

**Agriculture:
The Relationship Between
Aboriginal Farmers and Non-Aboriginal Farmers**

The purpose of this paper was to develop research specifically for the Western Development Museum's exhibits to celebrate the Saskatchewan centennial.

**Western Development Museum/Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre
Partnership Project**

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Introduction

This research paper will look at the past one hundred years of interaction between First Nations farmers and the European settlers in Saskatchewan and will also examine the ongoing relationship between First Nations and non-Aboriginal farmers. In many circumstances, the quality of the relationship was (and still is) dependent upon the level of respect that each individual had for the other. In general, shared agricultural activities, such as harvesting, breaking new farmland, fencing, stone removal and dealing with pestilence, drought, early frost, infestations brought Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people together resulting in positive relationships. As Elder Danny Musqua states:

They wanted us to work with them, because we helped each other. The Indian worked hard back then. Ask any white man who farmed. The old farmers they can tell you about the Indian that worked hard.¹

However, cohesiveness between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal farmers was uncommon. There are typically many examples of the strain on the relationships. Strain resulted from activities that were not conducive to harmony, such as conditions and incidents of blatant racism. The Victorian societal view that First Nations people were ‘savages’ and needed to become civilized through Christianity is one factor that set many people on the path of disharmony. The systematic attack on the First Nations traditional way of life demonstrates the early European attitude of arrogance and disrespect. The negative perception of Aboriginal people also illustrates the contempt that Canadian Government had and manifested in discriminatory policies that governed the lives of Aboriginal people.

The signing of the Treaties and the subsequent development of the *Indian Act* reflected the societal views and were essentially discriminatory. The two-prong thrust of education and agriculture, while welcomed at first, and negotiated to be part of the treaties was poorly implemented. Many First Nations people were disillusioned by the promises of the Canadian Government and the effect of the promises left many Aboriginal communities poverty stricken. The system of European settlement intended to benefit both the First Nations people and the greater community essentially failed primarily for the First Nations people.

After the *Indian Act* was passed in 1876, it required the development and implementation of the policy designed to govern the Aboriginal people. The policy that existed at the time heavily influenced how First Nations farmers related to non-Aboriginal farmers. For example, during the early years of settlement when the “Pass and Permit” system was implemented the movement of both First Nations people and non-Aboriginal people on and off the reserve was restricted. The system of acquiring permission in order to leave the reserve severely hindered the interaction between First Nations people and the early settlers.

¹ Elder, Danny Musqua, “WDM Transcripts”. SICC, June 2002, Tape 3, Side 1, 000.

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Part I: Government Policy

1. History

With the disappearance of the buffalo from the plains and the signing of the treaties, First Nations people in Saskatchewan were compelled to alter their traditional way of life. In 1876, the Canadian Government reflected the European perspective that existed at the time through the *Indian Act*. European society viewed First Nations people as savages or heathens that required civilizing. The assimilation of Aboriginal people was to take place within the framework of agriculture. The *Indian Act* set out the means of implementing the treaties that eventually governed the day to day life of Aboriginal people.

Agriculture was viewed by the Canadian Government as the best solution for changing a nomadic lifestyle based on subsistence to one that is sedentary and food was plentiful. It also believed to be a necessary change that the *Indian Act* provided for by creating a fixed land base for the creation of reserves. It was decided that agriculture would be the instrument by which the assimilation of Aboriginal people into Canadian society would occur. If the conversion was successful, there would no longer be a need for the treaties or Department of Indian Affairs, for Aboriginal people would be integrated into Euro-Canadian society.

A discussion of the development of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people requires an awareness of the policies implemented by the Canadian Government designed to deal Aboriginal people. The policies reflected the widely held Victorian and Christian beliefs regarding Aboriginal people. Essentially that First Nations people were savages and it was necessary that they be civilized in order for them to become good citizens.

The *Indian Act* of 1876 is the documentation of the manifestation of the discriminatory beliefs of the Europeans. The legislation has enshrined the concepts of “Indian status” and “enfranchisement” or in other words who is and who is not an Indian. It also provided for the creation of and administration of Indian reserves. The *Indian Act* was a discriminatory legislation that dictated the citizenship of Aboriginal people by enforcing European beliefs regarding lineage upon Aboriginal communities. The policies provided by the *Indian Act* created the foundation that would dictate the lives Aboriginal people in Canada.

In the prairies, agriculture was an instrument of assimilation of the First Nations people. Hayter Reed, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs (1893 - 1897), believed “that agriculture was the great panacea of what were perceived to be the ills of Canada’s Indians”². Reed, implemented several policies that were intended to place First Nations people on the road to what he believed to be a civilized, agrarian society.

During the early 1880’s, farming in Saskatchewan was prosperous. Many First Nations farmers were successful in competing in the farming economy along with the non-

² Carter, Sarah. Lost Harvest, Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993. p 15

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Aboriginal farmers. Utilizing newly developed dry land farming techniques and acting as a collective, many First Nations farmers won local prizes and awards for their crops as demonstrated in the following quote;

In the late 1880's, "farmers in the Treaty 4 area were among the first in the Northwest to experiment with summer fallowing"- an effective technique for moisture retention. In 1890, the first prize for wheat was won by reserve farms, both at Prince Albert and Regina. On Cowessess, Louis O'Soup's field of wheat was said to be no different from a white farmer's and he won prizes at the Broadview Fair. An inspector at one of the Dakota reserves declared the wheat crops to be "as fine as any I had seen among the white settlers," and the farmers "a very nice lot of Indians [who] seem to be industrious and therefore are deserving of encouragement."³

First Nations farmers shared the workload and the costs of equipment purchases and repairs. They were among the earliest farmers to plant new test crops, "One of their chiefs planted test crops and ranked among the earliest farmers in the West to plant the newly developed Red Fife wheat."⁴ Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal farmers worked side-by-side to break new land. Their combined efforts led to an unheard of success. The quality and quantity of the grains produced was greater than the subsistence levels envisaged by the program administrators.

An example of the success was demonstrated by the File Hills Farm Colony on the Peepeekisis Reserve which did not go unnoticed by the non-Aboriginal farmers. The File Hills Farm Colony saw great success through the adoption of an agrarian lifestyle. The Aboriginal people were encouraged to send their children to school in order that the children would be trained to ensure the continuing success of the colony. Prior to the World War I, the colony had around 33 Aboriginal farmers. Currently the colony is no longer in existence but there continues to be members of the Peepeekisis reserve pursuing an agrarian livelihood⁵.

The success of Aboriginal farmers unfortunately drew the attention of the Federal government which resulted in the development of policies intended to protect the interests and difficulties that non-Aboriginal farmers were facing. Reed implemented three policy initiatives that would change the lives of First Nations people. The policies effectively sabotaged most of the agricultural practices that were resulting in successful initiatives of Aboriginal farmers.

2. Severalty

The first of the policies is known as Severalty, which effectively divided reserve farmland into small 40 acres plots. An Aboriginal farmer was prohibited from holding no

³ Buckley, Helen. *From Wooden Ploughs to Welfare*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1992. p 52.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Pinay, Donna. "The History of the File Hills Farming Colony" in *Saskatchewan Indian*. Vol 4, No 6, p 16, July 1974. <www.sicc.sk.ca/saskindian/a74jul16.htm>

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more than four plots or 160 acres. The small farm plots were created in order to promote individualism, directing Aboriginal farmers onto the path of self-sufficiency⁶. The policy had a two-fold purpose; (1) the continuation of an overall government policy to subvert First Nations people from a tribal (collective) system to a system where individualism autonomy is key; and (2) to assist in determining the amount of agricultural land on reserves that would be available for surrender to the Federal government. The Canadian government felt that any unused or unallocated land should be open for sale or lease to the European settlers.

Although the farms were small, machinery was still required for cultivation and harvest. However, very few Aboriginal farmers could afford the cost of new machinery required to run the farms. The *Indian Act* prohibited the use of land as collateral for borrowing money in order to purchase equipment. When Aboriginal communities attempted problem solve by purchasing equipment collectively manner it was highly discouraged. The collective effort was viewed as an act of “banding” together by the Canadian government. The resistance by the government is evidenced in the following;

At Duck Lake in 1891, six or seven Indians together purchased a self-binder with the approval of the farm instructor. The implement dealer had to acquire the consent of the agent, who was ordered by Inspector McGibbon to object to the sale. No sale or delivery took place.⁷

After all the band-members on a reserve were allocated plots of land, any surplus land was deemed available for sale to European settlers. Surveys were used to determine the quantity of surplus land that would become available. The manner in which the Federal government acquired the so-called surplus land is highly questionable. At any rate, it served to decrease the available acreage available to First Nations farmers.

3. Peasant Farming

The second policy is known as the Peasant Farming policy. The policy was based on the belief that Aboriginal farmers should first learn how to farm through elementary methods of peasant farmers of other countries. The rationale was that Aboriginal farmers should be taught to cultivate land using simple implements on small plots of land. In combination with the Severalty policy, which reduced the number of acres that a First Nations farmer could put into production, peasant farming severely limited output primarily to subsistence levels. Prior to the Peasant Farming policy, Aboriginal farmers had a commercially viable operation, the effect of the implementing the policy was the exclusion of Aboriginal farmers from the agricultural economy. The policy served another purpose which was the reduction of completion to the on-Aboriginal farmers. The dual purpose of the Peasant Farming policy is furthered in the following quotes;

In Reed’s opinion, a single acre of wheat, a portion of a second acre of root crops and vegetables, and a cow or two could sufficiently provide for

⁶ Bateman, Rebecca. Talking with The Plow: Agricultural Policy and Indian Farming in the Canadian and U.S. Prairies. Vancouver: Simon Fraser University. p 219.

⁷ *Supra*, note 3.

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an Indian farmer and his family. He argued that it was better for Indians to cultivate a small acreage properly than to attempt to extend the area under cultivation. This restricted acreage eliminated any need for labour-saving machinery. Peasants of other countries, Reed contended, farmed successfully with no better implements than the hoe, rake, cradle, sickle, and flail, and he believed that Indians had to be taught how to handle these simple tools.⁸

The peasant farming policy was geared to protect and maintain the incomes of White farmers, ensure their contentment, and if possible, to allow them to become prosperous, thus attracting more immigrants to the Western prairies. Reserve agriculture suffered as a result.⁹

4. The Permit System

The 1890s saw further restrictions on farming, and new powers for agents and resident instructors on the reserves. Chief among the restrictions was the permit system, the piece of paper which the Indian farmer had to have in order to sell his grain or other produce, or to buy stock or implements.¹⁰

The Pass and Permit system were introduced in the late 1880's. The Permit System required all First Nations to obtain a permit from an Indian agent before they could legally sell their products off-reserve. The restriction adversely effected the ability of Aboriginal farmers to compete in the Canadian economy. The Indian agent controlled and distributed permits. Local businesses were prohibited from purchasing products from any First Nations person who did not have a permit. Therefore the Canadian government controlled all aspects of a transaction. The permit system did irreparable harm to the emerging initiatives of Aboriginal farmers. There are cases where crops and produce rotted in the fields because permits could not be obtained. Even many of the local settlers perceived the permit system as very restrictive, "The permit system was condemned by many settlers who were incapable of imagining themselves having to operate under such strictures"¹¹

5. The Pass System

The Pass system required all First Nations to acquire a pass before being allowed to leave the reserve for any reason. If caught off reserve without a pass, it was likely that an Aboriginal person would be arrested. It was actually considered criminal and an Aboriginal person would be classified accordingly if he or she was caught off reserve without a pass.¹² if The pass system played contributed greatly to the further segregation of Aboriginal people from the Canadian society. This point is further illustrated by the following excerpt from, *And They Told Us Their Stories*,

⁸ *Supra*, note 3, p 210.

⁹ *Supra*, note 7, p 220.

¹⁰ *Supra*, note 4, p 53.

¹¹ *Supra*, note 4, p 54.

¹² Province of Saskatchewan, Government Relations and Aboriginal Affairs, <http://www.iaa.gov.sk.ca/aboriginal/html/AC/1stNationHist/AC_passsystem.htm>

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Contact between the white man and the Indians was restricted even further. White people except those approved by the Department, usually only clergy and teachers, were forbidden to visit the Reserve. Friends and relatives among the Métis were not allowed to visit. Big trespassing signs were put up. Some reserves were fenced with guards posted at the gates. Storekeepers, traders, buyers of stock could function only through the Agent.¹³

The pass system was effectively enforced, especially in the years immediately following the 1885 resistance. It became routine work of the NWMP to intercept or arrest Indians without passes and turn them back to their reserves. In 1886, for example, in the Battleford district it was reported that “no Indians were seen off their reserves without a pass, except a few vagrants who came to Battleford, and were sent out again.” Indians found without passes in Battleford were arrested under the provisions of the *Vagrancy Act*. Indian agents reported to the police when parties left the reserves in order that they might be intercepted. In 1887, for example several families from Piapot’s band were tracked by ten members of the force. The “deserters” were discovered in a wooded ravine and escorted back to the reserve. In 1889 some Indians in the Duck Lake district left their reserve without permission to attend a sun dance. The police intercepted them and turned them back. The borders of reserves were patrolled by police.¹⁴

Not only did the Pass and Permit systems serve to restrict the flow of goods and services between Aboriginal people and the settlers, it also effectively limited interactions between the two communities. The Pass system was in use as late as World War II. It was officially removed from the *Indian Act* in 1951. The Permit system remained in the *Indian Act* until 1995 when it was officially removed. It should be noted that the Pass and Permit systems had no basis in law for the treaties provided freedom of movement to all the treaty First Nations.

Part II: Interaction

The relationships between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities developed under the mandate of discriminatory and oppressive policies as previously discussed. Life on the farm, and/or reserve provided many opportunities in which interactions occurred. Many interactions were well documented, while others were not. As a result of the restrictive government policies, many of the relationships that developed between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people were negative. However, there were strong friendships forged that were based on trust and a genuine need for assistance.

¹³ Funk, Jack and Lobe, Gordon. ...And They Told Us Their Stories. Saskatoon: Saskatoon Tribal Council, 1991. p 27.

¹⁴ *Supra*, note 2, p 152.

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1. Indian Agents and Farm Instructors

Throughout Aboriginal communities, there developed a deep distrust of the Canadian government and its agents. The Pass and Permit systems gave power to Indian agents that was not always used fairly. The agent had the ability to grant or deny passes and/or permits and at times the issuance of such was not done efficiently. The delay in receiving a pass and/or permit caused many hardships for Aboriginal people which resulted in resentment. Eventually Aboriginal people gave up on the process of obtaining a pass. The following passage reflects the patience required in order to obtain a pass or permit;

The process of getting a Permit was as onerous as the Permit itself. Often the Agent was too busy to make one out at the time it was requested, so the Indian person was told to wait, or he was told to come back another day, or told to go to a neighbouring reserve and get the Agent there, who might be unavailable, to make one out. The agent's house became a place to socialize as the people waited for a Permit. It was here that they learned to play cards as they lolled about on the grass. But the worst was when they had waited and waited and were then told to come back the next day and probably would have to wait again.¹⁵

There were agents that were well liked by the Aboriginal people on some reserves. These agents and farm instructors tended to defy the policies of the Federal government. Such agents often faced the risk of loss of employment because of the defiance, "Indian Farmers protested the new policy, and many angry agents and instructors took their side; some agents defied orders and were fired for their pains."¹⁶ Many farm instructors and agents viewed the policies as regressive and damaging to the welfare of on-reserve First Nation band members.

2. Working on Settlers' Farms

Government policies resulted in First Nations' farms being geographically small and with little more than rudimentary equipment to work the land. Even when Aboriginal farmers acquired more modern equipment, the use of the equipment was disallowed on the basis of the Peasant Farming policy. Aboriginal farmers were not permitted to freely leave their reserves to market their crops because of the Pass and Permit system. The policies inhibited and greatly discouraged Aboriginal farmers. The impact of the policies was seemingly greater when considered with the fact that the 1880's were a time of drought and early frost. During this period of time many crops were lost and resulted in Aboriginal farmers leaving the farming industry which is demonstrated in the following;

The adverse conditions of the 1880s also accounted for the high failure rate. In 1886 drought nearly totally devastated crops after three successive years of crop failures: there was a drought in 1883, drought and frost in 1884, and frost in 1885. In 1889 drought and frost were again experienced,

¹⁵ *Supra*, note 13, p 26.

¹⁶ *Supra*, note 3, p 53.

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and in 1890 the crop was widely injured by frost.¹⁷

Many farmers gave up in this decade, including some of the most successful. Louis O'Soup transferred to a Manitoba band, where he made his living by hunting.¹⁸

Soon after, the Canadian Government slowly began to equip more successful farmers with the modern equipment that could be used to farm the land properly. Modern equipment was generally labour saving, for it meant that fewer labourers were required to do the same work. By the turn of the century, the small on-reserve farms did not require as much physical labour to complete the work. First Nations people were able to look beyond the reserve for work. Many young First Nations people sought out farm jobs that paid wages. The following excerpt from John Tootosis, Biography of a Cree Leader, tells the story of a young man who sought work with a non-Aboriginal farmer who farmed close to his reserve;

A farmer, Bill Porter, a white American (Kee-chi-moo-ko-man) who lived across the river from Poundmaker Reserve could not do his own harvesting as he had been kicked by a horse and was unable to walk. He knew that the Tootosis family had three older sons and he sent John Sr. a message asking if any of the boys would come to work for him. Adam, Tom and John talked it over. The white farmer was said to have a bad temper and for that reason neither Adam or Tom wanted to go. John decided then that he would go. He explained why to his father. "I've gone through hell and this can't be worse than where I've been. This man can't be worse."

And so he got his few things together, parted from his family once again and trudged across the miles to seek his next adventure. At sixteen, he was too young to be swept into the far greater hell of World War I, then raging at its worst half way around the world. He knows very little about it, secluded as he had been at Delmas when the holocaust had begun, two years earlier. The only reality it had for him was that a number of men from the Battleford Agency reserves had gone away to fight and some of them had already died, so far away from home. If they were brave enough for that, then he, John B. Tootosis was not about to be intimidated by some white farmer, bad tempered or not!

Happily, John and Bill Porter got along very well together. John liked the work. Porter taught him how to use and care for his farm machinery and was pleased to find that John was accustomed to horses and know how to handle them. He paid John forty dollars a month, the going wages with his room and board, forty-five in the summertime.

John kept only enough of his wages to buy the necessary clothing for his

¹⁷ *Supra*, note 2, p 161.

¹⁸ *Supra*, note 3, p 20.

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work - he did not smoke - all the rest he gave to his father in order to help with the expenses of raising such a large family. He was proud to do this. It was the Cree way for the strong young people to help their Elders. There was another advantage for John in going to work for Bill Porter. From him he was able to learn to improve his English and to learn more about the world outside the reserve. He was not lonely. With Poundmaker Reserve just across the river he could still attend the Council meetings with his father and Tom and Adam. John ended up working for Bill Porter for four years.

He was in his late teens when a problem with white farmers came up for discussion in the Council. There were as yet no fences on the reserve and so there were times when Indian horses strayed beyond the boundaries and the farmer's horses in turn wandered onto reserve land. The white men had taken to impounding the Indian horses, then charging their owners a fee for their return. This incensed John. He was too young for a vote in Council, but he told his father that the white men were not going to stop this unfair practice unless action was taken against them. He said he was going to take the horses that belonged to whitemen that had strayed onto Indian land and impound them. His threat soon went around the reserve and came to the ears of the Indian agent. Agent Macdonald sensed trouble in the offing and came out to discuss the matter with John. John explained. He told him that the white farmers had impounded Indian horses when they had been cutting grain, holding up their work. "Then," he said, "their animals come and graze on our land and we don't do anything about it. I'm going to take those animals and I'm going to charge the farmers for it...I don't care what they think."

Macdonald admitted that there was an injustice here. He advised John to notify him when he did impound the horses. He said that the Indians could not charge for grass that was eaten, but that they could after one notice or warning to keep them out, charge for trespassing and for any hay or grain that was eaten. They could also charge the farmers for mileage involved in chasing them, the distance the Indians had to go to notify the owners and explained how to calculate these charges. John and his friends obeyed his instructions. The white farmers were none to happy over this turn of the tables but the law was the law and they had to pay up. The money collected from them went into forming a band fund, giving the Council money of it's own for the first time. It was not your classic Hollywood cowboy-Indian confrontation or range war, but an issue had been settled, and to the amazement of the Indians, in their favour. John's courage in taking a stand - in those days and unprecedented act - was duly noted by all on the reserve.

John was twenty when he decided to stop working for Bill Porter. Work on the home farm had fallen behind and he could see that his father needed him there. Porter had a serious talk with him. He felt that John should go out on his own. He offered to lend him his whole outfit, horses and

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machinery, so as soon as John picked an area of reserve farmland, he could do his spring seeding. He said that by now he knew John well enough to know that he would eventually be repaid for his generosity. John fully appreciated this kind offer but explained that just now his father really needed him and he could not just say “to hell with the old man” - that was not his way of doing things. Porter could understand this and they parted on the best of terms. Back home John and Adam worked together from dawn to dusk all through the summer and by the time fall came the Tootosis farm was back in good shape again.¹⁹

The above story demonstrates that there existed a dichotomy between Aboriginal farmers and non-Aboriginal farmers in respect to their business dealings. Some farmers would treat others with a great deal of respect and empathy and yet in the same community, there could exist blatant discriminatory practices.

3. Lending a Helping Hand

Farming at the turn of the century was a difficult industry. Farming was very labour intensive, and not many Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal farmers could afford the labour saving machinery. The lack of machinery and physical labour combined with the harshness of the climate meant that all farmers had to help each other out. The next passage is an example of the necessity of helping out one another and demonstrates the sharing nature and attitude that ensured success and harmony in the early days of settlement;

It was about 1909. Jim Greyeyes was a well-established farmer on the Muskeg Reserve. He and other farmers on the reserves used to capture wild horses in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains and then herd them back to the plains, break them and train them for use on the farm. The better mares were bred by the stallions which Bill Leask and other white farmers brought into the country from England. As a result, the farmers on Muskeg had a lot of fine horses for farming and trading.

One day, Jim went riding along the Saskatchewan River and came to the Doukhobor village of Petrofka. The Doukhobors had just recently come to Canada from Russia and they did not have any horses. What Jim saw was twenty women, big strong Doukhobor women hitched up to a wooden walking plow cutting furrows in the ground. Jim watched for awhile and then went home, rounded up four of his horses and took them plus harnesses and eveners to Petrofka the next day. It was difficult to carry on a conversation because Jim spoke only Cree and the Doukhobors spoke only Russian, but he did his best.

Jim left the horses there and went home. About a week later he returned to see how they were making out. He was dismayed at the condition of the

¹⁹ Sluman, Norma and Goodwill, Jean. John Tootosis, Biography of a Cree Leader. Ottawa: The Golden Dog Press, 1982. pp 112-114.

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horses. They had been overworked and underfed. At home, these animals were used to a daily ration of oats but here all they got was what they could forage on the prairie. The Doukhobors had been so pleased with the amount of land that could be broken with the horses that they had worked the animals far more than the horses could take. Jim was so mad that he took his horses home.

When he got home he decided that help was needed. So he got another team of four horses and took along his hired man, Mike Otterchild. He left Mike with the Doukhobors for a short while to show the Doukhobors how to look after and work the horses. A firm bond was established between the Indian and Doukhobor communities. Nick Popoff, one of the Doukhobor leaders, came to visit Jim Greyeyes every year.²⁰

As mentioned previously, both First Nations and European farmers faced common pestilence in the early days of farming, from drought to frost, grasshopper infestation, short growing season, inadequate tools, and diseases. The difficulties that the early farmers faced served to bring Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal farmers together.

The only difficulties that the non-Aboriginal farmer did not have to cope with was the strict policies that governed the lives and actions of Aboriginal farmers. For example, if a non-Aboriginal farmer did not like the land they were allocated, they could easily sell their land and move to another plot. This option was not available to Aboriginal farmers who were strictly limited to a particular parcel of reserve land. Non-Aboriginal farmers did not require passes to move freely throughout Canada, nor was a permit required to sell products or goods.

4. Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Women

First Nations women faced more than their share of issues. The original *Indian Act* of 1876 discriminated against Aboriginal women. An Aboriginal woman was not permitted to vote in any elections, including band elections and Federal elections (Aboriginal men were prohibited from voting in Provincial elections). If an Status Indian woman married a non-Aboriginal man she became enfranchised and lost all her status and treaty rights.

In 1951, an Aboriginal woman's right to vote was recognized by an amendment to the *Indian Act*. It is interesting to note that when Bill C-31 was passed, Aboriginal women who lost their status by marrying a non-Aboriginal man regained their status. The children of enfranchised women either had their status taken away or were never recognized as having Indian status also gained status. The winters in Saskatchewan were harsh. For many homesteaders' wives it was a difficult and lonely life for there were few means of entertainment. Some European women made contact with Aboriginal women from nearby reserves. The early interactions between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women instigated a change in the perceptions that European settlers had of Aboriginal people. The next story shares the value of the friendships in regards to medicine and survival skills told from the perspective of a non-Aboriginal person;

²⁰ *Supra*, note 13, p 80.

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During the long winter of 1904-1905 in Duck Lake, Mother learned many things from the Indian women. She discovered that, instead of being ignorant savages as she had imagined, these people had a vast knowledge that would have been of great value to the pioneer white people, settling on the prairies, had they also known these things. After all, the Indians had lived at ease in this land for many centuries and had learned to use the things provided by nature for their food, clothing, shelter, weapons and medicine for most of their common ailments. But they had no defence against the diseases of tuberculosis, smallpox, measles, venereal diseases, etc., brought to them by the “civilized” white man. It is reliably estimated that in the hundred years between 1780 and 1880 the Indian population of the Saskatchewan River valley was reduced by about 90 percent by smallpox alone.

From the Indian women, Mother learned the skills of a mid-wife, which she put to good use in future years. She also learned the uses of many native roots and herbs. One of the remedies I remember well was a tea made from a weed we called bachelor’s or poor man’s doormat, because it grew on the hard-packed earth around the doorstep. This tea was a cure for diarrhea and Mother dried quantities of the weed to have a year-round supply. Another interesting remedy she got from the Indians was the fine, powdery dust found in worm-eaten dead logs and stumps. This powder had a wonderful healing effect when applied to a baby’s bottom. I cannot list the things Mother learned in Duck Lake but this knowledge, combined with that handed down from her pioneer French-Canadian ancestors, was to be a godsend in contending with the hardships of which she was to have more than her just share.²¹

5. First Nations Farmers and The Wars

Many Aboriginal people, including farmers, were involved in both of the World Wars and the Korea conflict. The participation was entirely on volunteer basis for Aboriginal people were exempt from conscription. An article in the September 6th, 1915 issue of the *Nor’-West Farmer* stated:

The young farmers of the File Hills Colony became so interested in the Patriotic Fund that Superintendent Graham called a meeting last fall to explain fully the cause of the war and its progress. The speaker had barely finished when all the young men came forward to offer subscriptions. These were quite voluntary, as Mr. Graham had in no wise urged contributions from them. Threshing had just been completed on the reserve and the gifts, some 33 in number, took the form of oats and wheat, which when sold, amounted to \$502.

Two young men, members of the File Hills Brass Band, each contributed 40 bushels of wheat, which sold for a dollar a bushel. One of the

²¹ Andrew, Norman. Homestead Hardships Saskatchewan. Self-published, 1974. p 52.

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contributors was Frank Dumont, Sr., a nephew of the late Gabriel Dumont, to took such an important part in the rebellion of 1885. Two others are his sons, and the combined subscriptions amounted to over \$32. The Dumonts are members of the Red Cross Branch on the File Hills Reserve and their women are active knitters and sewers of articles of comfort for their men at the front.²²

Near the end of the First World War, the Canadian Government passed the *Soldier Settlement Act* (1917) which created a Soldier Settlement Board. The purpose of the board was to ascertain land for the settlement of returning soldiers. The Department of Indian Affairs turned over almost all of the surrendered land for resettlement by non-Aboriginal veterans. In 1918, the *Indian Act* was amended so that the Federal government could lease uncultivated reserve land without surrender or consent from Aboriginal people. First Nations veterans upon return were not treated the same, there were never any additional lands reserved for First Nations veterans. The following quote better explains the process by which the Federal government secured Aboriginal land for non-Aboriginal veterans;

After the war, the Department of Indian Affairs worked closely with the Soldier Settlement Board. Almost all unsold surrendered Indian land was turned over to the board, and Indians were induced to surrender further reserve land, sixty thousand acres in Saskatchewan alone, because of the terms of the *Soldier Settlement Act*. That act empowered the Soldier Settlement Board to acquire for veterans by means of “compulsory purchase” any agricultural land in areas where “lands remain underdeveloped, and agriculture is being retarded.” The department resolves to seek further surrenders of reserve land for settlement by non-Indian veterans. Under the threat of expropriation, many Indian bands surrendered their “underdeveloped” land.²³

During the Second World War, there was an extreme shortage of farm labourers. Many Aboriginal farmers were of an assistance during the war by harvesting the crops of 1944 and 1945;

Farm labour shortage during World War Two: “Indian workers were...employed in unprecedented numbers in the northern mixed farm or the southern grain fields. Approximately 4,000 natives were employed during the harvest of 1944, and a similar number in 1945, two experiments which seem to have worked very successfully.”²⁴

6. Agricultural Competitions and First Nations Farmers

From a production stand point both in quantity and quality, Saskatchewan’s First Nations

²² McD., Max, “Patriotism of File Hill Indians,” in *Nor'-West Farmer*. September 5, 1915.

²³ *Supra*, note 2, p 251.

²⁴ “Indian Harvest Help” in *Agricultural Canada Papers*. National Archives, vol. 1524, files 618, 619.

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farmers have always competed well. Beginning in the early 1900's, First Nations farmers have won awards and received accolades for their products. In the April 20th, 1915 edition of the *Nor'-West Farmer* it was reported that;

...[T]he Inspector of Indian Agencies quotes a few cases of individual prosperity that prove beyond a doubt that these Indians are holding their own, and in some cases surpassing their white neighbours in the production movement.

Joseph Ironquill has been farming eight years and last year his crop totalled 9,578 bushels of good grain. He had 235 acres in crop, broke 40 acres and summer fallowed 37, - making a total of 312 acres under cultivation. When the inspector wrote, Ironquill had shipped 3 cars of grain and had returns amounting to \$1,547. In addition to this he had sold a good deal of grain by the load. He is well equipped with machinery, is out of debt, and has a private bank account.²⁵

In a Department of Agriculture, Province of Saskatchewan reported the following;

Indian Farmer Will Compete. Muskenew (Strong Eagle) is a Cree Indian farmer of the Pasqua Band, located near Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan. He has made an entry to the competitive classes for grain at the World's Grain Exhibition and Conference to be held in Regina. Needless to say that he is confident of winning a place and the possibility too of being crowned the world's "wheat king", or the "oat king", or some of the other "kings" to be decorated as such when this great gathering of grower from all over the world convenes in 1932. This portion of the Cree Tribe selected exceedingly good land for their reserves.²⁶

7. The Law and First Nations Farmers

Most infractions by First Nations farmers centred on the enforcement of the Pass and Permit provision in the *Indian Act* which prohibited the free flow of people, and goods and services to and from reserves. The result of the enforcement of restrictive measures, was the arrest or turning back of Aboriginal people because they did not have the mandatory permits or passes. Some Aboriginal farmers went as far as selling products and crops illegally. If caught, in violation of the Pass and Permit system, there was a consequence of criminal prosecution. Even merchants had to be wary, for a merchant could be fined if caught with products sold by an Aboriginal farmer who did not have a permit. Unfortunately the serious consequences of being in violation of the Permit system impacted the lives of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people;

Although the Indian Act empowered agents to make such regulations before the mid-1880s, it was not until then that the permit system was

²⁵ McD., Max, "Farming on Canada's Indian Reserves" in *The Nor'-West Farmer*. April 20, 1915.

²⁶ Indian Farmer Will Compete, 1932 World's Grain Show Notes. Department of Agriculture. June 29, 1930.

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rigidly enforced in the West. The police had on occasion, however, arrested white settlers for purchasing produce from Indians. In cases tried at Fort Macleod in the early 1880s, for example, individuals were fined one hundred and fifty dollars for buying potatoes from Indians.²⁷

The following is a story that illustrates the grave and serious impact that the Pass and Permit system had on one Aboriginal family;

I remember away back in years, about fifty years ago. I was about five years old at the time. There was flu going around. A lot of children died.

Three of my sisters died within two days. Nancy and Gladys died at home on the Muskoday Reserve. Beatrice died at the Onion Lake Residential School. The news of her death did not reach my parents for about two weeks. Beatrice was buried at Onion Lake.

My Dad wanted to build coffins for the burial of my other two sisters but he needed some lumber. To get the lumber he needed, he wanted to sell one of his steers. To sell the required steer he had to get a permit from Mr. Simpson, the farm instructor. But the farm instructor refused to give him a permit.

My dad went ahead and sold one of the steers anyway to a farmer in the Birch Hills district. He then bought the lumber and white material he needed to make the coffins. He made the coffins and buried my sisters.

About a month later, the RCMP came to our home. Mr. Simpson was with them. He showed the police where we lived. They took my Dad away because he had sold a steer without a permit. My Dad spent three months in jail.²⁸

As stated earlier, neither the Pass or Permit system had a basis in law. Even the North West Mounted Police objected to the enforcement of the Pass system. In 1893, enforcement of the Pass system was temporarily suspended. However a storm of protest from the general public forced the North West Mounted Police to resume enforcement of the policy, "The Pass had no legal basis and the NWMP objected to being required to enforce this measure. This objection was overridden and the Pass became accepted policy of the Department of Indian Affairs."²⁹

At times the Europeans settlers took advantage of the poor relationship between Aboriginal farmers and Canadian laws. This was especially true when Aboriginal farmers tried to sell goods without a permit which is indicated in the following;

One Indian man told of the time he delivered a load of wood to a white

²⁷ *Supra*, note 2, p 157.

²⁸ *Supra*, note 13, p 30.

²⁹ *Supra*, note 13, p 24.

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man's place as requested. He then went to the house for his pay and was told to get lost. When he went back to the woodpile to load up his wood, the white man came charging out of the house and told him that if he touched that wood, he would have him arrested for stealing. The Indian man left the firewood because if it came down to his word against that of a white man, the Indian always lost. With a permit an Indian person had proof of what he had sold.³⁰

8. Sports and Recreation

The *Indian Act* of 1876 prohibited Aboriginal people from performing traditional dances and ceremonies, even old-time fiddle dances were not allowed. Residential or Industrial schools forbid the students from speaking their languages if the students broke this rule they would be punished. The purpose of prohibiting cultural traditions which included the transmission of Aboriginal languages was to eradicate tribalism.³¹

On colony farms and reserves, the playing of sports such as baseball and hockey, were allowed. Sports were a favourite activity of the missionaries, who coached many of the first baseball and hockey teams. Most of these teams competed in local tournaments and leagues but some of the Aboriginal athletes went on to play professional hockey.

There is a downside to Aboriginal people's involvement in popular sports, that is when Aboriginal athletes tried out for the local teams, racism was encountered. Harold Greyeyes shares the following experience;

The next fall, four of us, myself, Sonny Lafond, Hilliard and Arthur Arcand went to try out for the PA Mintos. Hilliard was really good. He should have been in the NHL. Anyways, we were in Prince Albert for the whole week. We attended all the sessions, didn't miss one and we were always on time. But we were never allowed to put on our skates and get out on the ice until the last day. Then we were told we would be part of a ten minute scrimmage - no stopping in play. The four of us, plus two others who had no chance of making the team, were on one team. I was in goal, the other three from Muskeg were the forwards. On the other side there were the holdovers from last year's Minto team - the best they had. Well, we played for ten minutes straight and we beat them 6-0. Chuck McCullough was the coach. None of us made the team.³²

9. Ranching

Aboriginal farmers relationship with agriculture went beyond harvesting cereal crops. Many farmers expanded their farms to include cattle and horses. This is particularly true of the Lakota people of Wood Mountain. The Lakota came to Canada from the United States in 1876 and 1877. They had left their traditional territories because of an armed

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Supra*, note 2.

³² *Supra*, note 13, p 108.

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conflict with the United States army. Sitting Bull was one of the prominent Lakota leaders. The Lakota people were not a recognized First Nation according to the Canadian government and many were encouraged to return to the United States. By 1881, much of the Lakota Nation had returned to their traditional territory.

There were two groups of Lakota that remained in Canada, one group was led by Black Bull and the other by Lean Crow and Red Bear. Black Bull and his band settled near Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. Lean Crow and Red Bear settled near what is now known as Moose Woods. During the Riel Rebellion between the Métis and the Canadian Government in 1885, both Lean Crow and Red Bear were captured and sent to prison. The remaining members of Lean Crow and Red Bear's band joined Black Bull in Moose Jaw. It was not until thirty years later that the Lakota were allocated a reserve in Canada by the Federal government.

When the Lakota first came to Canada, they brought herds of horses. The Lakota people were renowned for the skill that they had for breaking and handling horses. Many Lakota people were hired to work on the local ranches. After residing in Canada for sometime, many Lakota women began to marry the non-Aboriginal ranchers and set up homesteads in the area. Family members worked on the ranches by looking after horses and cattle, building pens, and mending fences.

A rodeo is held every year at Wood Mountain. The rodeo has a history older than the Calgary Stampede. Since the late 1800's, many Lakota ranchers and cowboys have participated in the Wood Mountain rodeo. The origin of the rodeo is described in the following;

The sport of rodeo grew out of the working life of the ranchers. One of the main reasons for the initial success of the Wood Mountain Rodeo was the participation of the Lakota people. Having learned to ride and break horses at an early age, the Browns, and Lethbridges excelled at bronco riding. Others, including the Ogles, the Thomsons, the Fergusons, and the Lecaines, were skilled calf ropers, a skill that developed as the Lakota on and off the reserve switched from raising horses to raising cattle. Most of them took part in one type of horse racing or another: Indian pony races or chariot and chuckwagon races. Bucking stock was contracted from Alex Wounded Horse and James Ogle. Other Lakota participated in parades and pow-wow at rodeo time, donning their traditional costumes and dancing the traditional dances....³³

As with other reserve farming enterprises, the cost and scale of ranching took its toll on the Moose Woods Reserve. There is only one large ranch left, the rest of the land has been rented out for farm or pasture land.

Besides the Lakota people, many other Aboriginal farmers diversified their participation in agriculture to include animals such as sheep, goats, hogs, chickens, horses, bison, wild

³³ Baillargeon, Morgan and Tepper, Morgan. Legends of Our Time: Native Cowboy Life. British Columbia: University of British Columbia Press. pp 131-132.

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boar, and cattle. Diversification made surviving on farms easier for it provided an additional source of sustenance and income.

10. Off-Reserve Farming

The most common occurrence of First Nations farmers working off-reserve was as farm labourers or ranch hands on non-Aboriginal farms and ranches. There are many examples of this occurrence, particularly at the turn of the century when farming was extremely labour intensive. During the World War II, many Aboriginal farmers found jobs on off-reserve farms.

The topic of off-reserve farming warrants consideration of the enfranchisement clause in the Indian Act which allowed for Indians according to the *Indian Act* to become citizens of Canada through the renunciation of their Treaty and Aboriginal rights. The intention of the clause was to provide an opportunity for Aboriginal people to fully integrate into Canadian society.

Conclusion

The idea of agriculture was not new to the First Nations people of the plains. They had previous experience through contact with First Nations people of the South, who planted and harvested corn and other crops. The use of agriculture as a means to a stable and plentiful supply of food was initially welcomed. This fact is evidence by provisions in the treaties for farming implements and oxen. Once surveys were completed in order to establish the reserves, farm instructors and agents arrived to help with the farming and home farms were established. By the late 1880's farming was well established activity among several reserves. The ability to act as a collective by sharing both input costs and labour allowed for a degree of success. Though the success did not go unnoticed by the non-Aboriginal farmers or the Canadian Government. New policies were developed to protect markets for the settlers. The major architect of the new policies was a man named Hayter Reed. The implementation of the policies created difficulty for the Aboriginal farmers and a further consequence was that the new policies also impacted the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal farmers.

Reed believed, that if individual First Nations farmers were to be successful, they needed to learn how to farm in a "peasant" manner with simple tools. They also needed to stop acting as a collective. In the Severalty Policy, reserve land was further subdivided into small acreage lots. The size of these lots provided little more than subsistence levels of food. The Peasant Policy restricted Aboriginal to the use of small simple to tools to do their farming. They were not allowed to purchase large labour-saving machines which were required to farm in the harsh prairies. The Pass and Permit system enforced barriers on the flow of people, goods and services between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal farmers. The government policies effectively stifled the entrepreneurial spirit of most Aboriginal farmers.

It is under these conditions that relationships or contact between Aboriginal farmers and general society developed. While there are isolated case where the relationships developed into friendships most were not on such good terms. The Severalty Policy

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prohibited Aboriginal farmers from expanding their livelihood beyond subsistence levels. Small farms were not commercially viable. The Peasant Policy made the already arduous task of farming even greater. Non-Aboriginal farmers were able to purchase labour-saving machinery, but Aboriginal farmers were denied the use of such machinery.

The policy that created the most damage to the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal farmers was the Pass and Permit Policy. This policy severely limited the movement and contact opportunities between Aboriginal communities and the rest of society. In order to enter or leave the reserve a pass was required and to legally sell and goods or products a permit was needed. Settlers were not allowed to purchase goods or products from any First Nations person without ensuring that a permit had been obtained.

Farming at the turn of the century was extremely labour intensive. Many settlers hired First Nations farmers and labourers to help with rock picking, fence building, breaking of land, and harvesting. Though when large machinery began to make its way into farms, the jobs began to disappear. During the Second World War, there was once again a labour shortage and many Aboriginal farmers were re-hired for harvesting.

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal farmers faced many common trials and tribulations. At times, the need to help assist others overshadowed the color of the farmer's skin. Neighbours helped neighbours in times of need. Many of these relationships were based on mutual respect and developed into lasting friendships. Still a lot of work is required to obliterate the disparities between Aboriginal people and modern Euro-Canadian society.

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