2nd session, 1871, p. 199.

105 Canada, 1881 Census, pp. 300-01.

106 Canada, 1885 Census of North-West Territories, p. 11.

107 There is a significant amount of recent scholarship on the Métis which touches on their cross-border and cross-continental mobility, including John Mack Faragher, “Americans, Mexicans, Métis: A Community Approach to the Comparative Study of North American Frontiers,” in *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past*, eds. William Cronon, George Miles and Jay Gitlin, 90-109 (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 1992); Gerhard J. Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Métis in the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); and John E. Foster, “Wintering, the Outsider Adult Male and the Ethnogenesis of the Western Plains Métis,” in *From Rupert's Land to Canada*, eds. Theodore Binnema, Gerhard J. Ens and R. C. Macleod, 179-192 (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001).

Paradoxically, this categorization of bi-racial people maintained the binary system of racial categories.

Just as federal authorities had tried and failed to keep the lines clearly drawn between “good” and “bad” land, between “Indian” and “white,” and between “American” and “Canadian,” the very existence of so many additional bi-racial people and “undefined” census categories was proof that the governments were unable to enforce the desired physical and social divisions between racial groups. While these census categories kept the lines discursively drawn around and between “pure” racial categories, they simultaneously highlighted their own permeability.

Not only did the census have to include additional categories for people of mixed descent, thereby revealing the existence of interracial sexual relationships and the porous nature of the lines drawn around Indian land, but the total figures revealed that men significantly outnumbered women in every non-aboriginal racial group. In Choteau county in 1880, for example, there were 344 white men and only 17 white women, 16 “coloured” men and two women, three Chinese men and no Chinese women.¹⁰⁸ The Canadian census of 1880 and 1885 did not subdivide individual groups according to the number of men and women in each, instead providing a total for each district. In the Macleod district in 1885, out of a total population of 4450 people, there were 2028 females and 2422 males. Thus even when the more gender-balanced aboriginal population was included, there were still almost 400 more men than women, and it is likely that the imbalance was most significant among the newcomer communities.¹⁰⁹ The longer this gender imbalance continued, the more likely it was that the mixed-race population was going to increase.

108 United States, Census, 1880.

109 Canada, 1885 Census of North-West Territories, volume 1, p. 3.

Local officials who discussed these numbers in their annual reports gave additional and impressionistic accounts of immigration into the borderlands, and chose to emphasize different changes which had resulted. These thriving, multi-racial communities in the borderlands in the 1870s and 80s both pleased and concerned local officials who were eager for immigrants but still committed to policing the lines of racial differences. For example, the presence of 1936 Chinese people in Montana in 1870, most of whom were concentrated in the mining districts, sparked complaints from the Surveyor-General. John Blaine noted that there were enough Chinese people to equal nearly one-tenth of the aboriginal population. Although he described the men as “industrious and well behaved” he added that they generally worked in mining or “domestic duties, earning a good deal of money, but give in nothing” and therefore he did not think they should be counted “in the general average” of wealth and productivity. There were few Chinese women in the Territory and he described them as “generally indolent and lazy.”¹¹⁰ Twelve years later Governor John S. Crosby complained that while these “strange creatures” might “seem to be very industrious, showing great aptitude for many useful occupations, and make little trouble,” they were “almost universally regarded as a curse to the country, keeping out others who might do their work and at the same time grow up into a part of the body politic.”¹¹¹ Because the presence of Chinese men in Montana’s lucrative mining districts was seen as a threat to the white men involved with the mines, Chinese people were perceived as an economic and social threat in a way that was remarkably out of proportion to their numbers.

110 United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of the Surveyor-General of Montana, John Blaine, House Executive Document 1, 42nd Congress, 2nd session, p. 201.

111 United States, Department of the Interior, *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior*, Report of Governor of Montana John S. Crosby, House Executive Document #1, Part 5, 48th Congress 1st session, 31 October 1883, p. 546. An excellent analysis of and corrective to these statements can be found in Swartout Jr.’s “From Kwangtung

At the end of December 1883, southern Alberta rancher, Indian instructor and inveterate booster Alexander Begg wrote a report on the Bow River district which emphasized the region's rapid growth. He estimated that the "influx from Montana to the country districts has been about the same as last year (1,200); but there have been large additions from the east at certain centres, notably, Moose Jaw, Swift Current, Medicine Hat, and Calgary, and along the line of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Calgary now has a population of over 500. I think I may safely say that 2,000 in all have come across the frontier in 1883."¹¹² His estimate of the number of new arrivals from Montana was generous, but made his point that the district was attracting hundreds of newcomers. What is more striking about his remarks is that they represent "the frontier" as a single line to the east and south, putting both Montana and the rest of Canada in the same "other side of the line" category. Instead of invoking the border or the nation, the most important line he draws is a continuous one separating his location from everything else.

White Albertans were hardly immune to racism, but the much slower growth of the non-aboriginal population and the incredibly small numbers of Chinese and black people in southern Alberta meant that these two minorities are not even mentioned in Begg's report.¹¹³ He was simply pleased to observe that the land was starting to look inhabited; unlike aboriginal peoples, whites had a significant visual impact on their surroundings. He noted that along the banks of several of the smaller rivers and creeks "settlers' houses and

to the Big Sky," *Montana Heritage*, pp. 61-79.

112 Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1883*, "Report on Bow River District" by Alexander Begg, Sessional Papers 1884, Volume 8, #14, 31 December 1883, p. 248.

113 There was a virulent outbreak of anti-Chinese sentiment in Calgary in the summer of 1892 for example, and Bruce Shepard discusses the racism faced by Oklahoma blacks when they moved north after the turn of the century. Lewis G. Thomas, editor, *The Prairie West to 1905: A Canadian Sourcebook* (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 202-207. Bruce Shepard, *Deemed Unsuitable: Blacks from Oklahoma Move to the Canadian Prairies in Search of Equality in the Early 20th Century Only to Find Racism in their New Home* (Toronto: Umbrella Press, 1997).

patches of land recently ploughed give the face of the country a very different appearance from what it had in 1881 and even 1882, when I was through there, and there was scarcely a house between Fort McLeod and Fort Calgary, a distance of 100 miles on the main line of travel.” There were many settlers along the Bow River, most of whom had arrived during 1883, and he expected the increase to continue.¹¹⁴ Howard Palmer’s study of nativism in Alberta notes that the “overwhelming majority” of newcomers in southern Alberta in the 1870s and 80s were either central Canadians or British, who “had neither the time nor the inclination to spend much energy assessing and debating the desirability of the few non-British or non-French people who arrived sporadically to join them in carving farms and settlements out of the western wilderness.” Most of them wanted to see the region develop, and to that end they supported federal efforts to increase immigration.¹¹⁵

The one group who did not welcome newcomers were the ranchers, who were opposed to agricultural settlers of any kind more than they were opposed to specific groups of immigrants.¹¹⁶ Every piece of land claimed and cultivated by a farmer was one less piece of land a rancher could use to graze or move his herds, and until the middle of the 1880s southern Alberta’s ranchers could count on the federal government to support their interests in the area. Ranchers also benefited from the fact that until the 1890s, few federal officials were thinking about southern Alberta when they were thinking about encouraging agricultural immigrants. A similar situation existed in northern Montana, in that the ranching economy so thoroughly dominated the region that it remained peripheral to federal visions of an American west dominated by white agricultural homesteaders.

114 Canada, Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report for 1883*, “Report on Bow River District” by Alexander Begg, Sessional Papers 1884, Volume 8, #14, 31 December 1883, p. 248.

115 Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice*, p. 19.

116 For a discussion of the anti-homesteader sentiment and activities among southern Alberta’s ranchers in the 1880s, see Breen, *The Canadian Prairie West and the Ranching Frontier*, pp. 42-59.

The dominance of ranching in the borderlands has meant that not only was the region not perceived as a prime destination for immigrants until the 1890s, but that officials and historians alike have not seen the multi-racial communities of men and women that existed in the borderlands long before the major influx of white homesteaders. The census takers and other local officials' methods of counting people and discerning differences resembled federal perceptions in that they were equally committed to social categories based on race, and a future where the key indicator of progress was the number of white people in an area. What was different was that local officials had to confront, count, and try to come to terms with the human diversity in the borderlands and the physical proof that "the races" could and did mix. Whiteness and maleness were present and embodied in the ranchers themselves, but the region was not just made up of Blackfoot people and white male ranchers. Chinese men, black women and men, and white women were also in the area, in spite of the fact that they had not been granted much room in the discursive terrain. Racial and gender hierarchies in the borderlands may have paralleled federal visions of the west, but the local picture was more complex than federal authorities recognized and did not entirely conform to what Ottawa and Washington wanted the west to be.

Chapter 4:

“When you have none but Indians”: White women in the borderlands

As the local census numbers indicate, very few white women had arrived in the Alberta-Montana borderlands area before 1890 and most of them lived south of the border. Most of these women perceived themselves as having arrived on “the frontier”, but each perceived that frontier quite differently depending on the timing of her arrival and her region’s relationship to the two different national political economies. Northern Montana had long been accessible via the Missouri River, and there are records of white women travelling to the region and staying as early as the 1860s. This “frontier” was characterized by the rapid development of the ranching and mining economies, the achievement of territorial status in 1864 with its clear implications of future statehood and incorporation within the nation, and ongoing hostility in the region between white and aboriginal peoples. Northern Montana may have felt like the edge of the world, but at least the rest of the nation was catching up rapidly. For white women in southern Alberta, the region seemed both further away from “civilization” because it was much harder to access until the Canadian Pacific Railway was completed, and yet not quite so far because very few white women were in the area before the railroad was finished. Although white settlement and political development happened much more slowly, there was relatively little hostility between whites and natives, and so the physical distances did not seem so dangerous. Yet on both sides of the border, the dominance of the ranching economy put these women discursively outside and physically beyond the leading edge of “family farm” settlement.

This chapter examines the diaries, memoirs, and reminiscences of a small number of these earliest white, English-speaking women who came to the land east of the Rockies between 1862 and 1892, and analyzes the roles these women played in the colonization of Blackfoot country and simultaneous creation of the Alberta-Montana borderlands. I

discuss their perceptions of the landscape, racial and ethnic differences, and of the other white women in their areas, to show how the categories they used to frame and narrate their experiences were sometimes similar to and sometimes different from those of their respective federal governments. Where federal efforts to erect lasting and meaningful social boundaries had failed, the “arrival” of white women and their role as boundary-markers and –makers should have done the trick. But where Canada and the United States tried to embed particular categories of race and gender within their regulatory regimes and create a region bifurcated by nation, white women used them to create local communities which had more similarities than differences.

“I must have been the discoverer”: white women encounter the borderlands

Many writers implicitly or explicitly name the “arrival” of white women in the colonial landscape as a key turning point in the settling/colonizing endeavour. From Dee Brown’s classic article on the “gentle tamers” of the American west, to Sylvia Van Kirk’s *“Many Tender Ties”* and the more recent work of such scholars as Dolores Janiewski, historians have focussed on the significant changes wrought by the presence of white women. Janiewski has written that white women played “crucial roles in the kind of imperialism, that is ‘settler capitalism,’ or ‘settler colonization,’ that characterized the parts of North America that became the United States.” White women not only “contributed their productive and reproductive” labour to the settler societies that displaced aboriginal communities, but their “arrival ... was one of the chief indications of the transition from the initial phase of exploration and commercial exploitation to settler colonization... .”¹

¹ Dolores Janiewski, “Gendered Colonialism: The ‘Woman Question’ in Settler Society,” in *Nation, Empire, Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race*, edited by Ruth Roach Pierson and Nupur Chaudhuri, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 57-58.

Other scholars, writing about vastly different colonial places, have challenged the view that white women themselves were always crucial agents in the colonial process, instead arguing for a more nuanced and even skeptical analysis of the degree and kind of power exercised by white women in colonial settings. Sarah Carter, writing about western Canada between 1870 and 1900, notes that white women “did not introduce notions of spatial and social segregation,” but their arrival in the west “coincided with developments such as the treaties and the growth of ranching and farming, which served to consolidate the new order and to allow the recreation of Euro-Canadian institutions, and their presence helped to justify existing policies that were aimed at segregating the new community from indigenous contacts.”² Similarly, Ann Stoler has observed that the “most startling” aspect of the arguments which ascribe such power to white women is that these “otherwise marginal actors on the colonial stage, are charged with dramatically reshaping the face of colonial society... .” White women are represented as being “not only the bearers of racist beliefs but hard-line operatives who put them into practice, encouraging class distinctions among whites while fostering new racial antagonisms, no longer muted by sexual access.”³ Anne McClintock concludes that colonial women occupied an “ambiguous place” within the colonial process. “Barred from the corridors of formal power,” she writes, “they experienced the privileges and social contradictions of imperialism very differently from colonial men.” They “made none of the direct economic or military decisions of empire and very few reaped its vast profits,” although “the rationed privileges of race all too often put white women in positions of decided – if borrowed – power, not only over colonized

² Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), p. 159.

³ Ann Laura Stoler, "Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in Twentieth-Century Colonial Cultures," in *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender,*

women but also over colonized men.”⁴ White women were certainly one of the important groups of players in every colonial context, but their exact role varied enormously depending on how many arrived, the timing of their arrival, and the specific colonial context itself.

It is true that white women were expected to and did act as key components of the social barriers of race, gender, sexuality and space in the Alberta-Montana borderlands; they were supposed to and did reinforce Ottawa’s and Washington’s claims to western spaces. Given that white women were constructed as *the* symbol of domesticated civilization in the late nineteenth century, their mere presence in colonial contexts did represent on one level the triumph of that civilization. However, the “arrival” which some scholars have constructed as a moment or turning-point, was often a complicated, drawn-out, and multi-faceted process. This was particularly true in a borderlands region that was, symbolically at least, at the ends of earth from the perspective of Ottawa and Washington officials, and the last corner of the Great Plains to be settled by whites. In addition, the small numbers of white women who immigrated to the region during the 1860s, 70s and 80s often found themselves spatially isolated on ranches. Unlike the colonial settings studied by other feminist scholars, only a few of these women were clustered in the tiny towns of Fort Benton or Fort Macleod. The distances between white women in the borderlands add a new element to the narratives of their arrival, by forcing us to look more closely at the degree of social or racial change white women could effect if it was rare to see two or three together at one time.

Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives, edited by Anne McClintock et al, (University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 352.

⁴ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p. 6.

Just as the federal governments had done, these women relied on interconnected assumptions about space, race and gender to make sense of their surroundings. They too reacted first and most strongly to the region's wide open spaces, towering mountains, and aboriginal inhabitants. Both American and Canadian writers generally admired or were even awestruck by the dramatic landscapes created by the open spaces and Rocky Mountains. As Annette Kolodny has noted, American women writing in the middle decades of the nineteenth century found the open spaces of the prairies more appealing and thus easier to speak of in a colonizer's voice than the heavily forested eastern regions. Instead of being afraid of or disliking the land, white women saw its beauty and could envision a place for themselves on it.⁵ In 1871, en route from Chicago to her son's cattle ranch in north western Montana where she lived for the next four years, Lucy Stocking wrote in her diary that her group had "passed the most beautiful scenery of hills, towers and stone walls of every conceivable form towering like ancient cities long since fallen into decay..."⁶ Alma Coffin Kirkpatrick wrote in her diary on August 7 1878, during her trip with her two sisters up the Missouri River to Fort Benton and then overland to the mining camp in south-western Montana where their father worked, "I know now why people love the West. The beauty and grandeur of the mountains, rocks and trees, canons and dashing streams! The vast landscapes revealed in the clear atmosphere are beyond all description." A few years later she "tried to analyze the lure of the far west; its wonderful atmosphere so clear that the distant mountains appear near; the air so keen and invigorating, inspiring one to large undertakings ... our valleys surrounded by mountain ranges that never appear

⁵ Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1984) p. 6.

⁶ Lucy Stocking diary, 12 May 1871, Montana Historical Society (hereafter MHS) SC142.

twice the same...”⁷ In June 1879 Flora Gardner wrote to friends about a trip she and her family had taken from Fort Benton south to the town of Bozeman: “I tell you the scenery was grand; the snow-covered mountains towering up all around us and the river winding along at the foot of the hills. You can’t imagine how far we can see in this country. I thought we were but a few miles from the mountains but found that it took us days to get there.”⁸

Canadian writers were similarly awed by the scenery they encountered in southern Alberta. In her reminiscence Julia Short Asher wrote that she had clear memories of her family’s journey from Manitoba across the Canadian prairie in 1884. She and her siblings had been born in Ontario, and the family had lived in Illinois and Iowa for a few years before moving to Selkirk, Manitoba in 1881. Of her trip from Manitoba to High River, Alberta she wrote that for most of the distance there were no “grain elevators or wide fields of sprouting wheat” which would have signified the presence of whites; instead, what she saw was “a boundless expanse of far-reaching grassland, enlivened by an occasional coyote or herd of antelope.” In her opinion the view improved once her family made it to the foothills of southern Alberta: “ahead of us were low rolling hills and shallow ravines covered with green grass and quantities of beautiful prairie flowers.” The Rocky Mountains seemed “close at hand, ... a great wall of white peaks with wide masses of dark green at their feet. Streamers of this green ran up in uneven stretches to fill and overflow the ravines, while the higher peaks towered above the timberline in their everlasting snow-crowned glory. Never had we seen such beauty and we thrilled with the joy of it.”⁹

⁷ Alma Coffin Kirkpatrick, reminiscence ca. 1910, includes diary excerpts from 1878, MHS SC940.

⁸ Flora Gardner, letter written to friends in June 1879 of family trip from Benton to Bozeman in May of 1879, MHS SC196.

⁹ Julia Short Asher reminiscence, Short-Knupp family fonds, Glenbow Archives (hereafter GA) M1137.

Twenty-four year old Mary Inderwick had come to southern Alberta in 1883 from Perth, Ontario to live with her brother who managed the lumber mill near Pincher Creek, and in April 1884 married local rancher Charles Inderwick with whom she would have three sons. She too loved the mountains, writing in the fall of 1884 that she could forget all of her troubles “in this joyous air with the grand protecting mountains always standing round the western horizon ... the dearest most constant of friends ... we are in the foothills - no plains here but the most glorious ranges of hills and rolling prairie - which all seem so near that one starts to ride to a certain land mark but finds oneself still no nearer at the end of an hour... .”¹⁰ Canadian or American, these writers were awed by the beauty of the borderlands and the way the space seemed to expand around them. They were not alienated by the open spaces or dramatic heights of the mountains, and, instead of being physically confined within the traditional interior spaces of middle-class white women, these women created and were continually aware of their own places in the wide-open landscapes of the borderlands.

In contrast to the women’s writing discussed by Kolodny and Vera Norwood, the women who wrote about Blackfoot country in the 1860s, 70s and 80s did not struggle to recreate “a landscape resembling as much as possible their homes back East.”¹¹ They were members of a tiny but already-privileged racial minority and some placed themselves within a traditional colonial narrative, observing beautiful, “empty” landscapes and describing that beauty for their absent readers, without feeling any obligation to fundamentally alter that landscape. It is possible that these writers did not attempt to domesticate the land in their

¹⁰ Mary Ella Lees Inderwick, letter to sister-in-law Alice, ca. fall 1884, GA M559.

¹¹ Vera Norwood, “Women’s Place: Continuity and Change in Response to Western Landscapes,” in *Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives*, eds. Lillian Schlissel, Vicki Ruiz, Janice Monk, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1988), p. 155. More recently, Glenda Riley has argued in *Women and Nature: Saving the “Wild” West*

writing because they had not come to the region to “domesticate” or “civilize” the land through agriculture. A few were just visiting or just passing through, but a full third (including almost all of the Alberta writers) were ranchers, and ranching demanded that the land be changed as little as possible.

Besides appreciating the beauty of the borderlands, many authors constructed their perceptions through another feature of colonial language: the “absence” of aboriginal people which permitted them to “discover” and claim that beauty. Margaret Harkness Woodman, for example, wrote in an 1892 letter that “I believe I can justly claim to be the first white woman” to see the Great Falls of the Missouri River, which she visited in 1862 on a trip from her home in St. Louis, Missouri. She remembered looking down on “the wonderful, beautiful Great Falls of the Missouri, nearly four hundred feet below me, plainly visible but just as plainly inaccessible!”¹² Mary Inderwick noted in her 1884 letter that she had “found” a small pond while riding alone, “a pond I must have been the discoverer of as no one knew of it and all wanted to see it...”¹³ As Ruth Frankenberg has written in *White Women, Race Matters*, whiteness provides a “standpoint,” a position of privilege “from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society.”¹⁴ And one of the privileges of whiteness, then as now, is the perceived right to “discover” and draw one’s own maps on top of other people’s territory – in this case, the territory of the Blackfoot confederacy.

Yet at the same time as their whiteness allowed them to speak with the voice of discoverers and colonizers, it and their gender marked them as newcomers who were

(Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999) that women often saw western spaces as welcoming and worth protecting, not forbidding and in need of conquering.

¹² Margaret Harkness Woodman, letter written from San Francisco in 1892 to librarian of Montana Historical Society, MHS SC988.

¹³ Inderwick, letter to Alice, GA M559.

unsure of their place in new landscapes. White women's reactions to this minority position seem to have differed depending on what side of the border they were on and when they arrived. The sources from northern Montana are predominantly from the 1860s and 1870s, and more frequently reveal heightened fears of both the native population and the landscape – a conflation that was not coincidental given the more violent history of American expansion and aboriginal-white struggles over western spaces. The Blackfoot and other northern plains people like the Sioux were not yet “contained” at even a discursive level, and some of the white women who made their way to Montana perceived themselves as being far away from white “civilization” and too close to aboriginal “savagery.” The sources from southern Alberta are from the 1880s, by which point the Blackfoot were assumed to have been contained by Treaty 7 and the Canadian Pacific Railway. The Alberta writers who did associate aboriginal people with the landscape did so in a way that rendered natives and the landscape harmless and largely invisible. Native women, north and south of the line, were dismissed as “squaws.”

Whites were not the only newly-arrived visible minority to “discover” Blackfoot country in the late nineteenth century, but the racial hierarchies of the day meant that white women were already assured of their superiority over the small number of Chinese men and black women and men in the borderlands. These “other” minorities were generally linked discursively with particular places (hotels, steamboats, kitchens, laundries) and their related functions as service providers to the nascent white communities. As I will argue below, while white women north and south of the line reacted to native people differently, suggesting that the border could make a difference in racial constructions, their stereotypes

¹⁴ Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 1.

about black women were identical, indicating that some kinds of racism transcended the border.

In all these instances there was a clear gender dynamic at work along with the racial and spatial dynamic. Ann Stoler notes that white women in the colonies “experienced the cleavages of racial dominance and internal social distinctions very differently than men precisely because of their ambiguous positions, as both subordinates in colonial hierarchies and as active agents of imperial culture in their own right.”¹⁵ When a white woman expressed a fear of aboriginal people and the spaces they dominated, what she was afraid of was the mobility and presumed hostility of native men although that fear was never expressed in sexual terms. At the same time, she had the advantage of both race and appropriately-gendered behaviour over the native women, black women and men, and Chinese men she encountered.

“Their own country”: borderlands as Blackfoot country

Physical proximity to aboriginal people was not automatically threatening as long as there were ways of maintaining social boundaries. Between May 8 1873 and July 4 1875 Lucy Stocking in Montana recorded the visits of dozens of native people, including what she described as “half-breeds” and “squaw ladies.” Normally she just wrote that they had “called,” but once a “half breed and 2 squaws called after the mower” and another time “2 half breeds staid over night”, and another time she wrote “half doz squaw ladies & their fellows gave us a call treated them to milk.”¹⁶ Her aboriginal neighbours were coming to her on her “own” territory, which allowed her to record these visits without any apparent alarm. Similarly, Lillian Miller wrote in her reminiscence of her childhood on a sheep

¹⁵ Stoler, “Making Empire Respectable,” p. 344

¹⁶ Stocking, diary 6 July 1873, 8 May 1873, 4 July 1875, MHS SC142.

ranch in north-central Montana in the 1890s that “Indians often came, two and three at a time and after tying their horses to the hitching post, would squat outside near the barns. You soon learned the only way to get rid of them was to feed them.”¹⁷ These visitors stayed outside, not trying to enter her house, but by placing them “near the barns” in her text Miller clearly indicates that they were interlopers in white-controlled space.

Mary Inderwick’s papers demonstrate a fascinating disjuncture between the 1884 letter to her sister-in-law, in which she describes a social terrain with few native peoples and her efforts to create and enforce their physical and social separation, and her diary in which it is obvious that the Blackfoot people continued to occupy an intimate place in her landscape. For example, in the letter she wrote that she and her husband were “the fond owners of a dear ugly discriminating Bull Terrier who does not allow an Indian near the place ...” right before noting that she had tried to get a local native women to do her washing but had given up. She had attended her first ball at the North West Mounted Police barracks at Fort Macleod, and was pleased to note that “It was the first Ball to wh. [which] the squaws were not allowed to go - but there were several half-breeds...” She went further at one point, writing “I think if the Indians could have been isolated in the mountains and left with their own laws and ways of being and never allowed to eat of the fruit of knowledge as revealed by the white men who came to live among them they could teach civilization a great deal - but our inconsistencies are too subtle for his direct mind and when he tries to follow he is lost - and under the circumstances the sooner he becomes extinct the better for himself and the country.”¹⁸ Although the last line of her letter suggests that she wanted to represent herself as a “hard-line operative” (to quote Stoler) in the regulation of racial and spatial boundaries, her suggestion that aboriginal people “could

¹⁷ Lillian M Miller, “I Remember Montana” reminiscence, MHS SC1404.

¹⁸ Inderwick, letter, GA M559.

teach civilization a great deal” reveals her admiration for at least some aspects of indigenous culture.

Neither explicit racism nor explicit admiration are present in her diary, where she simply records the fact that, at least occasionally, she did indeed share her space with local aboriginal people. For example, in February 1884, several months before writing the letter cited above, she wrote simply, “Three Indians here for dinner...”¹⁹ If we can assume that by “Indians” she means men, it suggests that while she might have been pleased that aboriginal women were not permitted to attend a social function which she had attended, she may have had fewer objections to or less control over feeding aboriginal men while she was still living with her half-brother. There may have been economic reasons for her to feed the men, or it might have been more acceptable for her to do so out of sight of other whites. This does give some support to writers like Van Kirk and Janiewski who argue that it was aboriginal women who bore the brunt of white women’s racism, but this is the only explicit example of such behaviour in the sources being discussed.

In spite of the colonial language of claiming and conquering which is evident in some of these sources, other sources exhibit a sense that the landscape itself was hostile and could not be claimed because it did not yet completely belong to whites. The space was still very much in the hands of the supposedly hostile aboriginal population and being used for their purposes. This is particularly evident in some of the early Montana sources. Carolyn Abbott Tyler, for example, was part of the Fisk Expedition which came from Minnesota up the Missouri River and then travelled west of Fort Benton in 1862, and she wrote in her diary on September 10 that “every one thankful that Blackfeet had gone to their own country”. Her party was told by a local Indian agent that the Blackfoot had been in the area to hunt buffalo but had also fought and defeated “the Pegans.” The agent told

them not to winter in the valley of the Teton River because “it was claimed by all tribes as neutral ground” as a short-cut to get to the buffalo hunt.²⁰ When she refers to “their own country” it is clearly constructed as a place external to the United States, and “neutral ground” for aboriginal people was dangerous ground for whites.²¹

The language of penetrating a new land is also present in Margaret Harkness Woodman’s letter, where she noted that her 1862 group included only two “ladies” but did have “an Indian hunter and guide. There was no road or trail of any kind, for the Indians avoided that stretch of country owing to the lack of wood and water, and the absolute impossibility of crossing the river at any point between Fort Benton and the present site of Great Falls City.”²² The lack of roads and trails obviously did not stop her group, however, thus allowing them to claim the accomplishment of trail-blazing in a land even Indians “avoided” and facilitating her claim to be the first white woman to see the Great Falls of the Missouri. In addition, the relative lack of native presence meant that she does not recall specifically worrying about being attacked, unlike Tyler’s 1862 group or May Flanagan’s mother’s 1873 trip to Fort Benton as a new bride. Flanagan wrote in an 1890 letter to her cousin that the “camping out and traveling through such a weird peculiar

¹⁹ Inderwick, diary 26 February, GA M559.

²⁰ Carolyn Abbott Tyler, diary 10 September 1862, MHS SC1430. Given that warfare between the different Blackfoot groups was not common, the agent may have confused the Peigan with another, non-Blackfoot group.

²¹ These reactions are by no means peculiar to white women who migrated to the American west, however. As Sandra Myres has demonstrated in her comparative study of white women who migrated to Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand, many women “feared ... the possible harm that might come to them and their families from hostile natives, wild animals, and unknown dangers. Many dreaded leaving civilization and making a new home in an unfamiliar land.” What the present study suggests is that whether or not a woman felt this way may have depended in large part on the timing of their arrival in different colonial contexts. Myres, “Victoria’s Daughters: English Speaking Women on Nineteenth Century Frontiers.” In Schlissel et al, eds., *Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988) p. 267.

²² Woodman, letter, MHS SC988.

country would have been interesting and pleasant if it not had been for this constant dread of being popped over by an Indian shot any minute.”²³ May herself was not yet born when her mother made the trip however, and so this comment clearly reflects her mother’s impressions more than her own.

Similarly, Mary Douglas Gibson’s reminiscence reveals the combined threat of an uncooperative landscape and hostile natives. She married into the family of Great Falls “founder” and businessman Paris Gibson, and wrote of her first trip from Minneapolis to Fort Benton in 1882 that “The river was so low it was impossible to navigate at night, so we were anchored in midstream for greater safety from Indians as well as less danger from running aground.” When her group decided to travel the last section overland, she remembered that they “were obliged to travel very slowly for the officers had to remain with their men who were walking, because of possible attacks from the Indians. ... Everything seemed very strange and wild to me. I had never slept in a tent before, to say nothing of being in a country of Indians and wild animals.”²⁴ This passage discursively separates the “country” of northern Montana as fundamentally different from the one she had left behind (Minnesota) by noting that the former contains “Indians” and “wild animals.”

What is striking about this series of remarks is that each one links the native population to the physical landscape, demonstrating Terry Goldie’s argument that white perceptions of “the indigene’s closeness to land” became an emphasis on the indigene “as the land.”²⁵ Whether the terrain is perceived as possibly beneficial to the white observers, such as Tyler’s valley, or a hindrance, like the low river, “Indians” are inextricably

²³ May G. Flanagan, letter ca. 1890, MHS SC1236.

²⁴ Mary Douglas Gibson, reminiscence, MHS SC1476.

connected to that terrain. Ruth Frankenberg has remarked that in colonial narratives “landscape and the experience of it” are “racially structured - whether those narratives seemed to be marked predominantly by the presence or absence of people of colour.” In the Alberta-Montana borderlands, as in other colonial contexts, it did not matter whether the native population was present or absent, visible or invisible, because they were socially and politically marginal and the narrative of white settlement was reinforced either way. As a result, Frankenberg continues, “Once a person is in a landscape structured by racism, a conceptual mapping of race, of self and others, takes shape, following from and feeding the physical context.”²⁶ Similarly, Paul Carter, writing about the colonization of Australia, argues that when colonizers worry about an imagined threat from aboriginal peoples, it is “symptomatic of a profounder spatial nausea, a sense of being out of bounds, of being invisible to themselves, though visible (and a prey) to others; in short, a sense of placelessness.”²⁷ White women initially struggled to find their place in new landscapes while en route, and their sense of being out of place stems from the fact that those new landscapes had already been structured by racism and colonialism.

“See plenty of them”: the presence of Blackfoot people

In northern Montana in the 1860s and 1870s the Blackfoot people were fundamentally present in the landscape even when they were not actually visible. The rivers and valleys and plains were still theirs, and so the incoming whites encountered the people and the land simultaneously and treated them as the foil against which their racial

²⁵ Terry Goldie, *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), p. 19.

²⁶ Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*, p. 69

²⁷ Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 147-148.

and gender identities were constructed. Carolyn Abbott Tyler wrote in her diary on September 4, 1862, that they had passed “an abandoned camp” of “3,000 or 4,000 Blackfeet Indians.” She scrawled “the Indians are savage” above that line and then noted that “A large [“]Medicine Lodge” in which they had celebrated their superstitious rites” had been “left standing although its covering had mostly been stripped from its framework. ... They had also left behind in the lodge blankets, skins, moccasins, and American flag which had been presented to them by the American fur company.”²⁸ She does not mention encountering any Blackfoot people directly, just this visible reminder of their presence.

There are three odd features about this entry in her diary. First, there is no explanation given for why any Blackfoot community would in fact have abandoned so many useful items. Secondly, there are details like the number of Blackfeet and the source of the flag that must have been provided by someone else in the party or the Indian agent the group had encountered. Thirdly, for her to have included as much detail as she did either she herself entered the lodge or someone else did and described it to her. By not revealing the source of these details, she can maintain her physical separation from the camp and her perspective as observer and judge of people who are not physically present is reinforced. As Sara Mills has written about white women in India, Tyler manages to maintain her respectability at the same time as she “produces knowledges” about places “of strange and barbaric customs, which she observes from a distance or is told about, but which does not contaminate her.”²⁹ Tyler does not say whether she herself entered the lodge or how she knew that “superstitious rites” might have been celebrated inside, and thus maintains through her text a physical distance from the lodge and an appropriate social

²⁸ Tyler, diary 4 September 1862, MHS SC1430

²⁹ Sara Mills, “Knowledge, Gender, Empire,” in *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies*, eds. Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose (New York and London: The Guildford Press, 1994), p. 45.

distance from knowledge about the lodge. Her status as a white woman who ought not to know too much about Indian camps and superstitious rites is preserved.

There were occasional dissenting voices in the Montana sources, writers who perceived the aboriginal people as distinct from the land and therefore safely relegated to landscape. A key difference between these examples and the preceding ones is that these writers indicated that they actually saw aboriginal people, suggesting that there were times when the act of seeing Indians made them seem less threatening than anticipated.³⁰ Kate Hogan, a military wife whose husband was stationed near Fort Benton in 1867, wrote in a letter, "We have no trouble with Indians. See plenty of them but they are peaceful but the Mosquitos are so bad that for a few days I couldn't sew..."³¹ When Lucy Stocking arrived at Fort Peck in northeastern Montana in 1871 she described the following tableau in her diary: "Thousands of Indians, squaws and children. Greeted upon shore. Dressed in varigated colors, while a large number of tents, stand along the hill back while the ponies are grazing over the hills." She did add, however, that a "square fort was built round for protection." Throughout her diary entries for 1873 and 1874 she records the frequent visits of "Indians" (meaning aboriginal men), "half-breeds," "squaws" and "squaw ladies," but for the most part seems to be simply noting the occurrence.³² Alma Coffin Kirkpatrick wrote in her diary on July 19, 1878, "Now that there is no danger from Indians, ordinary travel is perfectly safe." Although she does not explain why there is "now" no longer any danger, with the Indians conveniently out of the way she could add that "All is so still, the

³⁰ Sandra Myres and Glenda Riley have noted the same disjunction between the anticipation of danger from aboriginal peoples and the usually harmless reality in their studies of white women's texts. Myres, "Victoria's Daughters," *Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives*, p. 271; Glenda Riley, *Women and the Indians on the Frontier, 1825-1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984).

³¹ Kate Hogan, letter, MHS SC864.

³² Stocking, diary 8 May 1871, MHS SC142

wilderness so vast that one scarcely realizes that its solitude has ever before been penetrated.”³³

The Blackfoot people and the landscape of southern Alberta usually did not inspire fearful reactions. The Missouri River had allowed whites easier and earlier access to the southern portion of Blackfoot country, while the trickle of white settlers was slower north of the line. After the numbered treaties of the 1870s and before the 1885 Rebellion, Canada’s national discourse around plains peoples rested on the assumption that they were all safely contained on their reservations, little more than the backdrop against which white activities took place. Even when Sitting Bull’s Sioux fled north across the border in 1877, they were perceived as “American” Indians escaping from the American army, and thus reinforced Canada’s perception that it had handled its plains people more efficiently.³⁴ In addition, Canada did not have a legacy of “Indian Wars” and thus white women had fewer reasons to fear native people. The Blackfoot in southern Alberta were highly visible to white newcomers in the 1880s, but were rarely represented as hostile and were less intimately connected to the land. Mary Inderwick wrote in her diary on October 29, 1883, upon her arrival in Calgary, that the town was “very nice but it is a village of tents and framed in Indians and squaws in plenty”.³⁵ Calgary was “framed” by Indians in much the same way as Fort Peck had been when Stocking saw it in 1871, but Inderwick does not feel obliged to mention any safety precautions. The Blackfoot were nothing more than harmless backdrop, literally providing the frame for white activities. Only two days earlier, as she passed through Swift Current, Saskatchewan, she had written “Indians by the million” but being outnumbered did not seem to worry her. She and another diarist,

³³ Kirkpatrick, reminiscence with some diary excerpts, 19 July 1878, MHS SC940.

³⁴ See Beth La Dow’s discussion of Sitting Bull’s experiences with Canadian and American authorities in *The Medicine Line: Life and Death on a North American Borderland* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), especially Chapter 3.

Caroline Wyndham whose family ranched south-east of Calgary near Carseland, were even comfortable riding or walking alone. On August 13 1884, for example, Inderwick wrote in her diary, "Went for a long ride over the range alone."³⁶ And on December 17 1891, Wyndham wrote in her diary, "Lovely day went for a walk on prairie."³⁷ She does not specifically say that she walked alone, but also does not mention anyone accompanying her. Inderwick used her freedom of movement to escape emotional conflict with her husband, while Wyndham was free to simply enjoy the beauty of her surroundings.

There are two exceptions to this general acceptance of Alberta's Blackfoot peoples as backdrop and landscape as neutral space. The closest a Canadian-born writer came to the sort of fear of native people and their spatial dominance which was expressed in the American women's writings was during the North-West Rebellion in 1885. It was the main topic in 12-year old Julia Short's diary in late March and early April of that year. Her family had a ranch south of Calgary on the Highwood River. The local Blackfoot did not participate in the uprising, but Short's diary portrays a white community fraught with tension nonetheless. On March 31 she wrote, "Mr. Spalding says that the Indians are uprising and a whole settlement have been killed. Are afraid that they will rise near here too." There were rumours of the government giving whites guns and ammunition to defend themselves, and her community even briefly considered building a blockhouse. When that idea was rejected "They sent a man to Calgary for arms... ." When that man returned he told the community that they could not get guns "unless ten out of each forty volunteer to fight between here and Medicine Hat." Ten men from her community did volunteer and formed a Home Guard, but were never needed.³⁸

³⁵ Inderwick, diary 29 October 1883, GA M559.

³⁶ Ibid., diary and letter, GA M559.

³⁷ Caroline Wyndham diary, 17 December 1891. GA microfilm AC Wyndham.

³⁸ Julia Short Asher, diary excerpts, GA M1137.

In her reminiscence she wrote that “for a few weeks the settlers all though the West lived in a state of terror. A big Indian Reserve lay to the east of us, two more Reserves were not far south, and there was the chance that at any time they, or scattered bands of unruly young Indian Braves from these tribes, might sweep through the country, spreading death and destruction.” She could recall the horses being kept in the barn with their harness on in case a fast getaway was needed, and the family slept in their clothes for the same reason. The Canadian government increased the food rations to the Blackfoot, and Short wrote that “This did much to calm and discourage any would-be aspirations to regain the territory given over to the white race.”³⁹ Her reminiscence lacks the palpable fear of her diary, but accurately names the conflict as being a racialized battle over territory – a battle which, significantly, she frames as having been won by whites before 1885.

Julia’s diary and reminiscence both convey a sense of fear of being surrounded by potentially hostile natives during the spring of 1885, but even in the immediacy of her diary her fears and those of her community are not intimately connected with a sense that the land itself is hostile; indeed, the community is able to think of various strategies (blockhouse, government-supplied arms) that it could use to defend itself and the territory it feels it is entitled to retain. Their fears centred on the possibility that local Blackfoot “braves” would leave their reservations (i.e. the only land they are entitled to) and sweep through the rest of the country which they had “given over to the white race.” Sarah Carter notes “a significant shift in Euro-Canadian attitudes towards Aboriginal people after 1885,” from a perception of native people as “‘nuisances’ but relatively harmless,” to a perception that they posed “a distinct threat to the property and lives of the white settlers.”⁴⁰ In the sources from southern Alberta being discussed here, however, only the Rebellion itself is a source

³⁹ Ibid., reminiscence.

⁴⁰ Carter, *Capturing Women*, p. 21

of fear. When it was crushed swiftly these white women seemed able to leave the Blackfoot in the category of harmless nuisances.

The only text which does specifically link the aboriginal people of southern Alberta to a hostile landscape is the reminiscence of an American woman whose family had travelled to Alberta in 1893 to homestead and promptly headed back to the United States upon discovering their homestead was located at the bottom of a lake in central Alberta. Sadye Wolfe Drew was ten years old at the time, and remembered her mother's fears that a local native band was going to massacre her family when they came into their camp, "but they were friendly." As their journey continued, their native guide would periodically "go onto a high place to look around and then wave for us to come. When he would do that mother was afraid he was giving a signal to the Indians to come and kill us. I don't think my mother slept much on that trip across the unsettled country. It was lovely country - lots of grass and water. We never saw a soul on the way except Indians and not many of them."⁴¹ The country was lovely but still "unsettled" in both senses of the word: it was devoid of white settlement, and unstable in its own right.

Only once did any of these writers, American or Canadian, actually have any sort of negative encounter with the Blackfoot, and its outcome is telling. Although Lucy Stocking of Montana noted that her husband Winston had returned from an "Indian raid" on June 25 1873, and wrote "Indian scare" on September 19 of the same year, she does not provide any further explanation. In July of 1874, however, she noted that two aboriginal men who apparently had been drinking broke into the corral of her ranch north of Fort Benton and then tried to enter the house. One of the white men in the house took their rifle away from them and the intruders ran away. The next morning the body of a native man was found on

⁴¹ Sadye Wolfe Drew, reminiscence, MHS SC1532.

the native camping ground, and Stocking noted that she'd gone "to see the dead Indian."⁴² What the men were fighting about or the reason why they tried to enter the Stocking's house is not explored. What mattered was that they had not been able to enter the heart of white space, the house itself. Once dead, the body of the aboriginal man became an unthreatening object, something that could be viewed in safety as part of the spectacle associated with the specific place of the "native camping ground."

In all of these examples the danger was coming from aboriginal men, whose mobility and persistent spatial dominance, when combined with the American legacy of armed conflict between whites and natives, made them a potential threat to local whites. That threat was never specifically constructed as a sexualized threat by these white writers, however; it was their race and not specifically their gender which made them feel like potential targets. In Inderwick's reminiscence the bigger personal threat is from white men. She wrote that when her brother offered to pay her way to come to his place in Alberta he told her she had to "bring a girl with me who could cook – I could not be there alone – just rough men at the mill – 'and cow men on the ranches'" Similarly, after arriving in Calgary and starting to make her way south to her brother's place she was warned not to stay at one particular ranch because there were no women there and only a crowd of cowboys. She ended up having to stay there anyway, and discovered that the owner did in fact have a wife.⁴³ Inderwick is the only writer on either side of the border to raise the possibility of cowboys as a threat to white womanhood, and even here she is

⁴² Stocking, diary 4 and 5 July 1874, MHS SC142. I have not been able to determine which "raid" or "scare" Stocking is referring to, but tension between natives and whites in northern Montana was often high in the early 1870s as the different groups were being forced onto reserves with ever-shrinking boundaries and as the Sioux expanded their own territory northward.

⁴³ Inderwick, reminiscence, GA M559

recording the warnings of others, not any apprehension on her part.⁴⁴ Overall, these women seem to have felt safe as women in the borderlands, but occasionally felt that as whites they might be the target of Indian attacks.

“My Father’s Wife is an Indian woman”: de/constructing the boundaries of race and gender

In all of these texts, the word “Indian” meant an aboriginal man; a native woman was called “squaw” no matter which side of the border she was on. The word’s racist implications, about promiscuity or a lack of cleanliness, are more evident in the American sources however. Carolyn Tyler wrote in her diary in September 1862, “each Indian is allowed as many wives as he has horses, The chief has several they are as plentiful as King Solomon harem.”⁴⁵ May Flanagan noted that whenever native people came into Fort Benton in the 1880s, “The squaws would hold out their dirty blankets for any bundles of food... . One squaw was called ‘Shorty and Dirty’ and lived up to her name... .”⁴⁶ Alma Kirkpatrick reinforced the perception of native women as dirty drudges and denigrated the work habits of aboriginal men when she wrote in 1884 that the “squaws ... work faithfully down in the dirt [digging potatoes], while the braves, young and old, share the wages without the toil.”⁴⁷ Real men were not supposed to have multiple wives, let their wives do the hard work, or care for them so poorly that their only option was to beg; nor would real women (i.e. whites) tolerate such treatment.

⁴⁴ This apparent lack of fear of white male mobility in the borderlands provides a striking contrast with the situation such scholars as Marilyn Lake have found in Australia during the same colonization process. See, for example, Lake’s argument in “Frontier Feminism and the Marauding White Man: Australia, 1890s to 1940s,” in *Nation, Empire, Colony*, pp. 94-105.

⁴⁵ Tyler, diary 10 September 1862, MHS SC1430.

⁴⁶ Flanagan, memoir, MHS SC1236.

The additional implication that native women lacked domestic skills structured many interactions between white and aboriginal women. A few women recorded their efforts to “teach” native women certain domestic skills or at least employ them to do some domestic labour, thus reinforcing in their texts both their racial and gender superiority. May Flanagan mentioned “Tatsi, an Indian woman who washed for us,”⁴⁸ and Mary Inderwick wrote to her sister-in-law that she had “tried to make use of a squaw who is the nominal wife of a white man near us to do the washing but had to give it up ... the odds were too much for my courage and patience.”⁴⁹ Mrs. Trivett, wife of the missionary on the Blood Reservation in southern Alberta, had a different experience because she shared the work with the Blood women. She wrote in her diary on January 25, 1886, that “3 Indian women came to wash for me today, they are such nice old dears. We finished all by 12 o’clock.”⁵⁰ In this instance, “the washing” had less to do with Trivett’s racial or gender superiority, and as a result she and the “nice old dears” seem to have passed a pleasant morning together.

Such communal moments were clearly rare, and the fact that Inderwick felt it necessary to describe the native woman as the “nominal” wife of a white man hints at the complicated and controversial roles being played by the intermarriage of aboriginal women and white men.⁵¹ From the perspective of fearful whites on both sides of the border, the

47 Kirkpatrick, reminiscence with diary entries, MHS SC940. See Chapter 2 for a longer discussion of white perceptions of Blackfoot gender norms.

48 Flanagan, MHS SC 1236

49 Inderwick, letter, GA M559.

50 Trivett, diary fragment, 25 January 1886, Reverend Samuel Trivett fonds, GA M149.

51 The fullest treatment of the social and economic functions served by mixed-race couples during the fur trade remains Sylvia Van Kirk’s *“Many Tender Ties”: Women in Fur-Trade Society, 1670-1870* (Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer Publishing, 1980). A more recent analysis of the roles these relationships played in British Columbia’s colonial society can be found in Adele Perry’s *On the Edge of Empire: Gender, Race, and the*

most important role these relationships played in the 1860s, 70s and 80s was to protect insecure white communities from aboriginal hostility. Carolyn Tyler wrote in her 1862 diary that the white men who worked for the fur company “all have Squas they all have children some of the Squas have several ... these Squas talk very well, they have lived for years with these white men. The Pegans are savages and wild if it was not for the squas who are living with these white men at this time 1862 every white man would have been killed The squas and halfbreed children is protection The Blackfoot Indians are a blood thirsty tribe all ways fighting with the neighbouring tribes and would have fought our train had it not been [for?] an Indian agent” who gave them food and gifts.⁵² Even in her narrative the “protection” offered by aboriginal wives and mixed-race children was insufficient, and needed to be bolstered by food and gifts.

In southern Alberta during the 1885 Rebellion at least one Blackfoot woman was also seen as providing a degree of protection to a local white community, but with a greater degree of acceptance than the tone of Tyler’s diary. Julia Short wrote that Pokemi was the Blackfoot wife of a white neighbour, and the white community’s main source of information about the Rebellion and the steps the Canadian government was taking to ensure that the Blackfoot did not get involved. In her reminiscence Short wrote, “Not only was Pokemi friendly but so were most of her friends from Blackfoot Crossing, including “an old man, Abskinask, whom we believed to be her father. He was always very friendly to us new white settlers...”⁵³ The Indian Act barred Pokemi from living on the reserve at Blackfoot Crossing, yet she and her friends and relatives maintained positive relationships

Making of British Columbia, 1849-1871 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

⁵² Tyler, diary, MHS SC 1430.

⁵³ Asher, reminiscence, GA M1137.

with her white neighbours, to a degree that hints at a kind of *noblesse oblige* on the part of Abskinask.

The relationships that developed between aboriginal women and white men, and the mixed-race children who were produced, were two of the realities of Canadian and American colonization of aboriginal peoples. Native-white marriages may have been perceived by fearful whites as an effective barrier between them and aboriginal hostility, but the very existence of bi-racial children meant that the supposedly self-evident nature of racial boundaries had to be maintained in other ways. Lillian M. Miller recalled that in the 1890s native people in her area of northern Montana “were friendly which was rather surprising, for it was only twenty-five years before this time that the terrible battle on Snake Creek was fought and ended the Indian Wars. Of course, there had been many marriages between the early settlers and Indian girls and that helped establish friendship. The half breed children were our school mates.”⁵⁴ She did add, however, that a few of these children “were not too clean looking” and not well-dressed, demonstrating that there were always multiple strategies for keeping the lines drawn between supposedly-distinct racial categories. Her “half breed” schoolmates shared the physical space of the schoolroom with white pupils, demonstrating the friendliness between the two communities, but her comments about her schoolmates’ appearance discursively reinforced the social distance between the two communities. As Ann Stoler has written about twentieth-century colonial contexts, colonial authority rested “on two powerful, but false,

⁵⁴ Miller, "I remember Montana," MHS SC1404. Miller may be referring to the 1877 battle between the Nez Perce and United States Army near Snake River in north-eastern Oregon, one of the conflicts which forced the Nez Perce to flee eastward into Montana and make an unsuccessful bid for the Canadian border. Given that the battle did not take place anywhere near Miller’s location in north-central Montana, her memory’s narrative has moved the conflict closer to explain the passing of time and changing race relations in her area. For a discussion of the battle and the Nez Perce’s flight through Montana, see Malone et al, *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*, pp. 135-9.

premises.” The first was the idea that whites “made up an easily identifiable and discrete biological and social entity,” with “common class interests, racial attributes, political affinities, and superior culture.” The second premise was that “the boundaries separating colonizer from colonized were thus self-evident and easily drawn.”⁵⁵ In this nineteenth-century borderland, as in other colonial contexts, these premises did not reflect reality .

Another way of shoring up racial categories on both sides of the line was to remove the status of whiteness from white men who married native women by calling them “squaw men.” Sarah Carter notes that in Canada the phrase “squaw man” was used more frequently in the later 1880s “to denote men of the lowest social class. There was disdain for those within the community who did not conform to the new demands to clarify boundaries.”⁵⁶ The term was used earlier, more frequently, and with more negative implications in Montana. Lillian Miller noted that her family bought their first two ranches in northern Montana from “squaw men,” and she added that “all the squaw men and families” eventually “sold their ranches and moved to the reservation where they could be with their friends. We often wondered about the white men who seemed to be content to live so, all their lives.”⁵⁷ The men’s racial identity, their status as white men, was in question because surely no real white man would be content to live on an Indian reservation. Real white men presumably wanted the company of other whites, and wanted to be a part of white economies and enjoy the comforts of white “civilization.” The fact that “squaw men” might choose otherwise meant that they weren’t just the lowest social class; they straddled and therefore threatened the very divide of whiteness and non-whiteness. As Anne McClintock has argued in *Imperial Leather*, “Panic about blood contiguity, ambiguity and metissage expressed intense anxieties about the fallibility of white male and

⁵⁵ Stoler, “Making Empire Respectable” p. 345

⁵⁶ Carter, *Capturing Women*, pp. 184-5.

imperial potency.”⁵⁸ In northern Montana this meant that the whiteness of men who chose to marry aboriginal women could be called into question.

In Canada, racial categories were complicated by the provisions of the Indian Act, which decreed that a native woman who married a white man was deleted from the legal category of “Indians” and had to leave the reserve, while a white woman who married a native man was automatically granted “Indian” status and could raise her children on the reserve. The Act implicitly decreed that gender categories were more fundamental than racial ones, and this created a peculiarly Canadian blurring of spatial and racial lines. Sadye Drew, for example, wrote of her brief stay in Alberta in the 1890s that “There was an Indian in camp by the name of Andre Prudin who had a wife and two children. She and the children were blond with blue eyes, however they claimed to be Indians.”⁵⁹ Julia Short’s neighbour Pokemi and her white husband Smithy had three children, and Short added that “Pokemi was very kind and liked us to come and visit and see the children, but she was shy and would not speak English.”⁶⁰ Smithy’s identity as a white man did not seem to be threatened in the eyes of the community as a result of his marriage to a Blackfoot woman, perhaps because he would not have been able to live on the reserve even if he wanted to. Instead, Canada’s Indian Act dictated that Pokemi had lost her “official” native status when she married him, although Short’s diary makes it clear that this legal fiction did not make Pokemi any less aboriginal in the eyes of her white neighbours.

This perhaps goes some way towards explaining why white men with native wives in Montana were scorned to a greater degree than their counterparts in Alberta. North of the line mixed-race couples were not allowed to live on “Indian land,” and in the eyes of the

⁵⁷ Miller, “I remember Montana,” MHS SC1404.

⁵⁸ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, p. 47

⁵⁹ Drew, reminiscence, MHS SC1532.

⁶⁰ Asher, reminiscence, GA M1137.

law (if not those of local whites) the woman became “white.” South of the line a couple could live on Indian land and a white man could thereby access Indian resources instead of acting like a proper yeoman farmer. American white masculinity seemed more fragile than its counterpart north of the border because it appeared to be capable of switching sides. Even white men with no associations with aboriginal women could be at risk just by being in the west: Lillian Miller wrote in her reminiscence that when she and the rest of her family met up with her father and older brother in Chinook, the two men “looked almost like the Indians standing around. Montana’s sun is powerful and they were both very brown.”⁶¹ Montana’s women and weather had a way of de-racializing white men.

Multiple strategies were obviously needed to maintain racial boundaries socially if they could not be maintained physically. Rosanna Sturgis described in a letter an event that took place while she was coming up river to Fort Benton as part of the 1862 Fisk expedition. The steamboat took on additional passengers, including “an old Indian trader” whose “Wife is a squaw of the Blackfoot Nation ... his son was speaking of his Mother he said my Father’s Wife is an Indian woman but she is a Lady.”⁶² It is not clear if the speaker was in fact the son of the Blackfoot woman or if this was Sturgis’ opinion; if he was her son then he was speaking from the position of wanting to both distance himself from his mother’s racial background and redeem her status. He accomplished the former by referring to the woman as his father’s wife and not as his mother, and accomplished the latter by using the words “wife” and “lady”, suggesting that the couple was legally married.

The number of references to local aboriginal and mixed-blood populations decreased significantly on both sides of the border by the 1890s. Both federal governments were attempting to hone their containment and assimilation policies, and the

⁶¹ Miller, “I remember Montana” MHS SC1404.

⁶² Sturgis, letter written in 1867, MHS SC 809. Underlining in original.

number of white colonizers was increasing steadily. White women continued to note the movement and presence of natives, but less often and with less detail. Caroline Wyndham and her husband, for example, ranched near Carseland south-east of Calgary from 1887 to 1910. Although relatively close to the Siksika reservation at Gleichen, she mentioned “Indians” fewer than 15 times in her diary entries from 1888 and 1891. Sometimes she wrote that they had “paid us a visit” or brought her mail via her son Alexander who was in the North West Mounted Police; at other times she bought chickens from or sold them to the Siksika.⁶³

“One of their race”: “Other” minorities in the borderlands

The aboriginal population was certainly not the only group of visible “others” that these white women were seeing, but it was the largest. Montana and Alberta also had small communities of black and Chinese people, and while the white women always noticed and commented on them, their racialization was always simultaneously gendered and clearly divorced from the landscape. Unlike the Blackfoot, the spatial and social separation between whites, blacks and Chinese had already been entrenched on both sides of the border. These minorities were associated with places like hotels or steamboats, or functions like cook or laundress, which defined them as service-providers for whites. Black men and women and Chinese men were more easily slotted into the racist hierarchies of the day, and therefore posed no threat to white aspirations to spatial and cultural hegemony in the borderlands.

These groups were not distributed evenly in the borderlands, however. Black and Chinese men were not mentioned at all in the pre-1890 sources from southern Alberta,

⁶³ Wyndham, diary 1888-1891, GA AC Wyndham. It is likely that the main reason why Wyndham had as much contact with the Blackfoot as she did was because her son was

likely because their numbers were extremely small. The 1885 Census indicates that there were only four people of “African origin” in southern Alberta, at least one of whom was African-American cowboy John Ware, and only two of “Chinese origin.” Howard Palmer notes that most Chinese men arrived in southern Alberta during the 1890s, and there was a limited migration of American blacks to the province between 1908-1912.⁶⁴

There were slightly larger numbers of Black and Chinese men in northern Montana in the 1870s and 1880s (the 1870 census counted 14 “coloured” men and 3 Chinese men, for example), and they are mentioned in a few of the American sources, albeit infrequently and always as subservient service providers. In the spring of 1873 there was one African-American man working on the Stocking’s cattle ranch. Lucy only referred to him as “darkey” and kept track of his work. When he started work in March she wrote “darkey came.” He seems to have been fired two months later for kicking a cow. In between he was sent looking for “truant horses” and “truant steers.” Another day she wrote “the darkey runn a buffalo past the door and over the creek.”⁶⁵ Ed Sims, a black man who worked as a steward on the boat Mary Gibson took up the Missouri in 1882, “served cold drinks and did everything in his power to make us more comfortable, or I should say, less miserable.”⁶⁶ These two men do not occupy the same kind of place in each text – Stocking’s hired man is never named and does not last long, while Sims is both named and clearly doing his job well – but what they do share is a subordinate racial and economic status, and their mobility indicates that they have no permanent place in northern Montana.

a Mountie and her ranch was very close to the Siksika reservation.

⁶⁴ The only full-length biography of Ware is Grant MacEwan’s, *John Ware’s Cattle Country* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Press, 1975). Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982). Chinese men also occasionally worked as cooks on the big ranches after 1890; the Malcolm Millar ranch south of Calgary, for example, had anywhere from one to three Chinese men working in the house after 1900. Helen Millar, diary, GA M849.

⁶⁵ Stocking, diary, 23 March 1873, MHS SC142

The occasional references to Chinese men generally portray them as particularly noteworthy because they were “foreign” and they were men who occupied especially feminized service positions. Mary Gibson remembered that the “cooks, waiters, and ‘chambermaids’” in the hotel in Fort Benton in 1882 were all Chinese, which made her fear for her life. She wrote, “As I had never before seen one of their race, I couldn’t believe that it would be safe to eat food they prepared so I subsisted upon crackers, nuts and raisins which I bought at nearby stores, as long as we remained at the hotel.”⁶⁷ Lillian Miller recalled that the hotel in Chinook also had a Chinese cook in the 1890s, but it had “waitresses” whose race she does not specify and so were probably white.⁶⁸

The number of Black women in the borderlands was even smaller than the number of Black or Chinese men and yet they are the only group to be mentioned in both groups of sources. In this instance it was their gender and the particular nature of the services they provided which brought them to the attention of white writers. May Flanagan remembered a black mid-wife in early Fort Benton, “old Aunt Leah, a big fat negro mid-wife”, whose presence and usefulness was linked in May’s text to the birth of one of the first white babies to prominent local and cross-border businessman George Baker. In an account of a trip down the Missouri from Montana to North Dakota in 1882 Flanagan also noted approvingly that the riverboat had “negro waiters” and a “negro laundress.”⁶⁹ Gibson wrote that on her ranch she “had a Missouri woman for a cook who only worked when ‘the spirit moved her’, the balance of the time she sat, smoking a corn-cob pipe, near the kitchen stove, ‘warmin’ up’, but she was a good cook when sufficiently warm.”⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Gibson, reminiscence, MHS SC1476.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Miller, “I remember Montana” MHS SC1404.

⁶⁹ Flanagan, memoirs, MHS SC1236.

⁷⁰ Gibson, reminiscence, MHS SC1476.

These representations of black women as service-providers (and sometimes lazy ones at that) are paralleled in the one example from southern Alberta. Inderwick wrote in her 1884 letter that, after giving up on teaching the local native woman to help with the laundry, she sent it “to a dignified coloured lady” in Pincher Creek “who boasts that she and the Police Commissioner’s wife were the first white ladies to arrive in the country - Time is nothing to her and if I were an ordinary woman and not a bride with a good trousseau I shiver to think what might happen [to] me - when weeks go by and no laundry can be cajoled from our aristocratic Auntie[’]s dwelling.”⁷¹ She does not comment further on the fact that her racialized representation of the laundress in Pincher Creek does not match the representation the woman claims for herself. The woman says she is “white” and a lady; Inderwick says she is “coloured” and dubs her “Auntie.” The nature of her occupation probably would have been sufficient evidence for the rest of the town to agree with Inderwick. What is most remarkable about this incident is the way it suggests that the category of “whiteness” was open to external challenges as well as such internal challenges as those created by “squaw men” during these early years of white colonization. The “dignified lady” in Pincher Creek is claiming a racial status which the community does not think she is entitled to, and she makes a further claim to the status of colonizer by taking pride in being one of the region’s “first white ladies.” Her claims are challenged by local whites who see and label her as “coloured,” but it is clear that she does not let others’ perceptions change her own identification.

It seems clear from the preceding discussion that the black and Chinese populations were not viewed by whites as racial or spatial threats in the way that the Blackfoot were. Their numbers were even smaller than those of the white communities, and their racial and gendered inferiority indicated that they already “knew” their place in the hierarchies of the

⁷¹ Inderwick, letter, GA M559.

day and therefore would not create any major obstacles to the establishment of the young settler societies north or south of the 49th parallel. As white, English-speaking Americans and Canadians solidified their hold on the borderlands, the amount of attention these writers paid to visible racial differences declined. Being a white Canadian or white American mattered less than being unquestionably white and respecting the accompanying gender norms. Stoler has argued that “the colonial politics of exclusion” depended on constructing “legal and social classifications designating who was ‘white,’ [and] who was ‘native’”⁷² Even having “white” skin mattered less than having “white” status, because physical traits and the characteristics which were assumed to accompany them were not as reliable as official discourse would have it. The “colored” woman in Fort Francis, for example, was never going to be granted the status of whiteness by her neighbours because she took in other women’s laundry, and the whiteness of “squaw men” was suspect because of their associations with aboriginal women.

“What the women ought to be”: white women, femininity and ethnicity

Nonetheless, the gaze of the authors being discussed here was increasingly preoccupied with other white women as their numbers increased, and less attention was paid to the fuzzy edges of racial categories. Even when the number of white women was small their presence and the opportunities for visiting were important to many of these writers. May Flanagan indicated in her memoirs and one letter that when her mother first arrived in Fort Benton in 1873 there were only about six other white women in town and seven white families in the surrounding area. The advantage of this was that “White women and children were very much appreciated in those times.” May recalls getting to go to an evening dancing party “because there were so few white children in the town that

⁷² Stoler, “Making Empire Respectable,” p. 345.

those who were there were much spoiled and petted and people seemed to want them around.”⁷³ Two other sources from northern Montana in the 1870s suggest that while their numbers were small, white women did make a point of keeping in touch with each other. Lucy Stocking wrote in her diary on June 29 1871 that prominent Benton merchant Conrad Baker and his daughter had called at her ranch.⁷⁴ And no sooner had Alma Coffin Kirkpatrick arrived in Fort Benton in July 1878 than she accompanied a “Captain Haney” on visits to three (presumably white) families. She wrote that “The ladies were at home and very agreeable. Their houses are small, but prettily furnished. One lady played and sang for us, charmingly.”⁷⁵ In the early 1890s, Lillian Miller recalled that the “ladies” of her community “managed to visit each other once or twice a summer. Mrs. Ross, and her girls, would pick us up and then we tried to make two visits in one day.”⁷⁶ The fact that they could even make two visits a day indicates how rapidly the area was being settled by whites.

In southern Alberta in the 1880s Mary Inderwick used whiteness as a way to mentally map her area and the non-whiteness of some of her female neighbours means they were occasionally deleted from the category “women” altogether. She wrote in 1884 that she was the

only woman (white) on this river or the next for that matter as the next ranche is owned by a bachelor - so I am 22 miles from a woman - & though I like all the men and enjoy having them I simply long to talk to a woman - so about once a month I ride into Saint Francis [her pseudonym for Pincher Creek] with Charlie and stay a night with my dearest friend here Mrs. Borden... She was the first white woman in Saint Francis and came by way of covered waggon from Montana - with her two children! What splendid pluck!⁷⁷

⁷³ Flanagan, memoir, MHS SC1236.

⁷⁴ Stocking, diary 29 June 1871, MHS SC142.

⁷⁵ Kirkpatrick, reminiscence, MHS SC940.

⁷⁶ Miller, “I remember Montana” MHS SC1404.

Unlike the “coloured” laundress who tried to claim a racial status Mary did not think she deserved, Mrs. Borden’s claim to being the first white woman in town went unchallenged and was likely bolstered by her wagon journey from Montana.

Inderwick’s diary indicates that, although their numbers were small, she managed to visit other women in her area on a regular basis. For example, during a two-week period in 1884 she records at least three such visits. On January 24, she and “Mrs. M went to see Mrs. Battles. Think her very nice and nice baby”. On January 29 they headed to the Blood Reserve for dinner with the minister and his wife, Reverend and Mrs. Trivett, and had lunch at “Mrs. Bourne’s” on the way. And on February 8 she wrote “Mr. & Mrs. Geddes here for coal - stayed about half an hour and I enjoyed it - She is so nice... .”⁷⁸ It is clear that while their white neighbours were few, women tried to make the most of these contacts to build a sense of community, and seemed very comfortable travelling around their areas to do so. The situation could always be improved, however, and Inderwick wrote in her fall 1884 letter that she had “made all sorts of offers to a few of the men who are near us in the way of helping them get their shacks done up if only they will ‘go east’ and marry some really nice girls... .”⁷⁹ By specifying that she wanted the women to come from the east, she implies that she hopes they are Canadian.

She did get her wish eventually. By the end of the century white settlers finally started pouring into the Alberta-Montana borderlands, solidifying their place at the top of the spatial and racial hierarchies. The Blackfoot were rendered invisible, socially and economically marginalized on their reserves, their territory obscured by the maps and borders of whites. Black and Chinese people remained barely visible at the fringes of the new settler societies. Alma Coffin Kirkpatrick recalled a 1883 trip back to Illinois and

⁷⁷ Inderwick, letter, GA M559. “(white)” is in original text.

⁷⁸ Inderwick, diary 24 January to 8 February 1884, GA M559.

Indiana, during which a young man scoffed at her reference to her “good neighbours.” The man replied, “‘Good neighbours! I should smile! When you have none but Indians.’ Vainly I tried to explain that I had neighbours, white people too, none better.”⁸⁰ The young man was unable to believe that white communities could exist at the far edge of the Great Plains, but Kirkpatrick was determined to defend her neighbours and herself. Margaret Harkness Woodman wrote in 1892 from San Francisco that while she would like to visit northern Montana again, it would “all be new to me, except the natural scenery, the mountains and the river, and I shall miss the great herds of buffalo and the camps of Indians which I saw thirty years ago. But as their places are now filled with domestic animals and happy homes of industrious and enterprising white men, there will be nothing for me to regret.”⁸¹ This sentence conveyed her impression that aboriginal people had been completely displaced by white men and European-style economic activities, and that such wholesale displacement was a clear step forward for domesticity, industry and enterprise. Discursively at least, if not quite in reality, wild animals and wild Indians were gone while the beautiful backdrop remained, and these two writers wanted to convince their audiences that white society had been safely and permanently established.

The “arrival” of white women in Blackfoot country before 1890 might not have been the key factor in the transition to the Alberta-Montana borderlands, because their numbers were too small and federal agendas were not their own, but in many ways their experiences and perceptions did mirror and reinforce national goals and processes. White women generally reacted first to the land and its original inhabitants with some blend of awe, opportunity, and fear, and their personal comfort level determined the moment at which “Blackfoot country” became their country. The land and its aboriginal inhabitants

⁷⁹ Inderwick, letter, GA M559.

⁸⁰ Kirkpatrick, reminiscence, MHS SC940.

had to pass into the realm of the taken-for-granted for settlement to begin comfortably. When these women started to pay more attention to their white neighbours than they did to the mountains or the Blackfoot, their concern for domestic spaces and appropriate standards of white femininity came to the fore well ahead of any sense of national identity. These sources demonstrate that, just in time for the massive influx of white settlers to the Alberta-Montana borderlands at the turn of the century, these young, small, settler communities were firmly at the top of the spatial, racial, and gender hierarchies.

But establishing “whiteness” as a norm at the top of the racial and spatial hierarchies was not enough; as the Canadian government in particular had done in its views of immigrants, these women soon subdivided and ranked that whiteness by ethnicity and gender. Robert Griswold has noted that white women may have “inherited” a “domestic ideology” from the East, “but it was an ideology that was fluid, elastic, and complex: women explained their own actions by its assumptions, sometimes wrestled to align behaviour with diverse perceptions of its tenets, and modified it to meet changing realities.”⁸² An implicit criterion in the borderlands’ version of this ideology was whether or not other white women deserved a place in the west: a woman could be found wanting if she seemed too feminine, too masculine, or too attached to older, eastern ways of doing things. In the creation of social boundaries in the borderlands, a simple division of race was not adequate. Being “white” was only adequate (although fundamentally necessary) when the number of whites was very small and when “whiteness” as a taken-for-granted category still needed to be established. Other divisions were needed once there were enough white people to subdivide. In some ways, this could be seen as the triumph of

81 Woodman. letter, MHS SC 988.

82 Robert L. Griswold, “Anglo Women and Domestic Ideology in the American West in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” in *Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives*, p. 17.

Canadian and American colonization of Blackfoot country – white women, supposedly the very icon of civilization, felt comfortable enough with their position that they could direct their attention away from visible racial differences and the newness of the landscape to more nuanced details of ethnicity and gender. In other ways, however, this shift in their attention could also be seen as the failure of Canadian and American nation-building in the west, because the majority of these writers show little awareness of or interest in national identities and borders. Their lives were lived at the most local of levels, defined largely by their own homes and those of their white neighbours, which made it easier to continually reconstruct and negotiate the social categories of race and gender, but very difficult to invoke nation.

As the number of white people in the Alberta-Montana borderlands grew, the social boundaries separating whiteness from non-whiteness multiplied. Individuals now had to have white status as well as white skin, and exhibit the appropriate gender behaviour, to deserve a place in the borderlands. It is not surprising that the diaries and reminiscences which pay the most attention to ethnic and gender differences are from the late 1880s and early 1890s; by that point in time the hardest part of colonization, namely establishing whiteness as the norm, was largely over, and so more attention could be paid to finer distinctions. Only three of these writers explicitly mentioned ethnicity, and all are later writers: Inderwick and Short Asher in the 1880s in southern Alberta, and Lillian Miller in the 1890s in north-central Montana.

The key distinction Canadian-born Inderwick drew was between Canadian-born and English-born whites, and as such is a strong early example of what James Sturgis calls “Canadian territorial nationalism,” one based “on its own climate, vastness and

potentialities.”⁸³ In November 1883 she wrote in her diary, “Young Englishman for dinner Lar-de-dah style - dislike Englishmen.” Several months later she wrote to eastern relatives that the Englishmen were “almost all nice” except for the fact that “they nearly all have no tact in the way they talk of Canada and Canadians... . It makes my Canadian blood boil - I answer that though I have married an Englishman I have not lost my identity and am purely Canadian and am proud of it... .” Although her own family traced its roots to England, she had no doubt that being born in Canada made her different than someone born in England. A further advantage to a Canadian identity seemed to be a comparative freedom from family constraints: she wrote in her diary on Mar 30 1884, after her husband had received a letter from his family which wasn’t very nice to Mary, “I wish he was a Canadian & had no people.”⁸⁴

And although Inderwick wanted more white women to settle in her area, what she did not want was more English-born women. She wrote in her letter that the few who were already around were “freaks!” One had been dubbed “Miss Smith of London”, had a loud voice, and lived with four brothers. The woman had “brought all her traditions with her” but made her brothers do the cleaning and serving, although Mary admitted to enjoying having to dress for dinner at the “Smith” house. Another woman was “devoted to dogs” and a visit to her often meant clearing the canines off the furniture before sitting down. Mary’s strongest criticism was aimed at a third woman, however. She was “a very pretty woman and altogether a man’s woman - She sings and twangs a guitar” and “rides rather well... .” Not only did this woman flirt with Mary’s husband, but she smoked cigarettes in public with the local white men. In her letter Mary added, “I know you will

⁸³ James Sturgis, “Learning about Oneself: The Making of Canadian Nationalism, 1867-1914,” in *Kith and Kin: Canada, Britain and the United States from the Revolution to the Cold War*, ed. C. C. Eldridge (Wales: University of Cardiff, 1997) p. 97.

⁸⁴ Inderwick, diary November 1883 and 30 March 1884, GA M559.

say I am putting on modest airs in making much of her smoking but darling you know I never smoked cigarettes with anyone but [her husband and brother] ... but she smokes sitting on the Restaurant steps with half a dozen men - of course her husband is one of them - and worst of all she looks so pretty over it... ." ⁸⁵ In addition, the woman worked outside building fences with her husband and did a lot of the heavy work around their place.

Inderwick's dislike of the English-born women was partly a matter of national pride, and she is the only one of the writers on either side of the border who articulates such a strong national affiliation. But her reactions also reflect her assessment of the English women's gender behaviour and use of public space: appropriate behaviour for a white woman did not involve smoking in public with a group of men, flirting with other women's husbands, making one's brothers cook or doing too much outside labour on the ranch.

Even women who were not described as English-born received Inderwick's sympathy or criticism for not matching her ideas of appropriate femininity for white women in western spaces. She described one ranch wife she met while en route to Pincher Creek as "a nice woman" who "loved to talk to us because she was lonely - and a domestic woman, not a lover of horses - nor did the west fill her with awe and admiration - just as unfit for the position as [her husband] was." With this sentence she draws a clear distinction between women who are too domestic and therefore not suited for western life, and women like herself who love horses and admire the beauty of the west and therefore can make a place for themselves. More harshly, she called the women of Fort Macleod, "a lot of cats - more or less - though since I have discovered two very sweet ones...", and added that they "seem so gossipy and so different from the splendid great spirit of the west

⁸⁵ Inderwick, letter, GA M559. Underlined word in original.

- and what the women ought to be... .”⁸⁶ There were clear expectations placed on white women in the west, and as much as she wanted other white women to come live near her, she had additional gender and ethnic requirements in mind beyond their racial status. She wanted the men in her area to marry some nice girls, but did specify that she wanted the men to “go east” to find their wives which suggests that she would have been happiest with other Canadian women.

It is clear in the sources from Alberta and Montana that when the numbers of white people were very small, a wide range of ethnic and religious groups fell within the category and only very subtle distinctions were drawn between them. While federal immigration officials might have been concerned about encouraging Irish immigration, for example, Inderwick and Julia Short Asher both wrote favourably about an Irish couple who lived on the Little Bow River in the early 1880s. In her diary Inderwick described Mr. and Mrs. Quirk as “very jolly – very witty – no children”, and their home as “a kitchen and rooms – no floor in kitchen – Everything very tidy – awfully good grub – characteristic of this country.”⁸⁷ Short Asher’s reminiscence even explicitly places the couple within a narrative of colonization. Julia wrote that she thought “they were the first white family who lived on High River, as their farm was a good one even then and had a fine hay field.”⁸⁸ Their whiteness was proven by their domestication of the land, and the length of their residency by the quality of their farm and field.

Lillian Miller’s comments about certain women in her area of northern Montana in the 1890s combined overlapping opinions about their ethnicity and gender, with more emphasis placed on the latter. For example, she noted of one neighbour who had “only recently come over from Germany” that she was “a large, hard working peasant woman.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Inderwick, diary 30 October 1883, GA M559.

Her voice was loud and gruff, she walked like a man with long strides. But that rough exterior hid a heart of gold." Her German-ness likely was not a problem because Miller's father was German-born himself, but her less-than feminine appearance and demeanor still marked her as an outsider. Another local family were "of Scotch descent, ardent Presbyterians. In fact, all of them spoke with a broad Scotch accent. They were considered a bit queer, perhaps because of their strictness in religion and seemed aloof. Later I learned that it was Mama Cromley who was really the only straight-laced one." It seems safe to assume that "Mama" was the matriarch of the family, the one who imposed her strictness on the rest of her family, and this is one of the few instances where a writer specified another woman's particular religious affiliation. Mrs. Harris and Mrs. Lyons were sisters, "Canadian girls" who spoke with "english" accents. Their big advantage was that Mr. Lyons "built the first frame house in that part of the country for their home", including "a bathroom with a big porcelain tub." There was no running water, nor would there be for another 10 years, but the house itself (and presumably the expensive tub it contained) was "a great step forward, in the eyes of the women in the neighbourhood... ." The ethnic backgrounds of Miller's white neighbours were worth commenting on, particularly if they happened to be useful explanatory tools for the women's gender behaviour. The German and Scottish women fell short of appropriate femininity, because of their masculinity or their inability to connect with their neighbours, while the Canadian woman with a porcelain tub but no easy way to fill it gained the approval of her white neighbours.

Even when writers did not specify the ethnic background of the white women in their areas, they would often comment on their appearance, behaviour, the material goods they had brought with them from the (more "civilized") east to this new, rugged west, and

they did so on both sides of the border. Much of the literature on white women's settlement experiences has explored the ways in which the west allowed women to push the boundaries of conventional femininity, as well as the lingering power of normative gender ideologies.⁸⁹ This tension is evident in these sources from the borderlands, where a greater degree of personal mobility and freedom often seemed to be outweighed by a remarkably narrow band of acceptable behaviour in the eyes of other white women. Too little femininity or too rough a standard of living was not acceptable, but an overly feminine appearance or behaviour or too many fine quality household goods made a woman seem out of place in the borderlands. A white woman had to be at least a little bit tougher than her eastern counterparts to survive and contribute, but could not go too far without risking the disapproval of her white neighbours. After all, by the 1880s these borderlands were not as far removed from eastern "civilization" as they had been a decade earlier. Mary Douglas Gibson wrote that her mother-in-law had visited her husband and son in Fort Benton in 1881, a year before Mary arrived, "and upon her return to Minneapolis assured me that I would need plenty of pretty clothes as Fort Benton was a gay army post where there was much entertaining."⁹⁰

White women did not associate each other with the landscape, or even necessarily with any place except their own particular homes and domestic goods. Lillian Miller wrote about visiting one new arrival with her mother and being "very impressed with the nice

⁸⁹ See, for example, Jackel's *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty*, Griswold's "Anglo Women and Domestic Ideology in the American West in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," Julie Roy Jeffrey's *Frontier Women: the Trans-Mississippi West 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), Dee Garceau's *The Important Things of Life: Women, Work, and Family in Sweetwater Country, Wyoming, 1880-1929* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), and my article, "Gender(ed) Tensions in the Work and Politics of Alberta Farm Women, 1905-1929," in *Telling Tales: Essays in Western Women's History*, edited by Catherine Cavanaugh and Randi Warne (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2000).

⁹⁰ Gibson, reminiscence, MHS SC1476

walnut furniture, and everything else that we saw. Mrs. Ross talked so glibly of storing the 'better' furniture, packing the 'better' china into barrels, and putting the silver in a bank vault, that when we returned home mother told father she was afraid they wouldn't stay long. How could Mrs. Ross adjust to the rugged life of a pioneer after being used to all that luxury." As with the overly-domestic woman Inderwick encountered, the implication in Miller's text is that Mrs. Ross might be a little too feminine to cope with the challenges of frontier life. But in "pioneer country, back grounds become unimportant" and Mrs. Ross was eventually able to demonstrate that her privileged and almost excessive femininity, which seemed quite literally to be so out of place in a northern Montana ranching community, did not stop her from demonstrating "the stamina and fortitude, it takes to carry on."⁹¹

Lillian and her mother were confident that they had what it took to cope with "the rugged life of a pioneer," but that did not stop her mother from worrying about the opinions of other white women. She wondered what Mrs. Ross might think of her "home-made furniture" and the "one walnut dresser. Of course, we had a better house, and mother did not have a jealous nature. She was content with what she had. Some of her better things were stored too in Iowa... ." Another local woman, Mrs. Sweet, made her "all hot and bothered" every time she came to visit. Mrs. Sweet could afford to hire a cook for the hired men and had more time for visiting. Lillian recalled that although their house "was always immaculate and ready for company," her mother saw it as "plain and unpretentious," and was worried about what she was "going to serve such a fine lady for lunch?" Mrs. Miller's resilience was not at issue, but she did not want other women to think that she herself was unable to maintain certain feminine standards even on a sheep ranch.

⁹¹ Miller, "I remember Montana," MHS SC1404.

Three other white women in Miller's area warranted longer descriptions in her reminiscence: the hotel keeper Miss Fanny, the schoolteacher Miss Wilson, and the postmistress and shopkeeper's wife Mrs. Lohman. All three had pleasing and respectable appearances which were matched by their respectable occupations and appropriately feminine personalities. This combination was easier to come by in town than on a ranch, but Miller's mother wanted Lillian to grow up the same way and was particularly concerned about protecting her daughter's skin from the "coarsening" effects of Montana's sun and wind. It was one thing for her husband and sons to look as "brown as Indians", but quite another for her daughter to look the same way. Lillian recalled, however, that in spite of her mother's lectures "about keeping my bonnet on, at summers end, I was as brown as a berry."⁹²

Struggling to maintain standards of feminine beauty was necessary in the borderlands to reinforce a woman's racial and gender status, but they could also be played with to produce humour, as a series of diary entries by Mary Inderwick indicate. On February 7, 1884, she received a coloured photo from a "Mrs. Willson" back home in Ontario which became the object of a running commentary from the cowboys on her ranch. On February 8 she wrote "Staunton thinks Mrs. W. all very pretty except her shoulders which are too broad! Will thinks her all very pretty except her hair; it is too flowsy!" On February 9 she wrote "J. Garnett thought Mrs. W's face lovely in the photo except her lips which are too thin!" And on February 14, "Wilson thinks Mrs. W's mouth crooked & too large! - Sees a resemblance to Lizzie in lower part of face!"⁹³ Although it is not clear what prompted her to record such a curious collection of opinions about Mrs. Willson's appearance, the men may have been commenting for Mary's benefit: in her letter she

⁹² Ibid.

mentions the men teasing her that none of them have married yet because she is the only woman worth marrying.

There are hints in these sources that living in the borderlands did expand white women's traditional gender roles, at least to some extent, and as already discussed most of these hinged around the greater individual mobility many women enjoyed. While the mobility of aboriginal women and men was increasingly restricted in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, white women were generally free to move around the landscape on their own and could gain a sense of independence as a result. Mary Inderwick wrote in her letter to Alice that the main reason why the cowboys on her ranch supported her various attempts to bring "civilization" to the ranch was because she could ride well: "I verily believe if I did not ride they would have nothing to do with me - as it is they are rather proud of me - and oh Alice - I do believe I could still take pleasure in riding if I were a deaf mute - and you know what a trial that would be to a red-haired girl like me... . So when Jerry breaks my best cut glass dish I fly to the stables and have my Joy saddled and ride till I know that cut glass is nothing to make or mar one's good lovely day... ." She maintained her femininity by trying, among other things, to make the cowboys wear a jacket to dinner, but had enhanced the men's opinions of her by riding well and assisting her husband Charlie on longer rides driving cattle from one part of the ranch to another.⁹⁴

Her love of riding and the amount of respect she got from the cowboys for being a good rider allowed her to overcome to some degree what she saw as the gendered liabilities put upon her, and she is the only writer who expressed bluntly her frustrations at the limitations placed on her as a woman. She wrote in her diary on June 29, 1884, after her husband had refused to take her into town, "I wish I was a boy I could go where I chose

⁹³ Inderwick, diary 7 to 14 February 1884, GA M559. Lizzie was the maid Inderwick had brought with her from Ontario.

by myself then.” In the letter to her sister-in-law, after rhapsodizing about the “delights of this clear air”, she added, “let the housekeeper in you think of the appetites wh. [which] this air gives to men - and women - though we don’t count much in this way here ...” She had expressed an even less “feminine” sentiment several months earlier, writing in her diary on November 9 1883, “Phil brought in a young gentleman & introduced him to the girls as he said for which speech I felt like punching his nasty little head.”⁹⁵ Mary was 25 years old at the time, although not yet married, and did not appreciate being considered anything less than an adult woman.

“Strayed over the border”: white women and the 49th parallel

The borderlands did not offer all white women the chance to expand or significantly re-define their gender roles; this was, after all, a region being colonized, and the spaces and roles available to white women were complicated and multifaceted. Vron Ware, for example, has noted that colonial settings could provide “both a physical and an ideological space in which the different meanings of femininity could be explored or contested” at a time when very limited definitions of “women’s physical and mental capabilities were beginning to pass into the realm of ‘common sense’... .” These conflicting ideas were further complicated by notions of racial and cultural differences. A white woman in a colonial setting could be “a many-faceted figure,” from boundary-defying adventurer to mother of the race, from hardy pioneer to defenceless target.⁹⁶ Examples of all of these images and more can be found in the sources from the Alberta-Montana borderlands from the 1860s to the 1890s, indicating that even this tiny number of white women occupied a

⁹⁴ Inderwick, letter, GA M559.

⁹⁵ Inderwick, diary, GA M559. Emphasis in original.

⁹⁶ Ware, *Beyond the Pale*, p. 120

complex position and played complicated roles in the colonization and settlement of the region.

Their role in Canadian and American nation-building in the west is even less clear. The 49th parallel is almost never mentioned in these diaries and reminiscences, and only one of the writers seems to have actually crossed it: Sadye Wolfe Drew and her family crossed the line twice as they travelled to Alberta and back to the United States. In her reminiscence, the memory she associates with the northward crossing is an unlucky customs official finding a bag of soiled diapers.⁹⁷ The only Canadian reference to the border is in the diary of Helen Millar, who ranched south-west of Calgary and wrote on January 7 1891 “Gen. Miles killed by Indians S of Line.”⁹⁸ And Lillian Miller wrote that her brother “strayed over the border” once while herding sheep and “and a Canadian Mountie ordered him back. There were cattle up there owned by large cattle companies and these were almost wild.”⁹⁹ The border was a line that one could cross accidentally or with little effort, a line only drawn into existence when something marked it as such or when murderous Indians or wild cattle were on the other side.

Nor does the border seem to have played a large role in the identities these newcomers and their communities constructed for themselves: Inderwick identified herself as a Canadian in opposition to her English neighbours, not to her American neighbours, and Lillian Miller mentioned “Canadians” in the same way she mentioned Scottish or German immigrants, as just one of many not-American ethnic groups. The border does not appear to have created many powerful symbolic distinctions in their lives, perhaps because they lived their lives almost entirely on one side or the other and thus could take it completely for granted.

⁹⁷ Drew, reminiscence, MHS SC1532

⁹⁸ Millar, diary 1891, GA M849.

The broader national implications of the border are most evident in the earlier writers' different reactions to the landscape and aboriginal communities: a fear of native peoples and the lands they inhabit is more evident in the American sources, likely as a result of the more violent history of native-white relations in the United States. But by 1890, the Blackfoot had been rendered invisible on both sides of the border, socially and economically marginalized on their reserves, their territory obscured by the maps and borders of whites. Black and Chinese people also remained barely visible at the fringes of the new settler societies on both sides of the border, marginalized by their racial and gender status. In short, borderland settler communities had been established with striking similarities and subtle differences.

In many ways, then, the Canadian and American colonization of Blackfoot country was a success by 1890. White women, assumed to be the symbol of "civilization" and racial progress, were comfortable enough in the borderlands by 1890 that they paid less attention to other racial minorities or the land around them, and paid a great deal of attention to the appearance and behaviour of other white women in their own domestic spaces. Yet there are obvious ways in which federal efforts to divide Blackfoot country were less successful. The white settler communities taking root on either side of the border seemed to have more similarities than differences, and all-important category of "the nation" seems to have had little symbolic meaning for these writers. For them the border only really existed when it was crossed, and whatever national aspirations federal officials had for the region were inconsequential compared to personal and local goals and development. Categories of race and gender were used to construct and give meaning to the spaces created by white settler communities, but "the nation" remained elusive in these borderlands.

⁹⁹ Miller, "I remember Montana," MHS SC1404.

Conclusion

The lines which separate

Borders, like other categories of differentiation, do not exist all by themselves: they must be created. Once created, they must be continually reinforced lest they allow for too many unofficial and unsanctioned interpretations. Making the 49th parallel into a meaningful national border required the creation and reinforcement of discursive categories that could outweigh the topographical, economic, and social ties that cut across it. That is, to make the Alberta-Montana borderlands out of Blackfoot country, and make two different national spaces where a single and very different one existed before, the Canadian and American governments had several problems. They could not rely on language differences to make their nations for them. There were few physical demarcations to mark the border between the Great Lakes and the Rockies, and those which were created tended to be fleeting. Unlike the Lakota, who made a point about leaving one country and entering another, the Kainah, Piikuni and Siksika people moved back and forth across the line with relatively little fanfare, forcing local Indian agents to state that “their” Blackfoot were better than those across the line, with little actual proof. Ranching became the region’s dominant economic activity in the late 1870s, and challenged federal efforts to make “the west” a nationally distinct, coherent, agricultural heartland. The border between southern Alberta and northern Montana had to be made, and in the early years of its career as a national and cultural border that process was slow and uneven.

To make the 49th parallel into a meaningful political border, Canadian and American officials reached for the real and imaginary differences in their political systems; the size, topography, and fertility of their western spaces; and the racialized and gendered characteristics of aboriginals and immigrants to make the border and thus the nation meaningful to themselves. By the 1890s, these categories of difference seemed to be

working. With the development of irrigation projects, dry farming techniques, hardier strains of wheat, and the beginning of the long-awaited arrival of large numbers of white settlers, the decade held out the promise of agricultural bounty and the firm stamp of the nation upon the region. By 1900 Montana's population had jumped to over 240,000, and Alberta's had climbed to more than 73,000 in 1901, after the newly-elected Liberal government began a more aggressive recruitment campaign after 1896. The population boom in the borderlands would be even more dramatic in the first decade of the twentieth century.

And yet, the border remained on shaky ground. The first irrigation projects in southern Alberta were those of American-born Mormons who were trying to use the 49th parallel to escape from religious persecution in the United States. The parallel lines of the railroads running north and south of the border made it easier to incorporate each side of the border into its respective national economy, but a CPR branch line to Lethbridge, Alberta, completed in 1885 to exploit the region's coal reserves, was extended to Great Falls, Montana, in 1890 and reinvented the north-south alignment of the regional economy in the railroad era. The Great Northern Railway, which finally made it to north-western Montana in 1893, ran even closer to the south side of the border than the CPR did to the north. The man behind the Great Northern was James J. Hill, a key player in the syndicate which built the CPR and had relocated its line to the south and an entrepreneur who had already built a line north from St. Paul, Minnesota to meet the one coming south from Winnipeg, Manitoba.¹ Blackfoot country was decisively overwritten by the Alberta-Montana borderlands in the 1890s, but precisely because they were borderlands a range of new cross-border connections was being created as quickly as older ones were erased.

¹ LaDow, *The Medicine Line: Life and Death on a North American Borderland* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001) p. 77.

This dissertation, by taking a discursive and comparative approach to this borderlands region during three key transitional decades, suggests some of the potential of borderlands research to question borders and their meanings, to understand how they were created and how they have come to be used. Only by interrogating the ways in which borders, and other social categories like race and gender, are constructed and deployed, and by paying close attention to the similarities and differences between the two sides, can we de-naturalize taken-for-granted boundaries. For example, at the federal level this study has shown that the similarities between Canadian and American land policies can not only be attributed to each nation's desire to exploit its western spaces for economic and political development, but also to the fact that both were colonial nations with comparable cultural agendas and a shared belief in their right to displace the aboriginal people of the continent. In addition, I have shown that despite the well-known differences in Canadian and American Indian policies, the discursive framework, ideological centres, and regulatory tools of those policies were largely identical, an insight which can help us to understand why racism and poverty have become common experiences for most of North America's indigenous communities in the twentieth century. The discursive similarities between Canadian and American approaches to immigration can also go some way towards explaining how analogous white settler societies were created in both wests by two governments with vastly different powers over immigration.

By comparing sources written in Ottawa and Washington to those written in the borderlands by local officials and white women, this dissertation has also demonstrated that the instability of federal categories like "the nation" and the regulatory tools used to construct and reinforce those categories is most evident at the local level. While Blackfoot mobility back and forth across the border could be used to discursively reinforce that border, it was nevertheless an ongoing reminder of just how porous the border could be. The permeability of spatial and racial categories was more visible in the borderlands than in

the national capitols, and local officials worked continuously to draw their own clear social, racial, and political lines between white newcomers and the Blackfoot. Their inability to do so, however, was framed differently on each side of the border, demonstrating that slightly different alignments of race, gender and space were being constructed and deployed in southern Alberta and northern Montana. Similarly, this dissertation has also shown that although white women occupied different spaces in federal discourses about the west, there was a great deal of commonality in the ways they represented their experiences as white women and colonizers; for example, they tended to react first and most strongly to the landscapes around them, shared powerful cultural norms about the limits and requirements of respectable white femininity, and norms about the specific intersections of race and gender for black women. Where the different national colonial contexts can be seen, even if federal efforts to make “the nation” into a powerful category might not have been very successful, is in white women’s different reactions to the Blackfoot themselves.

As Anne McClintock has argued, “margins are dangerous. Societies are most vulnerable at their edges, along the tattered fringes of the known world.”² For Canada and the United States, this one edge of their countries revealed how fragile their nations could be. There is little doubt that the border became a powerful symbolic divide between Canada and the United States over the course of the twentieth century, and the 49th parallel has come to represent everything which supposedly makes the two countries different. For example, Calgary is frequently described as being “very American” (and thus not very “Canadian”) because the city fosters an image of a frontier past and entrepreneurial present, and all-too-often writers and commentators unfamiliar with history define the elusive “Canadian identity” as that which is not “American.” Yet the permeability of the border,

² Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995) p. 24.

normally a greater concern for Canadians, does occasionally trouble Americans too. For example, in December of 1999 a series of articles in the *New York Times* called for tighter security between Canada and the United States after an alleged terrorist entered the U. S. from Canada.³ The tribes of the Blackfoot Confederacy have maintained social and cultural ties across the border, and in the spring of 2000 they took steps to reinforce those connections with cross-border political ties.

The fact that the line which separates southern Alberta from northern Montana can still be crossed so easily throws into question the supposedly self-evident differences on either side. The Alberta-Montana borderlands between 1862 and 1892 demonstrate that if borders, like categories of race, gender, or nation, must be continually re-made to perform the social and political functions which the federal governments expected of them, they can also be challenged and re-made at the local level to perform differently.

³ *New York Times*, 24, 26, 28 December, 1999.

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