



PROMOTERS, PLANTERS, AND PIONEERS: THE COURSE AND CONTEXT OF BELGIAN SETTLEMENT IN WESTERN CANADA

by Cornelius J. Jaenen

ISBN 978-1-55238-570-8

THIS BOOK IS AN OPEN ACCESS E-BOOK. It is an electronic version of a book that can be purchased in physical form through any bookseller or on-line retailer, or from our distributors. Please support this open access publication by requesting that your university purchase a print copy of this book, or by purchasing a copy yourself. If you have any questions, please contact us at ucpress@ucalgary.ca

Cover Art: The artwork on the cover of this book is not open access and falls under traditional copyright provisions; it cannot be reproduced in any way without written permission of the artists and their agents. The cover can be displayed as a complete cover image for the purposes of publicizing this work, but the artwork cannot be extracted from the context of the cover of this specific work without breaching the artist's copyright.

COPYRIGHT NOTICE: This open-access work is published under a Creative Commons licence.

This means that you are free to copy, distribute, display or perform the work as long as you clearly attribute the work to its authors and publisher, that you do not use this work for any commercial gain in any form, and that you in no way alter, transform, or build on the work outside of its use in normal academic scholarship without our express permission. If you want to reuse or distribute the work, you must inform its new audience of the licence terms of this work. For more information, see details of the Creative Commons licence at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU **MAY**:

- read and store this document free of charge;
- distribute it for personal use free of charge;
- print sections of the work for personal use;
- read or perform parts of the work in a context where no financial transactions take place.

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU **MAY NOT**:

- gain financially from the work in any way;
- sell the work or seek monies in relation to the distribution of the work;
- use the work in any commercial activity of any kind;
- profit a third party indirectly via use or distribution of the work;
- distribute in or through a commercial body (with the exception of academic usage within educational institutions such as schools and universities);
- reproduce, distribute, or store the cover image outside of its function as a cover of this work;
- alter or build on the work outside of normal academic scholarship.



*Coal mine at Estevan, SK, 1912. (Western Development Museum, Saskatoon)
Early settlers on the Prairies exploited lignire seams for fuel.*

THE PROMISE AND CHALLENGE OF THE WEST

In implementing the first federal Immigration Act (1869), agents appear to have assumed that Belgium was among the “preferred countries” for recruitment. Government policy for the settlement of Western Canada favoured British Isles immigrants, ethnic bloc settlements and colonization companies. Canada had no diplomatic ties with Belgium until well into the twentieth century, so immigration agents operated through the High Commission office in London. Western Canada consisted of the provinces of Manitoba (1870) and British Columbia (1871), and a vast North-West Territories out of which the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan were created in 1905. Immigration in the Canadian federal system was a shared federal and provincial jurisdiction; therefore the Dominion, Manitoba, and British Columbia governments could appoint their own immigration agents. The railway companies, churches and land speculators financed their own settlement schemes.

Four federal actions had set the stage for western settlement: the survey system in 1871; the Dominion Lands Act, 1872, providing for homesteads; the Immigration and Colonization Act, 1872, providing for overseas immigration agencies; and the creation of the North West Mounted Police to ensure peace in contrast to American frontier violence. The “opening” of this Canadian West was the result of three related forces: first, a market-driven capitalist economy to inventory the resources and commodify and develop the soil and its products; secondly, industrial innovations in production, transportation, and communication; thirdly, centralized government in Central and Eastern Canada capable

of asserting ownership of land and resources, subsidizing enterprise and transportation, and promoting immigration.¹

In general, immigrants were welcomed as a means of developing the regional economy, consolidating the institutional framework, and affirming Canadian sovereignty. However, as we have seen, Belgians voiced cautious optimism as to a future in the new West. Flemings and Walloons, like many European immigrants who went to Western Canada, came first as farmers and miners. A few also came as tradesmen, land speculators and missionaries. Miners from Hainaut who were disappointed and disillusioned with working conditions in Atlantic Canada and Pennsylvania were lured by prospects on Vancouver Island and the Crows Nest region. Canada was imagined as a place where hard work would bring its rewards. Some thought it to be a classless society, a country of European origins with an established Catholic community.

Belgian immigration took place in three waves or periods that economists have related to the operation of the staple or export-led model of growth. The first period of Belgian immigration from the 1890s to 1914, with about sixteen thousand arrivals that constituted less than 1 per cent of the massive influx of immigrants, coincided with frontier expansion, railroad building and the expanded production of wheat. In 1893, for example, just under four thousand Belgians left Antwerp bound for North America, 35 per cent of whom came to Canada. The second period from 1919 to 1939, with another fourteen thousand new arrivals, was one of export expansion centred on wheat, minerals and lumber. The third period from 1945 to the 1980s, with over thirty-five thousand newcomers, was a post-war boom period of “expansion in oil, iron ore and pulpwood exports, with an attendant expansion in transportation services.”² In a 1996 census, 123,595 respondents claimed Belgian origin, of whom 42 per cent resided in Western Canada. This Belgian immigration was essentially the movement of individuals, extended families and small communities.

Challenges to Settlement

The flow of immigrants to Western Canada began as a trickle because of an awareness of a number of handicaps that could retard successful implantation. Biographies of Belgian settlers in local and district jubilee volumes record these challenges. First of all, there was the problem of transatlantic connections because until 1872 the only direct link between

Antwerp and Canada was by Hamburg-American Line from Liverpool to New York, and then by train to Quebec for 120 francs in third class.³ In 1873, the Red Star Line, founded by the International Navigation Company of Philadelphia (1871) and the Société Anonyme de Navigation Belgo-Américaine (1872) opened large emigration sheds in Antwerp to house those going to New York. Those destined for Canada were under pressure to change their plans and settle in the United States.

Steamship service to Canada would require subsidization. In the spring of 1883, Messrs, Steinman and Ludwig of Antwerp obtained a Canadian government subsidy of \$5,000 per voyage for redirecting vessels of the White Cross Line to Quebec and Montreal (Halifax in winter), but within three years the company had run up a deficit so the contract was passed over to a German line, the Dampfschiff Rhederi Hansa. In 1888, Bossières Frères opened a service from Le Havre to Quebec and Montreal subsidized by the Montreal Chamber of Commerce. From 1894 to 1896 a Belgian company, the Columba (reportedly subsidized, although this was denied by Prime Minister Mackenzie Bowell) introduced direct service from Antwerp to Quebec with no better results.⁴ In 1905 Allan Steamship Line signed a contract with subsidies for eighteen voyages per year between France and Canada. Government subsidies were an incentive because statistics for the number of passengers leaving Antwerp destined for Canada indicate that in the period 1900–15, 5,023 (34.8%) went by direct line and 9,391 (65.2%) went by indirect line, but in the period 1919–31, 12,073 (74.8%) went by direct line and only 4,068 (25.2%) went by indirect line.⁵

An official report to Belgian authorities in 1929 indicated that finally tremendous improvements encouraged emigrants to choose the direct route to their destination:

The Belgian, Dutch and English emigrants enjoyed greater comfort and occupied the rear cabins and decks. They had their own dining room, parlour, smoking room and bridge. The Slavic emigrants and those from eastern Europe were located in front and enjoyed a little less comfort. This difference is intended especially to satisfy those governments with stricter regulations, and results in separating the cleaner emigrants from those with more rudimentary manners. We frequently went down [to third class] to talk to the Belgian emigrants at

different times of the day and at different meals.... All appear to be full of enthusiasm and courage about the future. All those we questioned knew already the exact place where they were going, having received information from relatives or friends already settled in Canada. They assured us they were satisfied with the food and accommodations on board and they had nothing to complain about.⁶

This had obviously not been the experience of those who arrived before World War I.

Secondly, there was the geographical barrier of the Great Lakes and Canadian Shield that separated the West from central Canada. The American route through Chicago and St. Paul, Minnesota, tempted travellers to remain in Illinois and Wisconsin. This difficulty was partially overcome by the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway and the arrival of the first transcontinental train in Winnipeg in 1886. Rail travel could be hazardous at the turn of the century and the decades following. "Colonist coaches" from eastern Canada were crowded with immigrants who ate and slept on the wooden benches. Outright dangerous were the trestle bridges, many of which collapsed under the weight of freight and passenger trains. In addition to derailments, frontal and rear-end collisions took a toll as trains lurched along with a full head of steam and neither brakes nor signals provided absolute security. Immigrants rarely forgot their introduction to Canadian travel. Immigration propaganda distributed at Antwerp was often silent on these matters.⁷

This geographical isolation was accentuated by official preoccupation with eastern Canadian affairs. The *Manitoba Free Press* seconded the decision of the Winnipeg city council to undertake its own publicity campaign:

Up to the present time of all the immigration agents sent to Europe no one has had more than a theoretical knowledge of Manitoba.... Nothing more, surely, need be urged than to make a good demand upon Canada to select at least one resident of Manitoba to represent our case in Europe.⁸

The geographical barrier was also interpreted in some quarters as the border between civilization and frontier disorganization, even barbarism.

Thirdly, there was the problem of the negative image of Canada in Europe. Prime Minister Laurier, introducing the Autonomy Bills in 1905, observed that for many Europeans, “frontier civilization was with them a byword for lawlessness.”⁹ For Canadians, however, the acquisition of the North-West was an extension of the cherished values of a peaceful, orderly and law-abiding community into a “new” region in contrast to the alleged lawlessness of American westward expansion associated with civil war, Fenian raids, whisky traders and Indian wars. Europeans also knew that three epidemics had swept the country in the decades following Confederation. The early missionary reports stressed its untamed vastness, severe climate, and the hardships of evangelizing the Aboriginal peoples. The Red River resistance of the Métis, followed in 1885 by the North-West rebellion had required the intervention of the North-West Mounted Police and Canadian militia. The efforts to impose law and order on a frontier society were interpreted by a few as indicative of British colonial exploitation and domination. The dumping of orphans, unfortunates, and unemployed by Britain on the Dominion also reinforced a negative perception.

Little wonder that European immigrants, usually aware of the stereotypes of the American Wild West, on arrival in this strange new environment were often terrified of wild animals, dreaded the blizzards and prairie fires, and even expected to be attacked by marauding Indians. Charles Croonenbergh, who visited the West when the North-West Rebellion was still important news, underscored the cruelty of the “Redskins.” The Chevalier de Hesse Wartegg also stressed their cruelty in war, especially their scalping of victims.¹⁰

Much of nineteenth-century travel literature portrayed Canada as barely industrialized, traditional in its ways, and lacking the drive and modernity of the United States. In 1909 there appeared a sensational expose of the so-called “Canadian legend.” The European belief that Canada was a land of liberty, of great opportunity, of easy living, of phenomenal fertility, of low prices and high wages, of great investment opportunities was completely false.¹¹ With 111 documents, press releases mostly from Quebec and a few from Western Canada, the author described what he called the realities of Canadian life. Two arguments caused particular concern: there was a strong anti-French sentiment in many regions and the clergy were too dominating in Catholic areas. Two years later, Léon Brabant challenged the Canadian emigration agent’s assertions in a series

of articles in *Le Peuple*, warning people not to believe promises of easy success and prosperity in Canada.¹²

Fourthly, the region was so vast and made up of such diverse environments that immigrants could become quite perplexed when they arrived at their destination. Henry Youle Hind's expedition in 1857 and John Palliser's report for the British government in 1862 had identified a fertile north-easterly belt on the western plains, running from the Red River valley to the Peace River valley but had also warned against intensive farming in a dry south-westerly belt known subsequently as "Palliser's triangle." Palliser's conclusions had been influenced by the Scottish geologist James Hector and the French naturalist M.E. Bourgeau. In fact, the region would later suffer depopulation as its native vegetation and sparse rainfall were suitable only for ranching.

Fifthly, the survey pattern and homestead regulations created some problems for newcomers. The Torrens system of land registration, devised in Australia, was adopted in Manitoba in 1885 and in the North-West Territories in 1886. The rectangular system of survey based on astronomical observation, copying the square-mile system of the western United States facilitated the surveying of homesteads and the organization of local government and school districts on a grid system. The grid survey by numbered sections (640 acres), with a ninety-nine-foot road allowance between all sections, and townships of thirty-six sections numbered north from the American boundary, provided a convenient basis for land description. But the system ignored natural boundaries with consistent soil patterns. Besides, the homestead regulations did not permit contiguous grants of land, thereby forcing scattered settlement patterns. In many districts Belgians found that they required more than the initial 160-acre plot in order to farm profitably. In the Palliser triangle, very large tracts of land had to be laid out for grazing. Beginning in 1873, provision was made for ethnic bloc settlements but Belgians never organized, like Icelanders, Mennonites and Doukhobors, to obtain such a reserved bloc of land, perhaps because the colonization projects previously launched in Quebec by Belgian entrepreneurs had not proven viable.¹³

Sixthly, immigration regulations could prove to be counter-productive. In 1874 the federal government assumed responsibility for all immigration through the Department of Agriculture, transferred to the Department of the Interior in 1892, but the provinces remained in charge of colonization. This bureaucratic reorganization did not result in much more efficiency.

The Department of Agriculture, for example, reported large numbers of immigrants for which the Department of the Interior could not account.¹⁴ Not until 1917 was a Department of Immigration established which continued to function under a number of different names suggestive of a diversity of concerns such as citizenship, manpower and employment.

Seventhly, there was the problem of inadequate reception facilities for many newcomers, especially those who did not arrive as part of a large contingent with interpreters and travel agents. A popular historian made the damning observation that those who were enticed into coming arrived “to a land where not a single constructive step had been taken by anyone to prepare their arrival.”¹⁵ As early as 1872 there was an immigration shed in Winnipeg where immigrants could obtain free shelter for a period not exceeding seven days. A report in 1892 described a building without a foundation or weeping drains, often flooded to the main floor level, unheated bathrooms rendered useless in winter. “During the last year the constantly crowded state of the sheds has caused much inconvenience and hardship and no doubt illness.”¹⁶ In fact, there were thirteen deaths in forty days at these sheds attributed to inadequate medical inspection of new arrivals and overcrowded unsanitary accommodations.¹⁷ Only in 1905 was a satisfactory immigration hall constructed near the Canadian Pacific Railway station, by which time the Belgians had established their own network for directing compatriots.

Joseph Van Hove, who was an interpreter at the Cosmopolitan Hotel in Winnipeg, drew the attention of the consul “to the strange and quite extraordinary situation” in 1900 that not a single immigration officer spoke Flemish. He cited the case of a woman who was questioned for three hours merely to produce a travel voucher, could not obtain information as to how to rejoin her husband so returned to her hotel, and the following day was obliged “to put her purse on the table so that they could take the price of her room, since no official could explain to her how much she had to pay.”¹⁸ The Canadian Immigration Commissioner investigated and promised to call on Van Hove to interpret whenever necessary. However, Van Hove was not given a permanent appointment and in 1904 he again charged that “of all the European nations (even Galicians, Doukhobors and Icelanders) the Flemings are the only ones not to have an interpreter.” At this point, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs became aware that neither their consul nor vice-consul spoke Flemish.¹⁹

Newcomers were unprepared also because immigration propaganda distributed in Europe exaggerated the attractiveness and potentialities of Western Canada to the point that it has been described as “by all odds the richest, purplest fiction ever written about the Canadian West.” On climate, for example, one pamphlet claimed it to be “the finest climate on earth for constitutionally healthy people.” A CPR pamphlet forecast that eventually wheat production would be so great that “the output cannot fail to run into figures both of quantity and money that imagination can hardly reach.”²⁰

Finally, there were local environmental challenges. With experience, the immigrants became well acquainted with certain drawbacks to prairie agriculture. Initially dazzled by the promise of a homestead that could become one’s very own property, immigrants soon found the costs for equipment and supplies high and the labour involved in breaking land and erecting essential outbuildings and a house, often only a sod-house at first but later a modest frame structure, both slow and strenuous. Drought, hail, grasshoppers, frost, rust, and prairie fires sometimes dashed all hopes of reaping any return on one’s investment and work. During the early decades of pioneering, the lack of social amenities and of basic medical, educational, and religious services could take its toll. Isolation was an especially heavy cross for pioneer women to bear. There were environmental annoyances, lack of good roads, scarcity of good water, and lack of sufficient wood on the open prairies with which to contend. All goods brought in from the eastern provinces were expensive, including the coal oil, binder twine, barbed wire, machinery, furniture, and clothing on which they were dependent.

The hardships faced by many Belgian immigrants can be gleaned from the family histories published privately or in jubilee volumes. We learn, for example, that a family in Bruxelles, in southwestern Manitoba, first lived in a mud and frame “shack” with mud floors and a straw roof that was unable to withstand heavy rains and on at least one occasion caved in and ruined a year’s supply of flour. They cut their first crop by scythe and tied the sheaves by hand, which were then threshed by a compatriot who owned a steam engine and threshing machine. The huge steam engine cut deep ruts as it lumbered along to a suitable threshing floor, burning prodigious amounts of wood to get up a sufficient head of steam. More than once, the sparks issuing from its tall smokestack set straw stacks and surrounding fields alight.

New Optimism

There were reasons, on the other hand, to be optimistic. John Macoun, a self-taught botanist and staunch supporter of the Conservative party, was dispatched by the Macdonald government to reinvestigate the agricultural potential of the southern Prairie region. His report affirmed that the extension of the American desert “is proved to have no such existence.” Macoun’s *Manitoba and the Great Northwest: The Field for Investment* (London, 1883) questioned the Palliser, Hind, and Dawson theses of the unsuitability of the southwestern triangle of the Prairies for intensive agriculture.²¹ Also, Louis Riel’s dream of a sovereign Métis nation had evaporated, as had the fears of a general Indian rising on the frontier. The new optimism, and the desire to forestall American influences in the region, were reflected in the choice in 1881 of a southern route for the transcontinental railway and the move of the capital of the North-West Territories from Battleford to Regina. Belgians were inclined to settle in the southern regions, rather than in the more fertile northern belt, because several technological advances made settlement on the open plains less formidable. These changes included the introduction of the hay mower, binder, and threshing machine, improvements in milling and meat preservation, and the introduction of barbed wire for fencing large areas.

Secondly, provision was in place to establish law and order in the West. The federal government organized the North-West Mounted Police along the lines and with the ideology of the Royal Irish Constabulary. The North-West was to be an orderly British environment in which immigrants could settle, averting open hostilities with Aboriginal peoples. There was no apprehension that Belgian immigration would disturb the *status quo*.²²

Thirdly, on the administrative level, the North-West Territories won federal representation, proceeded to upgrade its judicial system, and obtained authority to incorporate land companies and to levy direct taxation. The stage appeared set for attracting immigrants to what the colonizing priest, the abbé Jean Gaire, called “the limits of the human desert.” The authorities in Ottawa were willing to envisage bloc ethnic settlements, although there was some public apprehension in Manitoba:

So far as this province is concerned there can be no room for any further colonization reserves, unless the area of Manitoba

is increased by enlargement of her boundaries; and we protest against any such reserves being granted in future without the concurrence of the Provincial Government. In the vast regions of the North West Territories there is land enough to spare.²³

Belgians did not arrive in sufficient numbers to envisage a bloc settlement. Upon the creation of the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan in 1905 out of the North-West Territories, there arose an acrimonious debate about denominational schools that were frequented by Belgian children. Clifford Sifton, who had directed immigration policy, parted ways with Prime Minister Laurier on the issue. His successor, Frank Oliver, clamped down on railway and colonization companies and opened the southern dry belt to settlement.

Why did Western Canada appear more attractive after 1890? Prime American farmland had been settled and so Canada seemed a northern extension of the fertile virgin lands. Also wheat prices had begun to climb by this time and the cost of its transport had begun to decline. Economists noted that labour and capital flows became mobile. Dryland farming techniques such as summer fallowing were developed and new faster maturing strains of wheat such as Red Fife and Marquis became available. This was the period when Belgian immigrants began taking up farms in the West.

Immigration Policy

The British North America Act, 1867, provided for shared federal and provincial jurisdiction in matters of immigration. On 30 October 1868 competition and duplication were avoided through a compromise whereby the federal government would set up an immigration office in London and another on the European continent. The provinces could name immigration agents accredited by Ottawa in Europe. By 1875 most provinces were so involved in railway construction that they were willing to leave immigration matters entirely in federal hands.

The first Immigration Act, 1869, provided for an entry tax and for quarantine of all vessels transporting ill passengers. The entry tax went into a fund destined to the care of sick and indigent immigrants as well as the cost of their travel to their final destination. Upon arriving at a port of entry, the ship's captain was required to provide a passenger list

indicating the total number of persons, names of heads of families and unmarried and/or unaccompanied persons, their country of origin and destination. Moreover, he had to declare if there were “any mentally ill, idiots, deaf and dumb, blind, or infirm, and if they were accompanied by relatives able to care for them.” The concept of exclusion of certain classes of persons was initiated by the clause that forbade landed status to “indigents or poor unless the captain offered provisional assistance to these immigrants to transport them to their destination.”²⁴

The implementation of immigration legislation was discriminatory, emphases being placed on “preferred countries,” notably the British Isles, and on agricultural pursuits. Ministers in charge of the portfolio were invariably Anglo-Canadians. In 1891, only 6 per cent of immigrants came from outside the British Isles. This imbalance was still 22 per cent non-British in 1901.²⁵ Race theories and public prejudice at the bureaucratic level account for this slow development of more open door practices. In 1875, during a brief Liberal administration, there was only limited seasonal employment on the railways and canals. Conditions were not improved by the fact that the Allan Steamship Line continued dumping crowds of destitutes from the British Isles.²⁶

Not all bureaucrats were in agreement with government policy. In 1892 the Department of Agriculture discontinued the practice of sending agents to Europe on the recommendation of Sir Charles Tupper. M. Lowe in Agriculture agreed with the policy but A.M. Burgess, Deputy Minister of the Interior, did not agree. In 1896, Clifford Sifton took charge of immigration and he “simplified the homestead procedures, promoted vast irrigation schemes in the arid areas of southern Alberta, eliminated the so-called land-lock by forcing the railways to select and patent their grants, and imparted new life to the immigration branch.”²⁷ He also provided a larger budget for advertising, agents, subsidies and tours of visiting journalists and dignitaries. He believed different “races” had different characteristics and some, including Belgians, were more inclined to farming than others. By 1903 it was concluded that the High Commissioner in London was doing little to promote immigration, so a separate office dealing with immigration was set up in London with W.T.R. Preston in charge.

Edmontonian Frank Oliver, who succeeded Sifton in 1905, was more inclined to disregard the narrow agricultural bias and to broaden the occupational background of acceptable immigrants, while introducing

a more rigorous system of selection. Revisions to the Immigration Act excluded not only the medically and morally unfit but also those likely to become public charges and political agitators. "Alien navvies" and strike breakers were quite welcome as labour-intensive resource industries, transportation companies and businessmen were consulted in determining needs for national economic development. When he was accused of filling the West with "foreigners," Oliver still felt it necessary in 1910 to affirm "in carrying out this policy we use due endeavour to secure the additions to our population from the people of our own blood ... the people of our own race."²⁸

How did Belgians fare in these racio-cultural assessments? The French complained that unsuccessful Francophone settlers were called French, but when successful they were called Belgians.²⁹ John Smart reported in 1907 that Belgian farmers "are among the best we can bring to Canada," while J. Obed Smith in Winnipeg found them "very industrious and they succeed well." His successor, J. Bruce Walker, two years later, commented that "they are from a very good class." He ranked them above Germans and Scandinavians as "above the average" and possessing "a pronounced discernment for agriculture." They were "preferred immigrants."³⁰

The consul general's report to Brussels in March 1908 echoed the same sentiments with pride concerning his compatriots:

Our compatriots are generally very appreciated and often succeed. I heard speak of them with praise; they are found to be hard working, thrifty, resourceful; they combine the main qualities of the English and French races; they have the tenacity of the former and the initiative of the latter. In short, Belgians are well regarded here; if they are Flemish, they have no problem learning English, which is useful, if not indispensable in Canada.³¹

The amended Immigration Act, 1919, provided for a literacy test but also left a significant loophole that permitted illiterates "otherwise desirable and admissible" from certain "preferred nations," including Belgium, who were "bona fide farmers, farm labourers, or female domestic servants" to be accepted.³² Immigration resumed in the 1920s, but when the drought and economic depression struck an order-in-council of 21 March 1931 limited immigration to Commonwealth subjects and dependents of Canadian

residents with sufficient capital to establish themselves immediately. There was also the restriction to provinces that had “not signified its disapproval of such immigration.”³³ After 1934, even the \$1,000 settlement capital was an insufficient qualification for entry. In 1937 the doors opened slightly but the outbreak of World War II late in 1939 nullified any great influx.

In the years after World War II, the Mackenzie King government responded to pressure from business interests that wanted a labour supply and from ethnic communities concerned about relatives and friends in Europe with a more expansive policy. The policy still contained the codicil “without altering the fundamental character of the Canadian nation.” In 1947 it was stated explicitly that the administration intended “to ensure the careful selection and permanent settlement of such numbers of immigrants as can advantageously be absorbed in our national economy.” The prime minister opined that “the people of Canada do not wish, as a result of mass immigration, to make a fundamental alteration in the character of our population.”³⁴ These restrictions of “existing character” and “absorptive capacity” did not discourage Belgian immigration. In 1950, an order-in-council classified Belgians on the same basis as British subjects and in 1953 accommodation was made for flood victims. The newcomers were now better educated, urbanite and less family-oriented than the two earlier waves of immigrants. The new technologies and business ventures were of more concern than agriculture and manual trades to which earlier immigrants had gravitated. Also, the church no longer played a predominant role in the social life of the recent arrivals.

The Conservative government of John Diefenbaker announced a shift in policy in 1962 from national origins to individual skills and education. Immigration was now a “technical issue,” although still tied to “absorptive capacity,” favouring the well-educated and professional admissible directly to the middle class. Statisticians stopped compiling figures on ethnic origin in order to concentrate on citizenship and country of residence.³⁵ The Liberal government in 1966 continued the policy direction by divorcing citizenship from immigration and combining immigration with manpower and branches of the Department of Labour. Sponsorship was controlled in order to avoid bringing in too many unskilled labourers. The Quebec government decided to take up its constitutional right to exercise full jurisdiction in immigration because from 1945 to 1965 only 3 per cent of immigrants admitted were Francophone.³⁶ This was a significant revelation because it was now the Francophone Walloons who were more

interested in coming to Canada than the Flemish who tended to gravitate to English-speaking regions.

Migration Patterns

Migration has been studied in terms of chain migration and bloc settlement. Sojourners and scouts were the usual initiators of chain migration. These individuals, typically a head of a family or unmarried sons, sought employment near a region of possible settlement in order to ascertain the likelihood of success were they to remain permanently. In the case of a favourable impression, members of the family, then the extended family, and finally friends and neighbours were induced to come. Chain migration was a transatlantic movement of linked individuals coming a few at a time to a common destination. Bloc migration, on the other hand, involved larger numbers coming more or less together. Chain migration could develop into bloc migration, although in the case of the Belgians there were only small bloc movements. It was the means by which communities in St. Alphonse, Bruxelles, and Manor developed. The St. Raphaël Society in Antwerp had in fact nursed the thought in 1891 of a Belgian Catholic bloc settlement:

There [Western Canada] in the measure that its influence increases, the St. Raphaël society will be able to realize at the same time as its charitable objective a patriotic aim dear to it: group Belgians together, in a manner that far from melting with foreign nationalities, they form small cores remaining in contact with Belgium and not be lost for religion and motherland.³⁷

Chain migration developed its own “highway” as newcomers touched base first with compatriots at St. Boniface, then moved on to Deloraine and Forget, before moving out beyond to new homestead locations.

There is also the phenomenon of internal migration, as people moved from one region to another within the same political jurisdiction. Manitoba and the North-West Territories sought settlers not only from overseas but also from central Canada. In 1888, for example, Manitoba appointed A.J. McMillan its Emigration Commissioner in Ontario. The province mounted agricultural exhibits at fifty-three fall fairs in central Canada

and arranged for farmers' excursions to the West with the assistance of the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Grand Trunk Railway. The railway companies were interested in having their blocs of land settled too. During the inter-war years when drought and grasshopper plagues struck the southern prairies, there was a movement of farmers and service people to the more northerly parklands region. After World War II, economic prospects in Alberta and British Columbia stimulated another inter-provincial migration from Manitoba and Saskatchewan. These internal migratory movements are reflected in the census returns for Belgians.

Sometimes people moved across an international boundary only to return later to a different region of their original land of adoption. For example, Clement De Pape came to Manitoba from Lembeke in 1894, at the age of twenty. For several winters, with his brothers August and Charles, he hauled wood to Cypress River and Holland to buy essential household provisions. In 1897, he and August went to Moline, Illinois, to work in the John Deere factory. The following year, he married Marie Hutlet, who had emigrated with her family from Halenzy. They moved to Red Deer, Alberta, in 1905, then on to the Queen Charlotte Islands to operate a hotel. Their life-style became almost nomadic with brief periods of residence in Prince Rupert, Denman Island, and back to Alberta in 1921. They returned briefly to southern Manitoba before settling finally on Hornby Island, B.C.³⁸ Miners who came to Vancouver Island and southern Alberta had in some cases originally come to Nova Scotia, moved on to Pennsylvania, only to return to Western Canada in search of better working conditions. This kind of migration was common for a number of Belgians, as an official Canadian inquiry in 1911–12 discovered:

The bulk of Belgian emigration at the present moment directs its steps towards the north of France. It is reckoned that every year more than one hundred thousand Belgians cross the frontier to work all the harvest in the French provinces, but thousands of them remain in France, in departments where not only the price of land is higher than anywhere in Canada, except in the immediate vicinity of large cities and towns, but where the attachment to the land being stronger than here, it is more difficult, even at a higher price to acquire a large domain.³⁹

A few Belgian agricultural and factory workers who came to Ontario moved to Indiana and Michigan and later relocated in the Dakotas and southern Manitoba.⁴⁰ The Mauws and Cherlet families that had originally emigrated to Ghent, Minnesota, moved to Swan Lake in 1920, a move that represented a decision to change country of allegiance but also to remain within a Belgian environment. The Catholic clergy launched several projects to induce Quebeckers to settle in Western Canada and Franco-Americans to return from the New England states to the West, and when these projects were not very successful they turned to Francophone areas such as southern Belgium in search of Catholic settlers.⁴¹ By 1912, the Catholic Immigration Association of Canada, an organization of clergy and laity, directed newcomers to communities with an established parish and school regardless of ethnic or national origin. A “key map” of acceptable communities was prepared for settlement purposes. Clearly, the Catholic community was not perceived by this organization as necessarily ethnic or Francophone.⁴² Although reliable statistics are not available for the movement of peoples between Canada and the United States, there is reason to believe Canada was a net loser in this process as in certain periods more people left Canada for the United States than arrived from Europe. There does not appear to have been a significant movement of Belgian immigrants out of Western Canada into the American Midwest. In more recent decades, of course, employment opportunities and retirement have accounted for a significant exodus to areas such as California and Arizona.

Immigrants who came in the inter-war years were looking for economic security in a land free of foreign invasion that held out hope of economic and social betterment. War brides formed a link between the New and Old World. Most who came had minimal education. A few single men were part of the annual trip to southwestern Ontario to work during the summer in the beet and tobacco fields. Some of these so-called “swallows” took up residence in Canada, including the western provinces. It was not unusual for a number of established farmers to return to Belgium to visit relatives and friends and encourage others to accompany them back to Canada. A few retired in Belgium leaving their farms to their sons.

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, industrialization and urbanization, while creating new employment opportunities, resulted in rural depopulation in Western Canada. Small towns such as Deleau, Manitoba, and Wauchope, Saskatchewan, disappeared quickly while

others, such as Manor and Forget in Saskatchewan, held out longer. The cities were more attractive than the rural areas, although employment could still be found in the beet fields of southern Alberta and in dairying in the Fraser valley. Eastern Canada absorbed most of the newcomers until the 1990s; nevertheless, the “oil patch” had its attractions too. The growth of Calgary, Vancouver and Edmonton made these centres attractive to those coming with better educational qualifications and specialized skills. Young Belgians were often graduates of such institutions as the Microelectronics Centre of Leuven, the Human Genetics Centre in Leuven, Space Research of the University of Liège, and the Institute of Interface Science in Namur. Industrial giants such as Pétrofin, Solvay, Cockerill Sambre and Bekaert launched young men and women on careers in Canada.

Recruitment Propaganda

It has been asserted that of all the means employed to encourage immigration “the most conspicuous and the least useful” was the appointment of agents abroad.⁴³ The Quebec government named Edouard Barnard its agent in Europe in 1871. On his return he was appointed on the same mission by the Dominion government. John Lowe warned Joseph Marmette, Barnard’s successor, not to make exaggerated claims and not to favour one province above another.⁴⁴ When Sir Hector Langevin suggested that Jules Boon be named agent in Belgium, the minister opined that “such an appointment could not be made.”⁴⁵

The distinction between a government agent and a booking agent for a steamship line was not always clearly delineated. An immigrant office worker complained that M. Berns, supposedly a Canadian agent, profited from his position because each person had to pay an additional 47,50 francs to make up the difference between what was paid the Allen Steamship Line and the 160 francs allotted to M. Berns. The complainant wondered whether Berns had a monopoly and whether he represented the Canadian government or the steamship company. A complaint addressed to the governor-general alleged that the letter of introduction he had been given to show to the agent in Halifax, which would entitle him to a voucher for a stay at a hotel in Quebec or Montreal until a suitable job was found for him, was taken from him and no voucher given in return. There is no record how such a complaint was investigated or rectified.⁴⁶

There ensued a brief period of activity. In 1891, abbé J.B. Morin was appointed government agent for the North-West to encourage him in the colonizing work he had already undertaken. Father Gabriel Cloutier in Manitoba was sent to Belgium to recruit at the time Auguste Bodard of the Société d'immigration catholique was named government agent. Mayor T.A. Bernier of St. Boniface was also commissioned to try to recruit workers for a manufacturing base for his community in 1884. The government of Sir Charles Tupper was opposed to any continuation of this practice; nevertheless, the curé Antoine Labelle, celebrated Quebec colonizing priest, was sent on mission to recruit settlers for Western Canada in 1885. In 1901, the journalist Henri d'Hellencourt, who had emigrated to Manitoba and had become editor of *L'Echo du Manitoba* in 1898, spent three months recruiting settlers with the support of the minister, Clifford Sifton.⁴⁷

A Canadian Emigration Library was established in the Commercial Museum in Brussels in 1892 and a permanent immigration office was opened in Antwerp in 1898, on the recommendation of Henri Bourassa, Rudolph Lemieux, and consul general F. Van Bruyssel. The library was to house all Dominion and provincial statutes, all available descriptive publications concerning Canada, documents and tariffs regarding transportation facilities, photos of agricultural life, blue books of the Labour Commission, relevant maps, catalogues, and samples of grain, tools and implements. The consul general pointed out that the Homestead Act, however, posed a problem because settlers could only obtain definite title by becoming naturalized British subjects, an obligation many Belgians resisted.⁴⁸

Désiré Tréau de Coeli, a prosperous trilingual Belgian living in Hull, was appointed immigration officer in Antwerp under the direction of the High Commission in London, with an annual salary of \$1,200.⁴⁹ Before taking up his posting, Tréau de Coeli investigated the circumstances of Belgian settlers in the West in order to better inform prospective emigrants in northern Flemish areas, where he concentrated his efforts, on what to expect. He consulted Msgr. Langevin in St. Boniface to obtain a list of useful overseas contacts. He also wrote to the Belgian government "so that my mission at least avoid any opposition."⁵⁰

The first problem he encountered was the invasion of his assigned territory of Belgium and Holland by Paul Wiallard, the agent in France to which Belgium had once been attached: "I would not like to be

commanded by a newcomer who would reap the benefit of my work,” he observed.⁵¹ He busied himself giving about twenty lectures with lantern slides each winter and distributing geography textbooks in over twenty schools. When Léon Brabant stirred up opposition to this intrusion into the schools, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to publish its own *Emigration Canada*, with annual updates to at least 1908.⁵²

It was important therefore to have some positive publications in circulation. The earliest propaganda brochure drawing attention to unlimited opportunities in the West was abbé Pascal-Joseph Verbist’s *Les Belges au Canada (De Belgen in Canada*, in Dutch), although his chief interest was in Quebec.⁵³ His compatriot, Gustaaf Vekeman, a farmer who had settled in the Eastern Townships of Quebec, was paid \$400 for the translation and printing of twenty thousand pamphlets in Flemish “for special distribution in Belgium.” He was also charged with the distribution of pamphlets in French “which were printed in 1873, on the subject of Manitoba and the North-West, he having written a Preface to adapt this edition to the present time.”⁵⁴ He relayed information about “The Great Canadian West” as an appendix to his *Le Canada, ou Notes d’un Colon* (Sherbrooke, 1884). After describing the geographical situation of Manitoba, the climate, its products, and cattle-raising, he offered some advice to newcomers:

There is advice of very great importance that we must offer emigrants, that is to be very attentive to adopt the practices whose wisdom and advantages have been demonstrated from experience, and not to waste their time wanting to implant in a new country the customs and usages of their mother country. For example, for what concerns ploughing on the prairies, the method followed in Manitoba is very different from other countries. The prairies are covered by a very tough grass that must be destroyed to render the land suitable for farming. Experience has proved that the best way is to plough only to a depth of two inches and to turn over a furrow from 12 to 14 inches wide.⁵⁵

He proceeded to explain that settlers should arrive in July to September to choose their farmland, that they would need to break ground the following spring using oxen in preference to horses, and sow only oats, flax, or

potatoes before mid-June the first year. He understood that the best source of emigrants would be the Flemish regions, therefore his brochure was published in two separate Flemish booklets, *Eene Reis in Canada of Nattige Raadgevingen aan de Belgische Landverhuizers* (Sherbrooke, 1882) and *Canada. Het Grootte Noord-Westen* (Ottawa, 1882). In 1885, Vekeman was paid an additional \$500 for two thousand copies of *Lettres d'un Emigrant*, to which he would add a dozen new letters.⁵⁶

Vekeman also laid great stress on the lack of compulsory military service, which until 1909 in Belgium weighed especially on the lower classes to fill the required ranks by lottery, the rich having purchased exemptions for their sons. He also believed Canada was a very tolerant country with little evidence of either religious or linguistic conflicts. This may have been true of the Eastern Townships at the time, but it hardly represented the political climate of Western Canada in the settlement period. In 1887, Vekeman had prepared the *Almanach des Emigrants*, with a Flemish translation, and felt justified in applying for a subsidy to recruit emigrants in Limbourg and Luxembourg provinces.⁵⁷ In 1890 he was still negotiating with *Het Land* and *La Liberté* to publish on a regular basis articles about Canada, for which he wanted a \$200 honorarium annually. He rendered good service but he also expected to be rewarded accordingly.⁵⁸

In 1885–86 there appeared two pamphlets in the *Guide universel de l'émigrant*, the first dealing with Manitoba and the second with British Columbia. These brochures attempted to promote immigration by drawing unfavourable assessments of life and prospects in Belgium compared to Canada. It invoked soil exhaustion after centuries of cultivation, overpopulation, burdensome taxes, military service and social inequities, while studiously avoiding any mention of possible inconveniences immigrants might face in Canada.⁵⁹ This negative approach, likely to arouse Belgian authorities and the press, drew the directive from Ottawa that “it is not thought advisable to have anything further to do with Mr. Lennox” in Brussels.⁶⁰

The following year, Stanislaus Drapeau published an official brochure entitled *Canada, le guide officiel du colon français, belge, suisse, etc.* which continued the comparison of Canada with Europe. Drapeau commented specifically on educational opportunities: “One can cite thousands of cases where the children of immigrants, who came from countries with few or no resources, received an excellent education.” It was a misleading

statement for much of the Prairie region at the time, where, apart from the Winnipeg and Brandon regions, a school system was barely in place yet.⁶¹

Alfred Bernier, who was commissioned to act as an immigration agent in Europe, published a pamphlet, *Le Manitoba, champ d'immigration*, destined for any group that might be interested in his province, hoping to divert attention from the eastern provinces.⁶² Bernier's appeal was seconded by Auguste Bodard of the Montreal headquarters of the Société d'immigration française. He prepared two booklets, *Guide du colon. La laiterie, l'élevage, la culture et les mines dans le Grand Ouest du Canada* (1891) and *Emigration en Canada. Description du Pays. Les Colonies Françaises, Belges et Suisses* (1892), which reproduced responses to questions he had put to immigrants concerning their satisfaction and success. No indication was given about the selection process of published replies.

Louis Hacault followed up with *Les Colonies belges et françaises du Manitoba*, an account of his exploratory journey to Manitoba in the interests of the Société Saint-Raphaël and right-wing Catholics, along with a number of testimonials that had been received for a British inquiry regarding pioneer conditions. He also published these letters in *Le Courrier de Bruxelles*, with which he was associated. A Flemish translation appeared in 1893.⁶³ It was not until 1890 that the province of Manitoba decided to avail itself of the constitutional provision for shared jurisdiction with the federal government over immigration by opening its own Immigration Office in Winnipeg. The Manitoba government also opened an office in Liverpool to prepare and distribute literature and posters destined for the British Isles and northern Europe.⁶⁴

The Dominion government requested the abbé Gustaaf Willems, a priest serving several communities in southern Manitoba, to gather testimonial letters from successful farmers. These letters were to convey a message of economic opportunity, social equality, and just rewards for hard work in a land where Catholicism was respected. The resulting booklet, *Les Belges au Manitoba. Lettres authentiques* (1894), eventually published also in Flemish, while urging compatriots to “choose Canada in preference to all other countries,” hinted at some challenges in this new environment. One farmer observed that income from his mixed farming operation required supplementing in winter through cutting timber. Another warned that any who came with little capital and expected immediate success would be sadly disappointed. Yet another admitted he had been fortunate to have adult children who brought in supplementary earnings

to enable the family to become established sooner than otherwise possible. Most commented on the importance of family and community ties, and one bachelor lamented: “it would be good to send out a regiment of girls because there are far too many single men.”⁶⁵

The most active propagandist was undoubtedly Désiré Tréau de Coeli. In 1899 he delivered dozens of brochures to the Minister of Foreign Affairs in Brussels. Among them were: *A travers les grandes terres de blé du Nord-Ouest canadien* (1893), *Kanada – ein schliesslich des Kanadischen Nordwestens: Manitoba, Alberta et al.* (1897), *The Winnipeg District: The City and Farm Lands Adjacent* (1898), and *Guide officiel du Klondike, le grand champ d’or du Canada* (1898).⁶⁶ He also contacted over four thousand teachers and placed many copies of an excellent geography textbook, *Géographie du Canada et Atlas de l’Ouest canadien*, in many schools.⁶⁷ Furthermore, he distributed widely an information bulletin, *Le Canada occidental* (*Canada West* in Dutch), bearing the motto “good crops, sunny climate, low taxes, free education.” It also took on the United States, the great rival in attracting immigrants:

What clearer and more conclusive proof of the advantages offered by Canada than the annual growth of American emigration. There are farmers living in one of the most beautiful countries in the world who leave their farms to come to settle in Canada, the neighbouring country they know and prefer to the great American republic.⁶⁸

In 1907 the Privy Council of Canada decided to call Tréau de Coeli Canadian Information Agent, rather than Canadian Government Agent for Emigration, because the Belgian government was very sensitive to the designation and privileges of emigration agents and it did not encourage emigration.

The Canadian Pacific Railway also published attractive brochures and posters to attract travellers and settlers, beginning in 1883 from its office in Amsterdam. In *Etablissez-vous au Canada* (1913), the railway attempted to overcome the popular image of “a few arpents of snow” with the assurance the winters “resemble much the winters in certain parts of Switzerland which each year attract thousands of Belgian tourists.” It offered established farms on land it owned as well as loans. In *Manitoba et le Canadien Nord-Ouest*, the Canadian Pacific Railway Company asserted that, whereas in the United States jobs were at a premium, in Canada

“there are many openings for a person who wants to work.” Railway coaches were described as luxurious, with the added “it is now no more complicated to leave Belgium for Canada than to move from Flanders to Luxembourg.”⁶⁹ Ernest J. Chambers produced *The Unexploited West* (Ottawa, 1914) for the Railways Lands Branch.

Another approach was to draw attention to agricultural advances on the Prairies at international exhibitions. At first, only a small agricultural display was mounted at the Musée Commercial de Bruxelles with opportunity for verbal or written inquiries. The limited interest can be gauged from the fact that in 1889, for example, there were only seventeen verbal inquiries and twenty written inquiries concerning Canada.⁷⁰ In 1885, it was decided to send an exhibition to the International Exhibition in Antwerp, but not to provide militiamen to act as security officers. The Massey implement company was anxious to show its new farm implements and so the Canadian government allocated the sum of twenty thousand dollars in expenditures.⁷¹ Richard Berns reported that the objective had been attained:

Belgian merchants, manufacturers, and capitalists are convinced that our [Belgian] overcrowded population can find in Canada the resources which are wanting here, that is to say, occupations for the labouring class, good holdings for farmers, and excellent investment for capital. And Canadian manufacturers have learnt that through Antwerp they can establish a new opening to the Continent of Europe for Canadian products.⁷²

Berns made several recommendations. He believed Canada should establish a Canadian Agency in Belgium, should suppress all relations with the journal *L'Emigration* and support the *Journal Populaire* and a similar Flemish paper. The Minister of Agriculture did not favour a regular agency in Belgium, “apart from the question of merits, he sees difficulty at the present time.”⁷³ The commissioner in London, undoubtedly, wished to retain control over continental operations. Also, it was felt that space was too expensive for participation in the 1895 exhibition in Antwerp because no such charges had ever been exacted in other international exhibitions.⁷⁴

In 1905, the government decided to erect a pavilion at the exhibition in Liège, an important manufacturing centre. Tréau de Coeli was satisfied

this venture succeeded in bringing “the agricultural and mineral products” to the attention of the public.

But the cost had been enormous, compared to previous experiences with international fairs.⁷⁵ He had distributed thirty thousand copies of a pamphlet “The World’s Best Wheat Fields” and extended all-expenses-paid invitations to several prominent farm experts to visit Canada. An important publication was associated with Canada’s participation: *Le Canada. Son histoire; ses productions et ses ressources naturelles* (Ottawa: Ministère de l’Agriculture, 1905). His office in Antwerp featured displays of grains, stuffed fowls and photographs of agricultural activities.

At the Brussels International Exhibition in 1910, the CPR employed Henri and Charles Van Heden, the latter becoming a permanent employee in Canada. An observer thought that the Canadian government exhibits gave visitors “a precise idea of Canada as one of the world’s granaries and possessor of the richest mineral deposits on the globe.” The assessment given later in the House of Commons was no less optimistic:

Thanks to the ministry of Agriculture, our pavilion in Bruxelles was the feature of the latest universal exhibition. Hundreds of thousands of Belgians were able to read our circulars, the atlases and the information published in the French and Flemish languages, describing the riches and beauties of our country. I am persuaded that this exhibition will attract for us several thousand Belgian settlers. It is easier to carry out propaganda through these exhibitions than through agents.⁷⁶

Immigration Assistance

The Canadian government followed through on its propaganda efforts by offering assistance to immigrants. This took several forms. The first approach was through free inland passes to certain classes of immigrants from the port of entry to their destination. The system was prone to abuse because shipping agents in Europe booked people for inland destinations telling them to plead poverty and ask for passes upon landing. In 1872, the Dominion government signed an agreement with the Grand Trunk Railway fixing the third class fare at three cents per mile.

The practice was terminated in 1888 and replaced by a bonus system. The bonus paid to each head of family and to each single male in possession

of proof of settlement in the North-West within six months of arrival was ten dollars. To the wife and children over twelve years, a bonus of five dollars was paid. This practice was abandoned in March 1894.⁷⁷

A passenger warrant system was instituted to meet competition from foreign countries and to establish an absolute differential in favour of the St. Lawrence and Maritime seaports as against New York. Fares were reduced by a maximum of one-third for approved immigrants, the reduction being shared equally by the government and the steamship lines. In practice, fares were reduced by five dollars only on tickets to Manitoba and the North-West into the early 1900s.

These approaches were all related to the commissions paid to booking agents of the steamship lines. The recognized practice was to allow them to deduct 5 per cent from the gross amount of the passage money, charged from the point of departure to that of destination. At first, only agents of the Allan Line were eligible, this in recognition of their efforts to populate the West. The commission was extended to the Anchor Line and the Dominion & Temperley Line, and finally any line using the St. Lawrence entry. Agents were paid for Belgians coming to Winnipeg in 1882 as farmers or mechanics. The five dollar commission was paid for immigrants to the Canadian West even if they came via New York and the American railways before the introduction of the Canadian Pacific transcontinental service. In 1907 it was decided to pay the bonus only to a few select booking agents in six “preferred countries,” who were “native of the country in which the booking agent is operating.” In Belgium, five agencies were recognized: Raydt & Bryunseels, Frenberg, Berns, Caron, and Schyn. All claims from continental steamship booking agents were to be processed in London to avoid any conflict with European emigration restrictions.⁷⁸

There was also assistance given to so-called “return men,” i.e., established immigrants who returned to their country of origin to lure friends and acquaintances to join them in Canada.

These men normally received financial support and free transportation from the government, the railway, and steamship companies. There was the problem that some zealous recruiters operated independently, sometimes offending Belgian authorities, and others made false claims of accreditation. A certain T. Mettner posed as an important person in Manitoba working for the Transoecania Society, for example, and was pursued by Ministry of Justice officials.⁷⁹ Similarly, Edmond Fasseaux

of Grande Clairière, while visiting his father in Binche, placed an advertisement in *La Belgique* saying he was “officially charged by the Canadian government to inform and to guide free of charge those who would like to accompany him on his return to Manitoba.” He did not ask for compensation for his services, but he had no official status and therefore was prohibited from recruiting publicly.⁸⁰

By 1894, officials in the Department of the Interior had come to the conclusion that, in spite of the number of return men that had been subsidized, “they had not been successful in producing any compensating effect on the flow of emigration to Canada.” As a consequence, the government, along with the railway and steamship companies, decided to place the practice “on a more business-like footing and give greater assurance of results commensurate with the expenditure involved than the old method had done.” Following a consultative conference, a new policy was set out:

Under the plan adopted these have received free transportation one way only together with a small pecuniary advance and their return passage, and further compensation is made to depend entirely on the success of their efforts in securing suitable settlers for Canada.

The twenty-seven return men to be supported were designated by country of operation. The British Isles were allotted fifteen, Sweden four, but France and Belgium were allotted only one each. Obviously, Hector Langevin’s plea to John A. Macdonald that French and Belgian settlers ought to receive more support went unheeded.⁸¹

In 1906 there was a minor scandal when it became known that since 1896 the federal Liberal government had entered into a secret and private arrangement with a syndicate of steamship agents in Antwerp known as the North Atlantic Trading Company. Whereas the Conservative government had paid a commission to individual booking agents, the Liberals upon assuming power in 1896 paid the commission to a collective group of identical agents. The system did good screening and sent out only the best immigrants. Clifford Sifton was so pleased with the results that in 1899 he appointed W.T.R. Preston inspector of the agencies in Britain and Europe. To further encourage the agents of the North Atlantic Trading Company to divert settlers to Canada, the bonus for adults was to be paid

for those over twelve years, rather than eighteen as had been the case. More money was also assigned for promotional literature. Between 1899 and 1906, the system brought out 71,000 immigrants at a cost of \$350,000 paid to recruiters.⁸²

This network of agents was to be kept secret from Parliament: “The Department does not know nor does not want to know what these agents are doing.” But it also contravened emigration laws in Belgium by sending in propaganda from outside the country and by aggressive advertising in newspapers. The Canadian Pacific Railways, for example, employed Paul Watelet of Charleroi as their general agent in Belgium, and he was closely watched by Belgian officials. Canadian sentiment was that, although not strictly legal, the system netted Canada “the pick of all those who were booking from continental ports, letting the riff-raff go to the United States and to South America.” When the terms of the clandestine agreement became public knowledge in July 1906, Frank Oliver, who had replaced Sifton, cancelled the agreement and opened the flood gates of immigration. The Conservative opposition and organized labour had evidence that W.T.R. Preston, Superintendent of Emigration stationed in London, James A. Smart, former deputy minister and Canadian agent of the company, and even Clifford Sifton himself had “sinister connections” with the North Atlantic Trading Company. Preston was removed from his post in London because he had worked with Louis Leopold of the Canadian Labour Bureau in London in “an enormous remunerative business” favouring the emigration of British mechanics and tradesmen. While the Canadian government appeared to have lost some of the control it had exercised over immigration from the European continent, the minister acquired more discretionary power to reject or deport immigrants.⁸³

In 1911–12, Olivar Asselin was sent by the Department of the Interior to visit Belgium and France in order to make recommendations for the improvement and the extension of emigration efforts in Francophone areas. This came in response to well-founded charges that this region had not received the attention placed on the British Isles and central Europe. It occurred in the context of heated debates in Canada on imperial solidarity and bilingualism. Asselin’s report made four major criticisms of the situation as he observed it. The Canadian Commissioners for Emigration in London made little effort to support effectively the exhibitions at Liège in 1905 and Brussels in 1909 and did not even join Tréau de Coeli and his staff. Secondly, none of the Anglo-Canadian steamship lines, including

the CPR that has a direct line to Antwerp, sponsors lectures in Belgium, and the London office did not send Belgian farm delegates to Canada, participate in agricultural fairs or mount a circulating agricultural exhibition in Belgium. Thirdly, the high commissioner and his staff in London do not appear to have understood Belgian law and customs concerning emigration. He recommended withdrawing the Antwerp office from the control of the London office, separating Holland from Belgium, and increasing both the budget and activity of the Antwerp office. Finally, he was scandalized that the agent in Antwerp replied to French or Flemish requests for information in English only. There was a serious lack of official authorized interpreters on subsidized steamships, Canadian ports, and railway stations such as Halifax. French-language publicity was too often a grotesque literal translation from English that inspired no credibility.⁸⁴

The publication of the uncensored report raised concerns in London because, from the point of view of “international courtesy,” it contained “unfortunate reflections on conditions in France and Belgium.” In fact, Belgium did not have the statutory restrictions on emigration that existed in France. The Governor-General informed External Affairs in Ottawa in a secret communication that “it is of great importance to exercise careful censorship, as regards references to foreign countries, before any report is issued by the Department.”⁸⁵ While there was concern not to vex the French government, there was no immediate response to the major problem of alleged favouritism and inefficiency of the Canadian High Commission and the Commissioner of Emigration in London.

Canada had emigration agencies in Antwerp, Paris and Copenhagen before 1914, all under the direction of the chief office in London. One day before Antwerp fell to the Germans, its Canadian office closed, as did the Paris office after the first bombardment, and all records were transferred to London. The Canadian immigration office in Antwerp was not reopened in 1918. After World War I, emigrants from the European continent to Canada required a British visa on their passport. J. Obed Smith, commissioner in London, recommended that the office in Antwerp be reopened, but under London’s supervision, because “there can be no dissected control on this side of the Atlantic.” The Canadian government was anxious to dissociate its activities from Britain and there was some thought of making the Antwerp office the clearing house for all its continental European immigration matters.⁸⁶

In the early 1920s, the Dominion government, the press and the business community promoted immigration, hoping to recapture the pre-war boom. The new regulations were published in Antwerp in *Le Matin*, *Métropole*, and *Handelsblad*.⁸⁷ In 1921 the Dominion government sent three immigration officers to Antwerp and Le Havre “in order that they may bring to the notice of the steamship companies any cases in which intending passengers have failed to fulfill the conditions of entry into the Dominion which has been laid down in the Canadian Immigration Regulations.” This was designed to spare immigrants “the hardships entailed by rejection at the port of landing in Canada.” This was direct action from Ottawa without consulting the British government or the High Commissioner in London. J. Obed Smith felt the purpose of the mission might be misunderstood as interference with Belgian sovereign rights: “Canada has no more right in Antwerp than Warsaw has in Montreal, but mutual arrangements can be made through proper channels.” The Belgian Foreign Ministry was advised of the Canadian intentions.⁸⁸

In reality, the need for renewed immigration was driven by such factors as the over-extension of the railways, the increased national debt because of war expenditures, and increased Canadian migration to the United States. Prime Minister Mackenzie King’s selective immigration policy, in 1932, continued to recruit farmers, farm labourers, and domestic workers from the British Isles and “preferred countries,” while placing Asiatics and eastern and southern Europeans in restricted categories. The volume of publicity decreased and only the railways seemed to take an active interest in promoting immigration. When Alex Lonay issued a polemical *Nécessité économique et sociale de l’émigration parmi les cultivateurs belges* (1926) during the post-war depression, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a warning that Lonay was not acquainted with economic conditions in Canada where he suggested Belgians might profitably relocate. Several agents were suspected of misleading people. Theophile Van Lysbettens, agent for the Canadian Pacific Railway in Antwerp, had his licence taken away on orders of the governor in 1925.⁸⁹ The Canadian government had just entered into a two-year “Railways agreement” with the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Canadian National Railways (renewed in 1927) to settle farmers, agricultural workers, and domestic servants in Western Canada. The scheme encountered several problems in addition to the drought and depression that struck the region. Immigrants found it expensive to establish themselves on a farm. Some who came never intended to farm

but gravitated to the towns and cities. Labourers were forced to go to urban centres because of the lack of jobs in rural areas. Unemployment was rising in the urban centres and the influx of immigrants aroused some hostility.⁹⁰

It becomes evident that the traditional “push” and “pull” factors are not the sole elements that explain emigration and immigration. One must also consider family and regional strategies and the development of international networks. This is especially true as communication and transportation evolve toward the idealistic “global village.” There was an interplay between individuals as active participants in the immigration process and impersonal historical forces.

Government policies, either to encourage emigration or to attract immigrants, alone cannot account for the movements of human population. The unpredictable results of seemingly positive governmental intervention can be illustrated from two measures. Memories of the great cholera plague associated with early Irish immigration moved the authorities to establish quarantine stations at Halifax, St. John, and Grosse Isle, Quebec, in 1869 to prevent such outbreaks. Three subsequent epidemics were interpreted as proof of the inadequacy of such action and did little to reassure the established population or prospective immigrants. Similarly, the introduction of the North-West Mounted Police and the suppression of the Métis movement, widely interpreted as the imposition of law and order, were interpreted by a few as indicative of British colonial exploitation and domination. Also, the unpublicized dumping of unfortunates, the “marginalized” and unemployed, by Britain on the Dominion reinforced a negative image.

Many factors go into the decision to emigrate, either with the intention of returning eventually or remaining away permanently. World War II was an important factor in massive Dutch emigration to Canada in the 1950s, but Belgian farmers were still interested also.⁹¹ Governments, entrepreneurs, private corporations, etc., have motives for supporting immigration or opposing it. These are not constant in either time or place. This is well illustrated by recent developments. The point system, introduced in 1967, matched immigrants to occupational demand in order to expand the domestic market and stimulate economic growth. Eventually the “human capital” sought in Belgium, as elsewhere, included highly educated computer analysts, scientists, and engineers, as well as business entrepreneurs with investment capital. In 1991, Quebec

gained control of the design, administration and delivery of settlement and integration services for immigrants from the federal government. Linguistic and cultural factors were important elements in the choice of immigrants to the province. In 1998, British Columbia and Manitoba signed similar agreements with the federal government. Alberta has an integrated program with the federal authorities. Immigration was decidedly one of several issues that became politicized in the 1990s in western Canada. There was mounting opposition from western regional politicians to continued immigration, multicultural policies, bilingualism and Aboriginal self-government. Prior to 2005 this was seen as a challenge to the elite consensus of the major political parties whose power bases were in central and eastern Canada. The Belgian experience in Canada in navigating these sometimes tempestuous waters illustrates well the complexity of the emigration/immigration process.

Migration Processes

The process of movement of peoples from one location to another has been studied historically in several different manners. First, there is the distinction between emigrants/immigrants who move with the conscious aim of establishing new family roots and sojourners who move temporarily to better their economic and social position but intend to return eventually to their native land. When Vice-Consul Robert De Vos travelled with a fact-finding mission to western Canada, he reported back to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brussels in 1901 his belief that a number of immigrants were in fact sojourners who hoped to return to their native country:

This meeting [with a farmer from the province of Luxembourg settled between Hartney and Grande Clairière in Manitoba] made an impression on me the exactitude of which was later confirmed for me: it is that our compatriot nourished the hope of leaving Canada as soon as he had some means to do so. The majority of emigrants have the same plan when they leave and still nurse it a long time after they arrive here. There is among all of them a certain repugnance, a fear of thinking that they might never see their native country again; they flatter themselves with thinking that absence from the homeland is but a transitory condition, a means of acquiring quickly the

capital which they hope to enjoy at home, in their own village. That is why, in the beginning, all their work is feverish, all their thoughts of the future as of the past being turned to their homeland. Nothing binds them to the new soil except their hope of gain.⁹²

On the other hand, De Vos also noted that the regularity and cyclical nature of agricultural labour tended over time to create a certain bond between the farmer and his land. This was in some cases sufficient to convert the sojourner into a permanent settler. Established settlers did not always appreciate sojourners who were itinerant labourers, as a St. Alphonse farmer observed: “they have become wanderers and drink a lot, something this country can do without, especially here in Manitoba.”⁹³ Clergy and emigration societies in Belgium, on the other hand, encouraged preliminary scouting as a prelude to emigration:

In general, we cannot extol the location of Canadian farms as being suitable to the great mass of agricultural emigrants. Usually they consist of abandoned farmsteads due to soil exhaustion.... The system which we prefer to follow consists first of all in sending out a member of the family and to have him taken on as a labourer. Thus he learns to understand the country and its culture; if he does not like it, he will have earned his travel costs and will have no losses to deplore; if he persists, he will be better able to direct his family and to achieve his mission.⁹⁴

The distinction between the two movements is sometimes blurred inasmuch as sojourners can change their minds and decide to become permanent settlers. This happened in the case of some miners from Hainaut and farm boys from Flanders who either decided to call on family to join them in western Canada or returned to recruit family and friends. Also, there were those who came with the intention of establishing permanent residence and then became discouraged or disillusioned and returned to Belgium.⁹⁵

