

**THE FRONTIER OF PATRIOTISM:
Alberta and the First World War**
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SECTION FOUR

Aftermath

The men and women who came home from the Front returned to a country and province that had changed dramatically over four years. The war had empowered some; for example, women had been granted the vote on 19 April 1916. They had participated in the 1917 provincial election as voters and also as candidates for the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. Other changes would prove less popular; for example, patriotic fervour spurred Prohibitionists, who believed that returning soldiers should come back to a “dry” homeland that would somehow be thereby rid of all social ills. They were instrumental in the passage of prohibition legislation in 1916.

Returning soldiers suffered from loss of limbs and other unseen symptoms comprising “shell shock,” or what is today known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Measures to help them to adjust were not always adequate. Many returning veterans had to be hospitalized. Medical historian J. Robert Lampard notes that, in the early 1920s, treatment of veterans was centralized in a number of key facilities. In 1922, the federal government built an 84-bed annex at the Strathcona Hospital in Edmonton to house soldiers, and also funded the building of the second wing on the Royal Alexandra Hospital. In Calgary, the Colonel Belcher Hospital opened in 1919 and received the remaining Calgary vets. In 1920, the Keith Sanatorium opened west of Calgary with 185 beds.¹ According to Lampard, by 1921, there were 650 veterans left in Alberta hospitals.²

Veneral disease also presented challenges since the rate of infection was so high; an estimated 66,000 Canadian soldiers were infected during the war. An Albertan, Dr. Harold Orr, played an important role in its treatment. A medical officer with the 3rd

Canadian Mounted Rifles in the field hygiene section, Orr developed important disinfection equipment to deal with the scourge of body lice. He undertook postgraduate studies focusing on syphilis and, in 1920, wrote the Venereal Disease Control Act of Alberta, the first in Canada. In 1923, he was appointed director of the provincial Division of Venereal Disease Control.³

Having survived the horrors of battle, veterans were among those who succumbed to the so-called Spanish influenza, which returned with them from the front and infected their communities. According to Mark Humphries, in 1918, more than 31,000 Albertans were officially listed as having the ailment; he suggests that the real number was probably at least three times higher. The mortality rate was also extremely high: 3,259 people died in 1918 and an additional 1,049 in the winter of 1918–19. Thus, deaths from influenza in Alberta equalled over two-thirds of deaths on the Front (4,308 compared to 6,140 killed in action).

Section Four: Aftermath explores short- and long-term impacts of the war. Mark Humphries covers the impact of the Spanish influenza pandemic of 1918 and 1919 in Alberta, detailing its devastating results, but also its role in prompting significant public health reforms, such as replacing *pest houses*, where people went to die, with community hospitals. Donald Wetherell links the war to the emergence of modern housing styles emphasizing healthier living conditions, namely through the federal government's 1919 Housing Act. Though inadequately funded, the Act aimed to stimulate the postwar economy and provide better shelter to veterans. Allan Rowe examines the federal Soldier Settlement scheme, a much-trumpeted program providing subsidized loans to veterans to acquire farmland, machinery, and seed. Of the 31,670 veterans who participated in the program, almost one-third (9,883) settled in Alberta, with the federal government directing them to the remote Peace River region. However, this program, like most others for veterans, sparked complaints about underfunding, mismanagement, and uncompromising regulations that produced a high failure rate and a legacy of bitterness.

The final essay in this section, which deals with the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, offers a more positive message. Communities across Canada have arranged commemorations of the war experience, a principal component of which has been the honouring of local servicemen, an exercise that Rory Cory shows has involved nearly all Alberta museums.

Notes

- 1 J. Robert Lampard, *Alberta's Medical History: "Young and Lusty, and Full of Life"* (Red Deer: 2008), 293.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 346–47.
- 3 Donald R. Wilson and Paul Rentiers, "Evolution of the Venereal Disease Program in the Province of Alberta," in Lampard, *Alberta's Medical History*, 92–96.

War, Public Health, and the 1918 “Spanish” Influenza Pandemic in Alberta

MARK OSBORNE HUMPHRIES

Andrew Robert W. was born along the Ottawa River near Aylwin, Quebec, on 23 June 1893. His Scottish father, John, was then a farmhand struggling to support a family of five children on an income of \$150 a year and, as was the case for many Canadian families, emigration to the West promised an escape from poverty.¹ When the Edson Trail opened in 1911, John W. moved to Alberta, clearing a homestead at Bear Lake near Grande Prairie.² When war came in 1914, Albertans flocked to the colours to escape a deepening recession, but the conflict seemed very remote from northern Alberta, where the prewar boom continued unabated.³ At that time, the railway was slowly pushing toward the Peace River country, the town of Grande Prairie was flourishing, and the family’s fortunes were on the rise. By 1916 Andrew had set up his own tinsmith operation and was beginning to move into gas engineering.⁴ Neither he nor his two younger brothers were eager to join the army. But the Canadian government required more soldiers to fill the ranks of its expeditionary force fighting in Europe; and with volunteerism failing, at the end of 1917 conscription was imposed, requiring all young able-bodied men to serve.⁵ In March 1918, 25-year-old Andrew went to the depot office

in Grande Prairie for his medical examination, and when he passed he was ordered to report for duty at the end of July in Calgary.⁶

While Albertans like W. may have felt that death and the horror of war were a world away, that fall a new disease—the so-called “Spanish” influenza—appeared in Canada. The flu would kill more people worldwide than the Great War, and nearly as many Canadians as died overseas.⁷ When it appeared in Calgary in early October, Andrew W. was training in the foothills of the Rockies. For weeks the epidemic raged and death seemed to be lurking around every corner: more than 4,000 Albertans would eventually die that fall.⁸ When the Armistice was announced on November 11 and a masked (to avoid contagion) but joyful population rejoiced in the streets, W. must have thought that he would soon be on his way home, back to Grande Prairie, having escaped the fate of so many Canadians on the Western Front. But demobilization came slowly, as those who were the last to join were also the last sent home. Weeks passed, and then he too began to cough.⁹

On the morning of December 19, W. paraded for duty as usual at Victoria Park Barracks.¹⁰ He looked unwell, so much so that his commanding officer sent

him on sick parade. The battalion's doctor, Major H.G. Nyblett, an English-born surgeon from Fort Macleod, Alberta, recorded his temperature at 102° and, an hour later, W. was in Sarcee Camp hospital.¹¹ On admission, there were no signs of pneumonia; a brief physical examination showed no abnormal heart sounds and his lungs were clear. W. was given Aspirin, a dose of quinine, and Dover's powder (a combination of ipecac and opium) to help him rest—all standard treatments aimed at comforting the patient and reducing symptoms. When he was examined that evening, his cough had worsened, but that was to be expected; nothing seemed amiss and he was left to sleep for the night. The next morning, when Nyblett made his rounds, he discovered that during the night pneumonia had set in. With a stethoscope pressed against W.'s chest—first to one side then the other and back again—the doctor realized that W.'s right lung had almost been completely consolidated; he could hear telltale rales (rattling) beginning in the left. W. was now struggling to breathe. Nyblett pushed a full array of stimulants, including strychnine, brandy, and pituitrin (an extract containing oxytocin and vasopressin) and ordered oxygen to be given as required. But, despite his best efforts, W.'s temperature kept rising past 104° as his breathing became shallow, wet, and laboured. At 9:00 that night he died from acute pneumonia—less than 36 hours after coming down with the sniffles on parade.¹²

The 1918 influenza pandemic killed 35,000 to 50,000 Canadians between September 1918 and April 1919. Many died as quickly and inexplicably as W.¹³ Across Canada, public health officials struggled, first to prevent the disease from entering their communities, and then, when it inevitably did, to manage the largest healthcare crisis in modern

history. The 1918 influenza pandemic circled the globe in three successive waves: the first in winter and spring of 1918; the second in the fall just as the war was coming to an end; and the third as troops demobilized in the winter of 1918–19.¹⁴ We do not know where the virus first appeared—it may have been China, the midwestern United States, or even in Europe.¹⁵ Evidence gathered from newspapers, public health reports, and hospital records shows that, during the first wave, many people across the globe became sick—including the King of Spain, who gave the disease its inaccurate but nevertheless enduring moniker. Few, though, actually died. It was in Europe that the virus mutated, emerging late in July with new genetic characteristics that made it a far more deadly disease. The fall wave of flu spread outward from England along the sinews of war: south to Africa on a British ship destined for Sierra Leone; east to Brest and the armies of Europe fighting on the continent; and west to Boston with merchant vessels or empty troop ships arriving to pick up the next drafts of the growing American army. A third wave of flu returned in the spring but was far less deadly.¹⁶

The second and third waves of flu may have killed as many as 100 million people worldwide.¹⁷ Seasonal cases of influenza tend to incapacitate otherwise healthy victims for a few days, only progressing to pneumonia in those with compromised immune systems, underlying health conditions, or the elderly. The deadly fall wave of so-called “Spanish” flu carved a different pattern: it killed young, healthy adults—like Private Andrew W.—who otherwise appeared to be in the prime of life. Scientists are not sure what made the flu so deadly for young people, or how it could progress from infection to death in a matter of hours. The most likely explanation is that the virus provoked a “cytokine storm,” causing

Mrs. Herman Hungerbuhler and children, feeding poultry, near Vulcan, Alberta, 1910. Left to right: Susie; Mrs. Hungerbuhler; Jimmie; and Alice. Jimmie, twin to Susie, died in the influenza epidemic in 1918. The Hungerbuhlers were immigrants from Switzerland. Glenbow Archives, NA-2685-49.



the body's immune system to go into overdrive; in this scenario, it was the intensity of the cascading immune response that ultimately may have killed many of the flu's youngest victims.¹⁸

Albertans were first alerted to Spanish influenza when it arrived in the northeastern United States.¹⁹ On September 18, the *Edmonton Bulletin* reported the deaths of 70 people in Boston from a strange new form of grippe which was said to have shut down the harbour and even all the shoe factories in nearby Brockton.²⁰ The next day, the paper said that there were more than 3,000 cases of "Spanish influenza" in the army camps of New England and upper New York State.²¹ According to Canadian military records, American soldiers from those barracks then carried the disease across the border to a Polish army camp run by the Canadian army at Niagara-on-the-Lake,

Ontario, and to barracks in Montreal and Quebec as they made their way toward waiting troopships bound for Europe. In Sydney, Nova Scotia, sick American soldiers also disembarked from an infected American freighter en route from New Jersey to England and were treated in Canadian hospitals there and in Halifax.²²

Historians once believed that the flu's primary vector was returning veterans, but with the war effort actually ramping up in Europe and the new threat of German submarines marauding off the Atlantic Seaboard, injured soldiers were not returning home that fall. In fact, the war effort was widening rather than waning. Earlier in the summer, Prime Minister Robert Borden had agreed to create a Canadian military force to go to Vladivostok, Russia, where it would assist forces loyal to the deposed Tsar in their

fight against the new Bolshevik government.²³ The mobilization of this newly created Siberian Expeditionary Force (SEF) spread flu across the country.²⁴ Just as influenza was beginning to cross the border, Canadian troops were assembling in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, and Ontario. Soon they boarded trains destined for Vancouver. When sick soldiers climbed into sealed trains packed to the roof with men, they entered a warm, crowded incubator. Whereas demobilizing veterans would have dispersed flu in a random pattern as they returned home to communities big and small across the country, the speedy and organized mobilization of the SEF ensured that the disease crossed the country in a matter of days, seeding crowded barracks and hospitals in all the major population centres from Halifax to Victoria.²⁵

On the morning of September 27, Special Siberian Troop Train 337 took on its first load of passengers at Sussex Camp, New Brunswick.²⁶ That same morning, the first cases of flu were reported in the camp among soldiers who had brought extra supplies to the over-stretched military hospital at North Sydney. By the time the cars lurched into Montreal, some soldiers were already getting sick and had to be removed to a hospital in the city.²⁷ The train also took on several new drafts of soldiers from a local barracks already infected with flu.²⁸ As Special No. 337 rumbled onward across the country, sick soldiers were secretly removed to hospitals in Winnipeg and Regina in the dead of night.²⁹ At 4:00 a.m. on the morning of October 2, the flu train pulled into downtown Calgary, where one officer and 11 other ranks were removed and sent to the Calgary Isolation Hospital. The assistant director, medical services for Military District No. 13 (Alberta), Lieutenant Colonel Chester Fish McGuffin, wired the director general of

medical services, Guy Carleton Jones, asking for “any new suggestions regarding treatment.”³⁰ None were forthcoming.³¹

The mobilization of the SEF was accomplished largely in secret, as the publication of troop train movements had been banned by the Office of the Chief Press Censor in Ottawa.³² Nevertheless, dire reports from the east continued to stoke fears that the disease would inevitably spread west—even as it was already simmering in the military hospitals of Calgary. On October 3, the *Redcliff Review* noted that Spanish flu was prevalent in many military camps in both eastern Canada and the United States. It warned readers that it was “of a serious type and when not properly taken care of it has, in many cases, proved fatal.”³³ When flu arrived, the paper suggested that readers “keep feet and clothing dry; avoid crowds; protect your nose and mouth in the presence of sneezers; gargle your throat three times a day with a mild antiseptic, if only salt and water; don’t neglect a cold; keep as much as possible in the sunshine; [and] don’t get ‘scared.’”³⁴ But it was difficult to remain calm. Frank Oliver’s *Edmonton Bulletin* noted that the flu was killing thousands every day south of the border, and would eventually reach western Canada where it was expected to do the same.³⁵ He argued, “on the principle that prevention is better than cure this is the time to mobilize the forces to resist the invader. So far as the public are concerned there is a total lack of information as to the cause and nature of the disease, the conditions which favor it, and the precautionary measures which may be employed . . . If there is any way of combating the disease by preventative measures, these should be officially explained and published widely and at once.”³⁶

Doctors had few weapons at their disposal. The ancient practices of quarantine and isolation might

be used to reduce or eliminate person-to-person transmission of the disease by erecting barriers between sick and healthy populations.³⁷ Restrictions could also be placed on people's movements, behaviours, and socio-economic activities, which might limit transmission of the disease once it reached a city or town. We now know that these non-pharmaceutical interventions could not prevent influenza, but would enable officials to control the epidemic by slowing down the transmission rate, thus reducing strain on public health resources. Across the United States and Canada, non-pharmaceutical interventions were employed with varying degrees of success. Epidemiological studies have shown that cities that were able to implement case reporting procedures, quarantine, and bans on public gatherings before the flu's arrival had lower overall mortality. However, if non-pharmaceutical measures were employed only after the disease was already epidemic, they had little effect on death rates.³⁸

Unlike many Canadian provinces that had little in the way of a formal public health infrastructure, Alberta was well situated to organize a robust response to the crisis.³⁹ In 1918 public health in the province was centrally managed by the Provincial Board of Health, which had been created by the Public Health Act of 1907; the provincial board, in turn, controlled regional health boards across the province.⁴⁰ Staffing was limited and, in 1918, the provincial board consisted of a provincial medical officer of health, a sanitary engineer, and a bacteriologist who in turn oversaw the Provincial Laboratory.⁴¹ In the years before the First World War, provincial and local boards focused almost exclusively on improving sanitation in Alberta's growing towns and cities, which amounted to inspecting pit

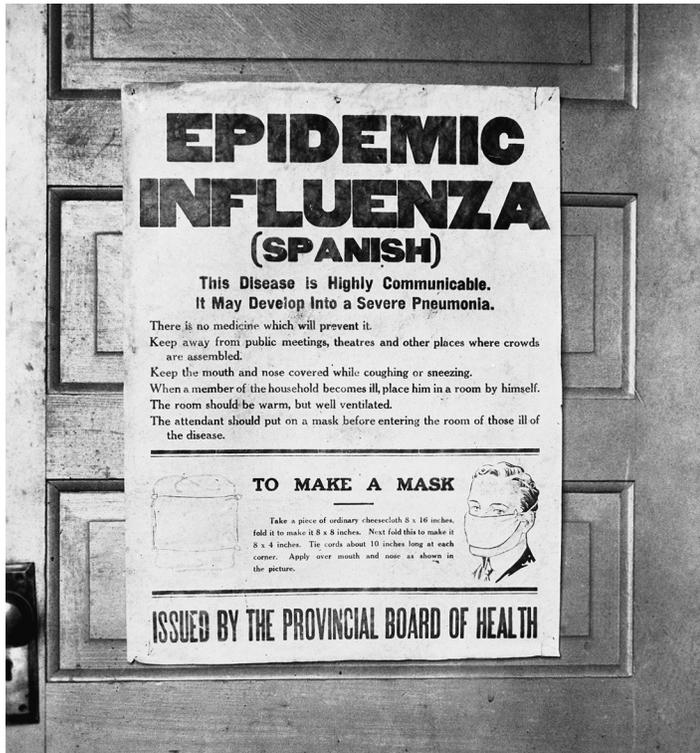
privies and ensuring that "nuisances" were removed, while seeing that the food supply, especially milk, was secure from infection.⁴²

While these community problems were not neglected, the province's growing immigrant population was often blamed for "importing" communicable diseases such as smallpox, typhoid, scarlet fever, or diphtheria.⁴³ "We in the west find that the immigrants coming into that country, not from foreign countries alone, but frequently from the older provinces, arrive in a convalescent stage of disease," read a typical prewar editorial. "They will go among their friends in the west and will say nothing about having been afflicted with disease, and the local authorities have no knowledge of the matter. What is the result? These people go among their friends and among children who attend the schools, and in a short time an epidemic breaks out. The number of deaths from diphtheria and scarlet fever in our western country, due to causes of this kind, is absolutely appalling."⁴⁴ Although there was little evidence to support such claims, the association between immigration and disease gave underlying nativist attitudes a scientific veneer, legitimizing fears of outsiders in a province undergoing an unprecedented period of growth and demographic change.⁴⁵ The main weapons against disease in Alberta, and Canada more widely, had been a robust immigrant border inspection, strict quarantine procedures, and disinfection when communicable disease was discovered.⁴⁶ As one historian has argued, an episodic, reactionary approach to public health and disease management prevailed across the country.⁴⁷

Few public health officials had experience managing outbreaks of influenza, as the last pandemic had been in 1889–90; it had also been much milder.⁴⁸ Initially, advice had to be appropriated

from British and American sources closer to the epicentre of the outbreak on the east coast.⁴⁹ On October 1, Cecil Mahood, medical officer of health for Calgary, told citizens that influenza began rapidly with a “sudden chill, headache, elevation of temperature, pains in various parts of the body, sore throat, herpes on lips, and prostration.”⁵⁰ In many cases, he warned, it then progressed to pneumonia. Because flu was transmitted by secretions from the nose, mouth, and throat, he recommended that “affected individuals go home and to bed at once, and place themselves under care of a physician.” There

Poster issued by the Provincial Board of Health about the influenza epidemic, Alberta, 1918. Glenbow Archives, NA-4548-5.



they were to remain, in bed, until the symptoms subsided, lest pneumonia develop.⁵¹ Alberta’s health board met to discuss the crisis for the first time on October 4 and issued similar advice.⁵² Over the next few days “influenza warnings” were published in local newspapers across the province and posted in public places. Again, Albertans were implored: “Don’t Get ‘Scared.’”⁵³

At first, the official response—that is, the efforts of public health officials—centred exclusively on quarantine and isolation. On October 9, T.H. Whitelaw, the medical officer for health in Edmonton, suggested that the provincial board of health should declare flu a reportable disease, which would give him the power to enforce quarantines against those afflicted with the condition.⁵⁴ The next day in Calgary, Mahood announced that he would not wait and would begin to order infected individuals to be isolated and quarantined immediately if discovered.⁵⁵ As Janice Dickin points out, although this violated the Alberta Health Act, most physicians and officials in Calgary supported his actions.⁵⁶ On October 14, the Alberta health board finally amended its regulations, but decided that flu should be a quarantinable rather than a reportable disease, to minimize panic.⁵⁷

As late as the end of the second week of October—10 days after the first cases of flu arrived in Calgary—public health officials were still discussing flu in the abstract, implying that it had yet to reach the province. Efforts to control the disease likewise focused on prevention through exclusion, rather than on developing the infrastructure necessary to manage an epidemic that was already underway. After a meeting of the provincial board of health on October 13, the minister of health, A.G. MacKay, announced a “sweeping program” designed to

prevent flu from reaching the province. Medical inspectors were hired and placed at every road or rail entry point along Alberta's borders, and charged with inspecting travellers on entry into the province. Those whom inspectors determined to be sick were to be placed into isolation or denied entry, while those on through-bound trains were to be quarantined throughout their journey. If flu was detected in a town, that location was to be isolated and cordoned off from the outside world.⁵⁸

Oyen, Alberta, a small town about 150 kilometres north of Medicine Hat near the Saskatchewan border, was the first place to be quarantined. When flu erupted there, the provincial board immediately ordered all theatres, churches, schools, and businesses closed. The town was also placed under a broader quarantine with the board prohibiting the "egress of any person to, or ingress from, Oyen and other nearby places in which influenza exists."⁵⁹ On October 17, the entire city of Lethbridge too was placed under quarantine. "Provincial Health Department Takes Unexpected and Drastic Action," read the headline in the *Lethbridge Herald*. "No one may enter or leave the city . . . From the date of the order which was first communicated to the CPR, the movement of passengers was prohibited and doors on trains passing through Lethbridge are locked before coming into Lethbridge and not unlocked until the train is out of the city limits."⁶⁰ Guards were also hired by the Royal North-West Mounted Police (RNWMP) to guard the road entrances to the city, blocking all vehicular and carriage traffic into or out of the city.⁶¹ Pincher Creek, Fort Macleod, and Taber were similarly quarantined in the south, as was Legal, north of Edmonton.⁶²

The Alberta Board of Health was the only public health authority in Canada to quarantine entire

municipalities. Yet this drastic step soon proved impossible to enforce or maintain. For example, at Lethbridge, coal miners returning from the night shift found themselves unable to get home and unable to return to work. Farmers, ranchers, and businessmen who had been in the city overnight when quarantine was imposed were similarly unable to leave despite the pressing needs of the harvest, their livestock, and their families.⁶³ The provincial board soon reversed course. Within 48 hours of being imposed, the quarantines were lifted, and, in their place, officials were dispatched to inspect incoming and outgoing passengers for flu. But while the citizens of Lethbridge complained about being quarantined, some towns actually imposed their own forms of isolation. The town of Irma, roughly 30 kilometres west of Wainwright, instituted its own quarantine on October 25 "to take steps to prevent the induction [*sic*] of the disease into the community from outside points by stopping travellers both by train and car from alighting here and in restricting the mixing of people in the community as far as possible without stopping business."⁶⁴

Bans on public gatherings and institutional closures were some of the most commonly implemented non-pharmaceutical interventions across Canada. On October 10, for example, the newspapers reported that all schools, churches, and theatres had been ordered closed in New Brunswick.⁶⁵ Winnipeg banned all public gatherings two days later, while Toronto outlawed meetings until the middle of November.⁶⁶ However, public health officials, worried about restricting commerce or still convinced that flu was primarily confined to the eastern parts of the country, remained reluctant to do so in Alberta long after officials in both British Columbia and Saskatchewan had taken similar steps. "There



Victory parade, Calgary, Alberta, 11 November 1918. The image shows the masks worn during influenza epidemic. The hill in background is thought to be North Hill. Glenbow Archives, NC-20-2.

is no need of closing the theatres in Calgary because of the Spanish Influenza epidemic which is raging in eastern Canada so long as . . . precautions are taken,” Mahood told the newspapers in mid-October. As Oral Cloakney, the manager of the Allen theatre, reported, this meant washing the premises with carbolic acid every night as one might have cleaned a contemporary operating room. “Some of our patrons complain of the carbolic odor, but we are not going to take any chances,” he said. “There is not a home in the city of Calgary where one may feel as immune as in Calgary theatres.” Mahood agreed, assuring Calgarians that the city’s “theatres are probably the healthiest place in the city as a result—far healthier than the average business house.”⁶⁷ Both Edmonton and Calgary waited until October 18—more than two weeks after the first cases arrived in the city—to

order theatres, dance halls, public libraries, and poolrooms to close.⁶⁸

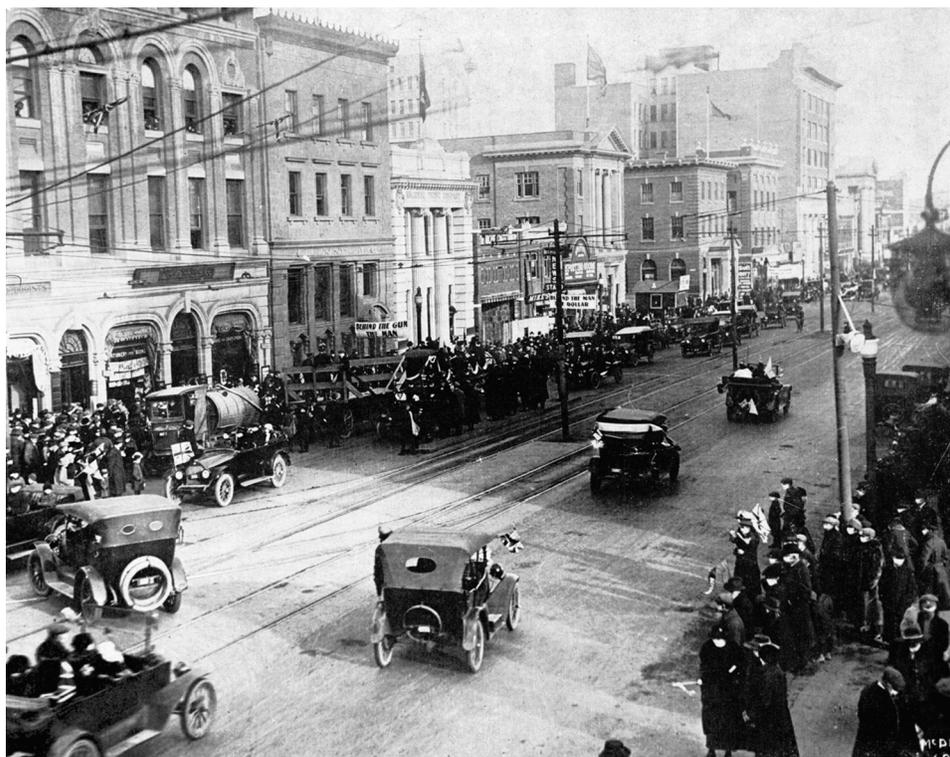
Public closures caused significant disruption to not only commerce and patterns of social interaction but also to the spiritual lives of Alberta’s terrified communities. In Irma, Pastor C.G. Hockin acknowledged that the severity of the flu outbreak necessitated closing the churches, which placed responsibility for religious observance on the family. “The first teachers of life and truth in every family are the parents and in a time of pestilence they are given more responsibility than commonly falls to their lot in the modern civilization,” he told his flock via the local paper. “This includes a deeper religious interest. We would like to suggest that the family become the worship unit during the time of our danger. Make the family altar to be the place

where all are found at the hour when public worship would be called and let us hear God's Word in our homes and with boldness make our requests unto the Almighty."⁶⁹ Families were not only left to worship together but also to bury their dead. In isolated communities across the province, family units dissolved in the face of disease and further suffered because of the absence of normal, rural community supports for the survivors. In the district of Athabasca, it was reported that "a lad of fifteen is seen digging behind the house, he is asked what he is doing, his answer is that he is burying the dead, asked who was dead, his answer is, father, mother, brother and sister."⁷⁰

By the time churches were shut, quarantine had clearly failed to stem the tide of flu's advance. Once it

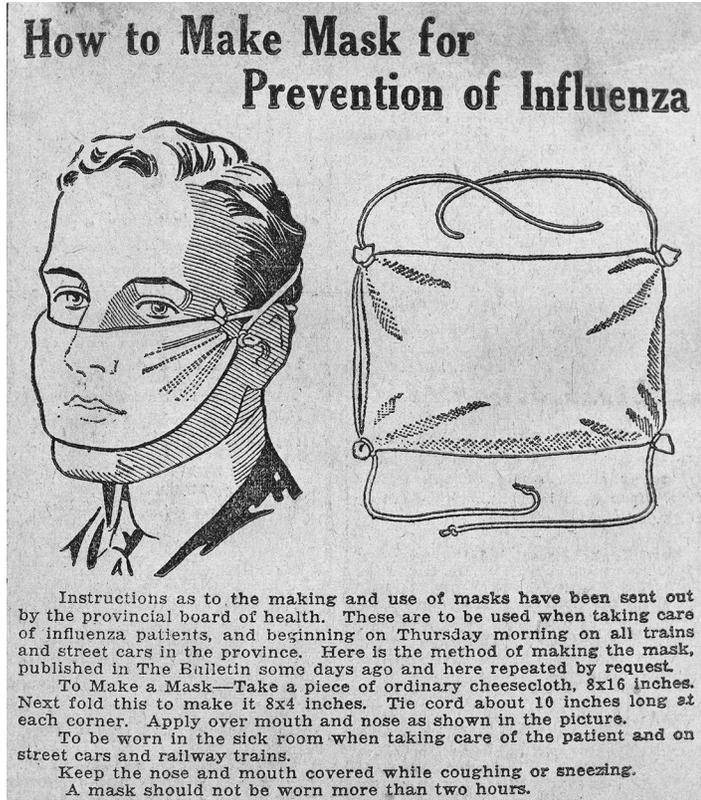
failed, the Alberta Board of Health sought to control the further spread of the disease by ordering all citizens to wear masks over their mouths and noses when they left their homes, providing instructions on how each might manufacture his or her own version from readily available supplies.⁷¹ "These masks are made of cheese cloth," reported the *Red-cliff Review*, "sixteen by eight inches, which are twice doubled alternatively until they are finally eight by four inches in size, and are then tied over the nose and mouth with cord."⁷² Many refused to wear them. As Janice Dickin has noted, some complained to the newspapers that they were grotesque, depressing, and even dangerous.⁷³ Besides being unpopular, the regulation was difficult to enforce. During the first

The Armistice Day Parade, on 11 November 1918, took place on Jasper Avenue in Edmonton in spite of the flu epidemic but some people wore masks. McDermid Studio. City of Edmonton Archives, EA-10-655.



few days when the order was in effect, 30 summonses were issued to Edmonton men who refused to comply.⁷⁴ When pressed to explain their actions, some claimed that they could not smoke while wearing a mask, while others said that they had no money to buy the necessary materials; one man told a judge “that if the city wanted him to wear one it would have to buy him one.”⁷⁵ Even some physicians refused to partake in the precautions. The *Bulletin* reported

“How to make [an] influenza mask.” 21 October 1918. Provincial Archives of Alberta, A13187.



that “one doctor who was going about maskless [*sic*] told the [medical] officer [of health] that he did not need any and drove on.”⁷⁶ When A.G. MacKay visited Calgary, he too complained to Mahood that only about 20 percent of the population seemed to be wearing their masks as required.⁷⁷ But Mahood himself refused to enforce the provincial regulation because he felt that it was a “fruitless endeavour,” insisting that his efforts were better focused on implementing other forms of protective measures.⁷⁸ Even when “offenders” were arrested and brought before the local court, it was frequently pointed out that those present to hear the cases—including the judges—were not actually wearing the masks themselves as proscribed by the province. Most offenders ultimately escaped with a warning.⁷⁹

For many physicians, quarantines and masks seemed to be relics from another era of less scientific medicine. Ever since Louis Pasteur demonstrated the effectiveness of his artificial rabies vaccine in 1885, medical researchers had looked to the laboratory to inoculate the vulnerable against illness.⁸⁰ After all, in the absence of the “magic bullet” antibiotics would later provide, few diseases could actually be cured; prevention was thus the best medicine.⁸¹ In 1918, many doctors hoped to develop a vaccine that would reduce morbidity and mortality from flu, as had been done against smallpox, rabies, and a host of other diseases. We now know that influenza is a viral infection, but in 1918 most medical professionals believed that it was caused by Pfeiffer’s bacillus—based largely on erroneous research conducted in German laboratories during the previous pandemic of 1889–90.⁸² This presented the possibility that a serum could be developed using a weakened form of the bacteria to confer at least a degree of immunity on healthy people.⁸³

During the fall of 1918, vaccines were prepared across North America containing a potpourri of dead bacteria—and probably live copies of the virus—drawn from the noses and throats of flu sufferers.⁸⁴ In Manitoba and Ontario, thousands of doses of vaccine were issued.⁸⁵ In Alberta, too, Dr. Heber Jamieson, the provincial bacteriologist and head of the Provincial Laboratory in Edmonton, developed his own version of an American vaccine first prepared in New York.⁸⁶ However, the first 1,000 doses were not ready until November 1, when the epidemic was already reaching its height. Even so, it would have had little effect—and may actually have been harmful—because it was designed to inoculate against a bacterial rather than a viral infection. Even at the time, many physicians were skeptical about the usefulness of vaccines against flu. “Since we are uncertain of the primary cause of influenza,” read a dispatch from the Royal College of Physicians in London, and printed in the *Edmonton Bulletin* on 12 December 1918, “no form of inoculation can be guaranteed to protect against the disease itself. From what we know as to the lack of enduring protection after an attack, it might in any case be assumed that no vaccine could protect for more than a short period.”⁸⁷

The development and distribution of dubious vaccines spoke to the provincial health board’s growing sense of desperation. By the middle of the third week of October, it was becoming clear that far more people were getting sick than official case reports suggested; the authorities had lost control of the situation. Rumours swirled that there was a severe epidemic at Drumheller, where two-thirds of the population were said to be sick; death notices began to fill the pages of local papers. Yet officially published numbers suggested that the epidemic

was still limited in scope. The public seemed to be losing confidence. The provincial board suspected that compliance with the suggested procedures was low because the reporting of influenza cases was still voluntary. On October 25, the flu was thus made a reportable disease. This required all physicians across the province to give the patient’s name, sex, age, and address for any case of influenza, or pneumonia, as well as report on any deaths.⁸⁸ Case reports immediately began to pour in from across towns and cities.

By the end of October, Albertans were dying by the hundreds. Some of the most tragic cases were those of conscripted soldiers, who died alone and far from home. Thirty-three-year-old Private Joseph M. of Nanaimo, British Columbia, was drafted in June 1918 and sent to Calgary for training. He was admitted to the Edmonton isolation hospital on 23 October 1918 suffering from a cough, pain in the chest, headache, constipation, and low fever. The next day, his temperature had risen to 104° and his symptoms worsened. By the 27th, his doctor reported evidence of broncho-pneumonia, and the next day his fever was 105°. M. died on the night of October 30 and was buried far from his family in Mount Pleasant Cemetery. Caregivers could usually anticipate death in cases of Spanish flu by the appearance of a peculiar heliotrope cyanosis, a brief dip and then spike in temperature, and the quickening of pulse and respiration. Unfortunately, there was almost nothing that could be done to save victims when the disease progressed to broncho-pneumonia.⁸⁹

As public health officials came to grasp the enormity of the crisis, the official response shifted from prevention to treatment. At first, flu victims had been encouraged to remain at home in bed. But such directives were most easily followed by those from the middle and upper classes, who could afford

a private doctor or nurse, not to mention the luxury of taking a voluntary hiatus from work, as well as extra fuel for the fire. For the working class, living in crowded conditions in the slums of Edmonton or Calgary, medical assistance was usually unaffordable, and isolation and privacy not possible. Failure to attend work, too, carried a significant risk of dismissal and increased financial hardship. Farming families would also have had a difficult time following the health board's advice. The onset of the epidemic coincided with the final weeks of the harvest. Even if the wheat crop was in, household chores still had to be performed and members of farm families who became ill could no more confine themselves to bed rest than could wage workers in the cities. Prescriptions for bed rest and isolation were, thus, ideal remedies that were unrealistic for all but a few Albertans.⁹⁰

Soon, though, it became clear that travellers, soldiers, and the poor had few options but to seek care in the province's hospitals.⁹¹ By the 25th, the wards in Edmonton and Calgary were crowded with victims. Public health officials looked to commandeer public buildings to create makeshift flu wards. In Edmonton, Whitelaw took over the University of Alberta's Pembina Hall as a flu hospital, providing beds for 150 patients.⁹² Halls and schools across the province were similarly appropriated, usually staffed with volunteers who ran soup kitchens and changed bedding for those unable to care for themselves.⁹³

As public health efforts shifted from prevention to treatment, the role of physicians faded into the background. Although members of the medical profession volunteered their expertise, there was little they could do to treat flu.⁹⁴ While physicians might prescribe stimulants or sedatives, these had little effect. The most useful treatments consisted

of bed rest and nursing care. In this respect, both professional female nurses and volunteers now took the lead role in managing the crisis at the level of home and community. Nurses had, in fact, been preparing to minister to the needs of the community long before public health officials abandoned quarantine efforts. On October 15, the Graduate Nurses Association held the first of several emergency meetings to "devise ways and means of coping with the malady if necessary and to do the best that could be done under the circumstance."⁹⁵ Lists of trained nurses were prepared should the need arise to call on their services.

Nurses had played an important but often overlooked role in the provision of care even in normal times.⁹⁶ Usually confined to hospitals or private residences, there were relatively few professionally trained nurses in Alberta—many had also chosen to go overseas by 1918. Despite early preparations, by October 19 the city of Edmonton was already in the midst of a nursing shortage, forcing Whitelaw to close the city's only isolation hospital to new admissions.⁹⁷ The next day, provincial bacteriologist Heber Jamieson told the *Bulletin* that the "scarcity of nursing talent was becoming a serious embarrassment," in part because many wealthy families were employing their own private nurses "to the exclusion of those who had not" the means to pay. "It was not fair," he said, and announced plans to require employers to allow private nurses to service the entire community rather than individual families.⁹⁸

On October 25, Whitelaw announced that the city would be divided into districts to better facilitate management of care.⁹⁹ Each district would be placed under the supervision of a graduate nurse appointed by the province. These professionally trained sisters would be responsible for managing cases within

Nurses at the Isolation Hospital, Lloydminster, Alberta and Saskatchewan. Nurses and teachers acting as volunteer nurses pictured during influenza epidemic, 1918. Glenbow Archives, NA-1422-7.



their ward, visiting families in need and arranging assistance as necessary. Each graduate nurse would work out of a school commandeered for the purpose where volunteers and Volunteer Aid Detachment (VAD) nurses would be trained to provide home care for the sick.¹⁰⁰ The decision to organize care by district around the nucleus provided by professional nurses rather than physicians also called on these professional women to take on the traditionally male tasks of hospital organization and administration. Not only were nurses asked to go into the homes of the sick but also to manage care, reporting directly to the provincial board of health, bypassing local medical professionals.¹⁰¹

As Linda Quiney argues, VAD service provided women with a “unique opportunity for an active part in the war effort, not available to women through any other form of voluntary patriotic work.”¹⁰² Voluntary service during the pandemic was also extremely

dangerous. In Edmonton, Christina Frederickson was one of the first nurses of many to die in the pandemic. As the *Edmonton Bulletin* reported, Ms. Frederickson had “volunteered when the soldiers of the Siberian forces were taken from a troop train some days since suffering from the influenza and placed in the isolation hospital to assist in nursing them, and she had been steadily at work with little respite up to the time that she herself became infected with the disease.”¹⁰³ It may have been hazardous work, but that did not tend to discourage volunteers. As one nurse said, “It is dangerous—undoubtedly. So is overseas service; yet that did not hinder enlisting to any large extent. It would be better to have the ‘flu [sic] than to carry through life the uneasy feeling that by your indifference you allowed some other woman to die.”¹⁰⁴

While graduate nurses such as Frederickson organized and managed treatment networks across

the province, female volunteers—many of them teenagers and young adults—were responsible for administering to the sick on a daily basis.¹⁰⁵ In 1918, providing basic necessities such as food, heat, and water required a significant amount of effort, often beyond the ability of the stricken. Water had to be pumped, sometimes from an outdoor well a good distance from the house. Fresh food had to be bought and prepared. Sick families across the province were thus in desperate need of assistance. “Volunteers are wanted to give a hand in certain homes,” implored the *Edmonton Bulletin*. They “are needed to look after babies and children in homes where there is sickness—an opportunity for girls. The furnaces and stoves have to be looked after—ashes taken out, coal and wood to be got in. Play the game, boys. There’s work for everybody.”¹⁰⁶ The situation was most acute in the rural parts of the province where there were neither graduate nurses nor doctors to organize care. MacKay told rural Albertans that they “must realize that they cannot depend upon receiving trained nurses; that the local men and women must organize and under the instruction and direction of the local doctors they must give what assistance they can.”¹⁰⁷

As Esysllt Jones found in her study of Winnipeg’s response to the pandemic, the flu was truly a community disease that could only be contained through a cooperative effort.¹⁰⁸ Unlike previous outbreaks of illness that were blamed on outsiders and immigrants, the 1918 flu proved the ineffectiveness of prophylactic interventions aimed at specific ethnic minorities and, instead, emphasized the importance of community cooperation.¹⁰⁹ In part, this shift in attitude can be attributed to the work of middle-class female volunteers, who came into contact with the sufferings and daily hardships of the working class for the first time in a meaningful way

during the pandemic. Care instructions necessitated a close and sustained period of contact between the sick and their nurses. Caregivers were instructed that fresh air and bed rest were the most important elements of care, while nourishing food and water were to be given at regular intervals. Bed rest was to be so complete that patients were not even to leave their beds to go to the bathroom but were instead to use bedpans that had to be emptied. Patients might be given an antiseptic mouthwash every few hours, and their bedclothes had to be changed and washed, but few other interventions were possible. As Jones has argued, this routine, which might last a week or more, created an unheard-of level of intimacy between members of different social worlds.¹¹⁰

In Alberta, as elsewhere, it was the poorest members of society who suffered most during the epidemic. When Edmonton volunteers went door to door, they found families living in squalid conditions in the city’s slums. One family of six was said to have been living in a 10 × 12-foot shack with only one window and a door.¹¹¹ Throughout the crisis, the family had to sleep in the same bed where the mother and her infant child died.¹¹² One VAD nurse reported that she had only discovered another fatal victim of flu when two small girls approached her in the street to say that they needed help because they could not wake up their mother.¹¹³ In response to this heart-wrenching story, one Albertan wrote to the *Bulletin*: “Surely our health organization is not in such a wretched state that fatal cases have to be reported in this sad manner. If so, it is an everlasting disgrace to our city authorities and board of health . . . surely there are enough Christian-spirited people left outside of our overworked nurses and volunteers who would be glad to learn what aid they could rather give than leave the sick to die unattended. If there

are not such we had better lock our church doors and stop playing at Christianity, and continue to live and die as the heathen."¹¹⁴

As with the working class in Alberta's slums, Aboriginal groups suffered a disproportionately higher level of mortality from flu, both in the province and across the country.¹¹⁵ A Department of Indian Affairs report compiled in 1919 puts the death toll among Aboriginal peoples living on reserves in Canada at 3,694 out of a total population of about 106,000, suggesting an influenza mortality rate of 34.85 per thousand—more than five times the national average for non-Aboriginal Canadians.¹¹⁶ In Alberta the mortality rate for flu among Aboriginal groups was much higher than the national average, at 53.8 per 1,000 (see table below). The squalid living conditions on many reserves—where Aboriginal people had been forced into inadequate housing provided by the Department of Indian Affairs, where many suffered from malnutrition, and where tuberculosis and other diseases were already in wide circulation—made victims more susceptible.¹¹⁷ In the Treaty 8 territory of northern Alberta, RNWMP inspectors feared the worst when reports of flu began to trickle in to the north. K.F. Anderson of the Peace River Detachment wrote to R. Field, the commanding officer of N Division, requesting permission to take medicines to "fight the Spanish Influenza" to the people living in the vicinity of Great Slave Lake, as he feared that "if it should get amongst the Natives, most of whom are suffering from pulmonary disease . . . it will commit wide and general destruction."¹¹⁸ When flu came, 11 percent of the Aboriginal population in Treaty 8 territory alone succumbed to the disease.¹¹⁹

On 1 December 1918, a University of Alberta Public Health student named Frank Fish filed a report with RNWMP headquarters in Edmonton

accusing the Department of Indian Affairs of neglecting the health of the people on the Hobbema agency. Fish had gone there after hearing that many of the Cree people in the agency were suffering from both influenza and smallpox. "I might say that the housing conditions on the Reserve are not of the best," he wrote in an affidavit filed with the RNWMP. "In fact in many cases I found as many as eight or nine adults living in a one roomed shack which in all cases were absolutely devoid of ventilation . . . I found in many cases, that the families were without food and had gone to relatives or friends in the hope of getting nourishment. In many cases, also, I was asked to inform the [Indian] Agent of the condition of the people with regard to the lack of food."¹²⁰ A subsequent RNWMP investigation revealed that the Indian agent had been placing families infected with smallpox in quarantine and then refusing to feed them, forcing the victims to secretly visit friends and family at night to obtain something to eat. "There is no question," read Staff Sergeant Fyffe's report, "that the Official[s] on the Reserve at the present time have no idea whatever as to the number of Indians suffering from smallpox, and apparently very little has been done by them to find out, if the indian [*sic*] dose [*sic*] not report it themselves, and as far as I could learn the Indians hide the fact that they have smallpox, as the [*sic*] say they would be quarantine and would get no food."¹²¹ Over the next few months, the situation improved little, although food and medicine were eventually brought in by the RNWMP. At Hobbema, the combination of smallpox and flu drove the death rate from flu alone above 120 per 1,000, meaning that it killed roughly 12 percent of the population of Hobbema.¹²²

Whereas previous epidemics had devastated Aboriginal groups but had little effect on the

Mortality rate from influenza by reserve for the period October 1918 to February 1919

INDIAN AFFAIRS AGENCY	POPULATION (31 MARCH 1918)	DEATHS FROM FLU (1918–19)	MORTALITY RATE (PER K)
Blackfoot	710	25	35.21
Blood	1,112	29	26.08
Edmonton	727	49	67.40
Fort Simpson and Fort Smith	2,544	8*	3.14
Hobbema	831	100	120.34
Peigan	414	10	24.15
Saddle Lake	883	40	45.30
Sarcee	182	7	38.46
Stoney	669	55	82.21
Treaty 8	1,941	216	111.28
TOTAL	10,013	539	53.83
Alberta	495,351	4,308	8.70
Canada	8,100,000	50,000	6.17

* This figure only represents deaths recorded as due to influenza

Source: Population statistics are based on annual treaty payment figures from *Dominion of Canada, Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs for the Year Ended March 31 1918* (Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs, 1919), 111–12; "Influenza Epidemic," 28 May 1919, RG 29, vol. 2970, file 851-4-D96, Part 1, LAC.

European settler population, the 1918 influenza pandemic struck across ethnic boundaries—even though Aboriginal groups still suffered disproportionately due to the legacies of Canada's colonial policies. The 1918 flu was a community disease that necessitated collective action. When the second wave of flu finally crested in late November and rolled back through December, more than 31,000 Albertans had officially been listed as sick—although the real number was probably at least three times as high. A total of 3,259 people died of the disease in 1918. That winter, there were a further 7,185 cases and 1,049 deaths.¹²³

To summarize, the official response in Alberta to the Spanish flu epidemic was both paradoxical and lurching. The initial prophylactic measures taken by public health authorities to guard against flu followed established patterns of quarantine and isolation, reflecting a stubborn belief that despite the appearance of a few military cases at the beginning of the month of October, flu could be halted so long as outsiders were prevented from bringing the disease into the province. Strong but unenforceable measures such as municipal quarantine were precipitously proposed and adopted while more realistic and pragmatic steps like school closures

were avoided until well after the disease was already in wide circulation.

In part, this approach reflected the lingering dominance of the old quarantine practices that had been used to guard Canadians from disease since the age of cholera. When Albertans looked for a scapegoat to blame, though, this time it was not immigrants or outsiders but public health officials who had made false promises of safety. "Flu is a communicable and therefore quarantinable disease," argued Frank Oliver on the editorial page of the *Edmonton Bulletin*. "The Dominion government have sole authority to enforce quarantine. They did not establish quarantine. They took no notice of the fact that there was an epidemic spreading over the world."¹²⁴ In another editorial, Oliver elaborated. "When the menace appeared," he wrote,

had the Dominion authorities through the war railway board, taken charge of all arrivals at ocean ports and entry ports along the boundary, and subjected them to the inconvenience of two or three days in quarantine, there is every reason to suppose that the disease could not have got past the borders; certainly it could not have attained the proportions of a nation-wide epidemic . . . Certainly there is no excuse for the Government having made no attempt whatever to keep it out. Is human life of no account in Canada?¹²⁵

But the ultimate lesson of the pandemic was that quarantine alone was not sufficient protection and that, so long as the seeds of disease found fertile soil among the poor and colonized, epidemics would be unstoppable. As prophylaxis failed and the attention of public health authorities turned to managing

treatment efforts, the entire community was, for the first time, called upon to take responsibility for protecting public health by assisting the less fortunate. It was during the pandemic that Albertans, and Canadians in general, began to see health as a community rather than an individual concern. Flu's lasting legacy was the recognition of this central tenet of modern public health policy: health can only be protected through the cooperation and with the consent of all members of the community.

Notes

This paper is based on a combination of new research as well as research published in Mark Osborne Humphries, *The Last Plague: Spanish Influenza and the Politics of Public Health in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

- 1 1901 Census of Canada, RG 31, Reel T-6549, District 200, Sub district C, Division 1, Family 7, 1, Library and Archives Canada (LAC). According to Eric Sager's research, this would place John W. in the lowest 20 percent of wage earners. Eric Sager, "The National Sample of the 1901 Census of Canada: A New Source for the Study of the Working Class," unpublished paper presented at the Social Science History Conference, 16–19 March 1998, web.uvic.ca/hrd/cfp/publications/Eric%20W.%20Sager.pdf, retrieved 2 October 2013; Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 250–55.
- 2 Particulars of a Recruit Drafted Under Military Service Act, 1917, Personnel File Andrew Robert W., RG 150, Accession 1992–93, vol. 10433, file 57, LAC.
- 3 On perceptions of war in the West, see John Herd Thompson, *The Harvests of War: The Prairie West, 1914–1918* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978). On enlistment in the province, see C.A. Sharpe, "Enlistment in the Canadian Expeditionary Force,

- 1914–1918: A Regional Analysis,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 18, no. 3 (1983): 15–29, esp. 20–22.
- 4 1916 Census of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, RG 31, Reel T-21951, Alberta, Edmonton West, 25, 15, Family 212, Line 2, LAC.
 - 5 J.L. Granatstein and J.M. Hitsman, *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1977), 75–77. For an examination of farmer’s responses in Ontario, see W.R. Young, “Conscription, Rural De-Population, and the Farmers of Ontario, 1917–19,” *Canadian Historical Review* 53, no. 3 (September 1972): 289–320.
 - 6 Service Card, Personnel File Andrew Robert W., RG 150, Accession 1992–93, vol. 10433, file 57, LAC.
 - 7 Peter Wiliton, “Spanish Flu Outdid WWI in Number of Lives Claimed,” *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 148, no. 11 (1993): 2036–40.
 - 8 There were approximately 3,300 excess deaths in the province in 1918–19. Mark Osborne Humphries, *The Last Plague: Spanish Influenza and the Politics of Public Health in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 106.
 - 9 Records of a Court of Inquiry, Statements of Evidence, Personnel File Andrew Robert W., RG 150, Accession 1992–93, vol. 10433, file 57, LAC.
 - 10 Report re Death of # [redacted], RG 150, Accession 1992–93, vol. 10433, file 57, LAC.
 - 11 Personnel File of Major H.G. Nyblett, RG 150, Accession 1992–93/166, box 7390, file 40, LAC; Records of a Court of Inquiry, Statements of Evidence, Personnel File Andrew Robert W., RG 150, Accession 1992–93, vol. 10433, file 57, LAC.
 - 12 Records of a Court of Inquiry, Statements of Evidence, Personnel File Andrew Robert W., RG 150, Accession 1992–93, vol. 10433, file 57, LAC.
 - 13 For an overview of the historiography, see Guy Beiner, “Out in the Cold and Back: New-Found Interest in the Great Flu,” *Cultural and Social History* 3, no. 4 (2006): 496–505; and Howard Phillips, “The Re-Appearing Shadow of 1918: Trends in the Historiography of the 1918–19 Influenza Pandemic,” *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 21, no. 1 (2004): 121–34. For a general introduction to the pandemic in Canada, see Humphries, *The Last Plague*; as well as Janice P. Dickin McGinnis, “The Impact of Epidemic Influenza: Canada, 1918–1919,” in *Medicine in Canadian Society: Historical Perspectives*, edited by S.E.D. Shortt (Montreal and Kingston: McGill–Queen’s University Press, 1981), 471–83; Janice P. Dickin McGinnis, “The Impact of Epidemic Influenza, 1918–19,” *Historical Papers* (1977): 120–41. Although somewhat dated, Eileen Pettigrew’s *Silent Enemy: Canada and the Deadly Flu of 1918* (Regina: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1983) is still useful, especially for firsthand accounts of the crisis.
 - 14 Humphries, *The Last Plague*, 3–4.
 - 15 Mark Osborne Humphries, “Paths of Infection: The First World War and the Origins of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic,” *War in History* 21, no. 2 (2014): 55–81.
 - 16 Alfred Crosby, *America’s Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 37–39.
 - 17 Niall P.A.S. Johnson and Juergen Mueller, “Updating Accounts: Global Mortality of the 1918–1920 ‘Spanish’ Influenza Pandemic,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 76 (2002): 105–15.
 - 18 Michael T. Osterholm, “Preparing for the Next Pandemic,” *The New England Journal of Medicine* 352, no. 18 (5 May 2005): 1839–42; for a broader introduction to cytokine storms, see Jennifer R. Tisoncik et al., “Into the Eye of the Cytokine Storm,” *Microbiology and Molecular Biology Reviews* 77, no. 3 (September 2013), <http://mmbbr.asm.org/content/76/1/16.full>.
 - 19 The most complete regional study is Esyllt Jones, *Influenza, 1918: Disease, Death, and Struggle in Winnipeg* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007). See also Ann Herring, ed., *Anatomy of a Pandemic: The 1918 Influenza in Hamilton* (Hamilton: Allegra Press, 2006); Niall P.A.S. Johnson, “Pandemic Influenza: An Analysis of the Spread of Influenza in Kitchener, October 1918” (MA thesis, Wilfrid Laurier University, 1993); Maureen K. Lux, “‘The Bitter Flats’: The 1918

- Influenza Epidemic in Saskatchewan," *Saskatchewan History* (Spring 1997): 3–13; Maureen K. Lux, "The Impact of the Spanish Influenza Pandemic in Saskatchewan, 1918–1919" (MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1989); Denise Rioux, "La grippe espagnole à Sherbrooke et dans les Cantons de l'Est" (Sherbrooke, QC: Études supérieures en histoire, Université de Sherbrooke, 1993); D. Ann Herring, "'There Were Young People and Old People and Babies Dying Every Week': The 1918–1919 Influenza Pandemic at Norway House," *Ethnohistory* 41, no. 1 (1994): 73–105.
- 20 "Influenza Takes Heavy Toll in New England," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 18 September 1918, 2.
- 21 "Epidemic in Three US Army Camps," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 19 September 1918, 6.
- 22 Mark Osborne Humphries, "The Horror at Home: The Canadian Military and the 'Great' Influenza Pandemic of 1918," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 16 (2005): 241–47.
- 23 On the SEF, see Benjamin Isitt, *From Victoria to Vladivostok: Canada's Siberian Expedition, 1917–19* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).
- 24 See Dickin McGinnis, "The Impact of Epidemic Influenza, 1918–19," 120–41; Janice P. Dickin McGinnis, "A City Faces an Epidemic," *Alberta History* 24, no. 4 (1976): 1–11; a more recent example is David Bright, "1919: A Year of Extraordinary Difficulty," in *Alberta Formed, Alberta Transformed*, edited by Donald Wetherell, Catherine Cavanaugh, and Michael Payne (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2005), 420–22.
- 25 Humphries, "The Horror at Home," 248–53.
- 26 War Diary (WD), Assistant Director, Medical Services (ADMS), Military District (MD) 7, 28 September 1918, RG 9, vol. 5063, file 978, Part I, LAC.
- 27 District Records Officer (DRO), MD 4 to DRO MD 7, 7 November 1918 and Memorandum DRO, MD 7 to ADMS MD 7, 27 November 1918, RG 24, vol. 4574, file 3-9-47, vol. 1, LAC.
- 28 WD, ADMS, MD 4, 29 September 1918, RG 9, vol. 5061, file 976, Part I, LAC.
- 29 Humphries, "The Horror at Home," 253–54.
- 30 ADMS MD 13 to Director General, Medical Services (DGMS), 2 October 1918, RG 24, vol. 1992, file HQ-762-11-15, LAC.
- 31 Janice P. Dickin McGinnis paints a similar picture, although she suggests that these soldiers were returning veterans because they were reported as such in the local papers. See Dickin McGinnis, "A City Faces an Epidemic," 1.
- 32 RG 6, Reel C-5863, file NSC 1029-6-24, LAC. On wartime censorship in general, see Jeff Keshen, *Propaganda and Censorship during Canada's Great War* (Edmonton: University of Athabasca Press, 1996), especially chapters 3 to 6.
- 33 "Precautions," *Redcliff Review*, 3 October 1918, 2.
- 34 Ibid. Identical notices, likely derived from American wire services, were printed in the *Chinook Advance* on the same day.
- 35 "Time to Take Precautions," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 3 October 1918, 7.
- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Heather MacDougall, "Toronto's Health Department in Action: Influenza in 1918 and SARS in 2003," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 62, no. 1 (2007): 89.
- 38 Howard Markel et al., "Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions Implemented by US Cities during the 1918–1919 Influenza Pandemic," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 298 (2007): 644–54; S. Zhang, P. Yan, B. Winchester, and J. Wang, "Transmissibility of the 1918 Pandemic Influenza in Montreal and Winnipeg of Canada," *Influenza and Other Respiratory Viruses* 4, no. 1 (January 2010): 27–31; Lisa Sattenspiel and D. Ann Herring, "Simulating the Effect of Quarantine on the Spread of the 1918–19 Flu in Central Canada," *Bulletin of Mathematical Biology* 65, no. 1 (2006): 1–26.
- 39 Humphries, *The Last Plague*, 109–11.
- 40 Adelaide Schartner, *Health Units of Alberta* (Edmonton: Health Unit Association of Alberta/Co-Op Press, 1982), 22–24.
- 41 Ibid., 22.

- 42 Ibid., 22–23.
- 43 Ibid., 23–24.
- 44 “Dominion Board of Health,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 24 February 1908, 4. For examples, see “Immigrants from US Spread Smallpox,” *Edmonton Capital*, 5 August 1910, 1; “Smallpox on the Increase,” *Taber Free Press*, 28 May 1908, 4; “Immigrants Should Not Stay in Cities,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 4 April 1914, 6.
- 45 Alan M. Kraut, *Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and the “Immigrant Menace”* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 5–7.
- 46 “Dominion Board of Health,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 24 February 1908, 4. On the development of quarantine, see Humphries, *The Last Plague*.
- 47 Jane E. Jenkins, “Baptism of Fire: New Brunswick’s Public Health Movement and the 1918 Influenza Epidemic,” *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 24, no. 2 (2007): 322–26.
- 48 On the earlier pandemic, see F.B. Smith, “The Russian Influenza in the United Kingdom, 1889–1894,” *Social History of Medicine* 8, no. 1 (1995): 55–73; and Mark Honigsbaum, “The Great Dread: Cultural and Psychological Impacts and Responses to the ‘Russian’ Influenza in the United Kingdom, 1889–1893,” *Social History of Medicine* 23, no. 2 (2010): 299–319. A brief overview of the Canadian experience is provided in Humphries, *The Last Plague*, 58–67.
- 49 A similar struggle took place in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario. See Margaret W. Andrews, “Epidemic and Public Health: Influenza in Vancouver, 1918–1919,” *BC Studies* 34 (Summer 1977): 30; Lux, “The Bitter Flats,” 9; Jones, *Influenza, 1918*, 43; Province of Ontario, *The Report of the Provincial Board of Health, 1918* (Toronto: Government of Ontario, 1919).
- 50 “Fifteen Spanish Influenza Cases Come to Calgary,” *Calgary Herald*, 2 October 1918, 10; for the verbatim text of Mahood’s release, see “Spanish ‘Flu Has Reached the Province,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 4 October 1918, 12.
- 51 “Spanish ‘Flu Has Reached the Province,” 12.
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Applying Modernity: Local Government and the 1919 Federal Housing Scheme in Alberta

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The outbreak of war in 1914 was accompanied in Alberta by calls to defend the nation and the empire and protect home and family life. These calls were broad and emotive. “Home” was a familiar term, but one laden with varied notions about social continuity, tradition, gender, personal comfort, safety, and belonging. The “house,” as the physical space that sheltered the home, was of more than passing importance in the expression of these values. And by 1914 the ideal house could be defined by citing objective criteria that had recently coalesced into a definition of the “modern house.” These criteria drew upon relatively new scientific knowledge about health and the cause of disease and theories about how physical space affected social relationships. This knowledge also guided how houses should best be arranged on lots, and how neighbourhoods should be laid out to create social efficiency, healthful surroundings, and, if it could be had, a beautiful environment in which to live and raise families. When the federal government created a housing scheme for postwar reconstruction in 1919, it drew directly on these understandings about modernity and domestic architecture.

“Modernity” was not a style in domestic architecture but rather a loose set of concepts that posited a healthier, more rational future through science, rational design, and technology. By the outbreak of the First World War, advances in scientific knowledge postulating that germs were a major cause of contagious disease had been broadly accepted. It was also understood that germs could be killed or, at least, their impact mitigated by cleanliness, sunlight, openness, and fresh air.¹ The application of this knowledge in house design necessitated the replacement of nineteenth-century closed-in rooms—which were dark, had poor air circulation, and were hard to keep clean—with open plans in which rooms connected one into the other and had plenty of windows that could open. The public was cautioned that every room had to have at least one window. Logically, living areas in basements were, thus, considered to be unhealthy and depressing. Sanitary standards were further enhanced by smooth walls that would shed dust and hard floor surfaces that were easy to clean. This justified the replacement of lath-and-plaster walls covered with wallpaper with ones finished with smooth plaster or panelling, or

with various wall-board products. While employing such design principles could help prevent disease, it supported broader social values as well. Open plans were conducive to family life because they brought people together, while openness, light, and fresh air also contributed to sound mental and spiritual health and a positive outlook.² For urban houses, the relationship of the house to its community was equally significant. Connection to municipal sewer systems was essential for public sanitation, but houses also needed to be placed within lots (rather than completely fill them) to ensure that sunlight and fresh air could easily reach into the buildings. Sound land-use principles also demanded the prohibition of incompatible land use near housing, and the provision of public open spaces where community life could be focused. As the Canadian town planner Thomas Adams advised in 1916: “The first necessity of good housing is to control all land development by town planning.”³

Although the elements that defined the modern house were broadly accepted by the time of the outbreak of the war as those needed for decent standards of housing, they were not codified by the state or public agencies. Moreover, only the urban middle class and a few wealthier farmers could afford to implement them; and, at the start of the war, many people lived in crowded, small, poorly constructed houses without adequate sanitation or heating. Mortgages were difficult to obtain; wages were low and job security was rare; while on farms, capital was invested in production rather than housing. All of these problems were intensified in Alberta because of its recent settlement. As A.E. Grauer noted in 1939 in his survey of the history of housing in Canada: “The housing difficulties of low income

groups common to all countries have been complicated by conditions peculiar to a young country—rapid growth, inflated real estate values, speculative activity, and influx of poor immigrants and lack of planning.”⁴ Nor did the state see itself as having a role in helping people gain access to better housing through mortgages or other programs.

Alberta thus entered the war with ideals about what contributed to good housing that exceeded what most people could afford. The province’s economy was also fragile. It had recently experienced a five-year period of increasingly frantic growth and land speculation, but this boom had collapsed suddenly in 1912–13. The most telling consequence in Alberta was a rapid drop in the price of land, which had reached extremely high levels because of speculation driven by the optimism and greed of the previous half decade. Although there was a brief revival of activity in Calgary in 1914 after the discovery of oil at Turner Valley, speculative fever was over for a time.⁵

This collapse left many towns and cities with substantial amounts of vacant land that had been surveyed and serviced by local governments with sewage, electrical, and transportation infrastructure in preparation for what was believed would be imminent private development. When the economy collapsed, the prospects for rapid development of this, as well as other subdivided but unserviced land, disappeared, and much of it was soon being forfeited for nonpayment of taxes. The impact of the collapse of land values on local governments was exacerbated because some cities in the province had earlier adopted a single-tax system in which only land, not improvements, was taxed. In 1912 the provincial government had imposed this system across Alberta. As a method of funding local government, the single

tax had many problems, but the most obvious one was that tax revenue fell as land values evaporated. In some places, generous tax incentives that had been offered to attract industry also now weighed heavily on local governments. Although war-related industrial production was minimal on the prairies, unemployment was low because of the enlistment of employable men and a boom in agricultural and resource industries. However, most of the resulting gains disappeared in wartime inflation and, in terms of industrialization, the war probably had a negative impact on the prairies.⁶

For local governments, problems became worse because of falling tax revenues, forfeiture of land for nonpayment of taxes, and slow economic growth. As a result, homeowners, who could ill afford it, were forced to pay higher and higher property taxes. In an attempt to gain control of its finances, Edmonton, for example, brought in a civic income tax from 1918 until 1920; but it was too late. The city and its rate-payers struggled for the next 25 years to overcome the difficulties resulting from the short-sighted policies of the boom years and the added problems of the 1930s.⁷

The war slowed house construction dramatically, and the near collapse of the house-building industry in Alberta ensured that very little new housing was constructed in the province between 1914 and 1918. This meant that there would be even more serious housing shortages at the end of the war than there had been at its beginning. Thus, providing housing was widely recognized as a priority for postwar adjustment and, as Thomas Adams of the Commission of Conservation observed in 1918: “If there is a shortage now, what will be the conditions when several thousand men return from Europe?”⁸ Adams’s

question pointed to the dual housing problem faced at the time of postwar adjustment: taking care of returned soldiers and meeting the already-pressing housing needs of the civilian population.

To grapple with current and impending housing shortages, and the likelihood of social unrest because of it, the federal government developed two separate policies to deal with rural and urban housing. Rural and urban housing needs were different and required different approaches, especially since rural programs further aimed to promote land settlement to create economic stimulus at the war’s end. In 1917, the federal government passed the Soldier Settlement Act, which enabled soldiers to obtain loans on a 20-year term to homestead, to purchase land for farming, or to build a farm house. In Alberta, most of this settlement took place in the Peace River country and in the areas north and east of Edmonton. By the end of 1920, almost 20,000 soldier settlers had taken up land in Canada, 5,785 of them in Alberta.⁹

As part of this land settlement program, the federal Soldier Settlement Board also issued architectural drawings for outbuildings and for four different types of modest houses that could be built easily and quickly by soldier settlers. The plans were developed with prairie conditions in mind and included double floors, storm windows, “liberal use of building paper,” and an exterior wall finish of asphalt and “flint coated ready roofing”—all of which would “make a wind tight job.” The interior was finished with wall board. The houses ranged from a two-room, gable-roof shack of about 22 square metres to a small, six-room, two-storey house with a simple gable roof. All were designed so that they could be easily enlarged in the future. Soldier settlers could

buy building materials at reduced prices, and complete packages of the materials required could be purchased from Eaton's and many lumber yards.¹⁰

To meet the needs of urban people, a postwar adjustment housing scheme was introduced in 1919. It, too, aimed to create employment and stimulate the economy by meeting the obvious demand from low-income urban people for affordable housing. The scheme also reflected tentative stirrings to recognize housing as a social-reform issue. A belief that the war had been caused by materialism, greed, and a lack of cooperation gave new vitality to demands that town planning schemes, public sanitation services, and other civic improvements relevant to housing quality had to be approached systematically, and as part of the state's responsibility for housing.¹¹ Under this scheme, the federal government lent \$25 million at 5 percent interest to the provinces, distributed according to population. The provinces, in turn, lent this to municipalities where jurisdiction in the housing field lay. Loans were made to prospective owners at 5 percent, instead of the current rate of 8 percent, amortized over 20 years. The plan aimed to provide housing in industrial areas for people with incomes of less than \$3,000 per year, which constituted the vast majority. Local governments were required to provide land at cost, by expropriation if necessary, in order to eliminate speculation. The land was expected to represent only about 10 percent of the total cost of the house exclusive of local improvements. As well, each province was required to develop a housing plan according to which the houses would be built, ideally as part of a single, serviced site close to amenities and employment. The federal government drew up recommendations for design and construction, which, while not mandatory, were considered the "minimum standards

for health and comfort, and not as ideals that are difficult to attain." Under the scheme the building cost could not exceed \$3,500 for a seven-room, wood-frame house.¹²

Reflecting ideas about open plans; the connection between light, sanitation, ventilation, and human health; and the relationship between urban planning and the quality of housing, the houses built under this 1919 scheme were to be of "modern character." This meant that each house had to be part of a general urban plan. The house was to face onto a street, or a large courtyard, and be accessible to playgrounds, parks, and other public services. To ensure light and ventilation, the house could not occupy more than 50 percent of the lot. Houses were expected to have proper sewage disposal systems and ample plumbed-in clean water. The bathroom was to be located on the second floor of a two-storey house, and each room, including the bathroom, was to have a window placed so that it would provide light and good cross-ventilation. Basements were not to be used as living space. Ventilation and access to fresh air were further promoted by setting minimum sizes for rooms; furthermore, all ceilings on the second floor were to be at least 2.4 metres high, and were to cover no less than two-thirds of the floor area.¹³

These standards were promoted not only by the federal government but also, with some slight modifications, by the Ontario Housing Committee, whose recommendations received wide coverage in Alberta newspapers and in Canadian building journals. Clearly, what had been the ideals of modern design before the war were now seen as baseline standards that could be applied across the country. Importantly, these standards drew upon scientific knowledge about health and disease. They also asserted basic standards for comfort and family life, and

social amenities. This was one of the most important consequences of the scheme and, as was observed in 1919, “by this legislation, Canada has lifted the study of the homes of her people from a local . . . interest to a national status.”¹⁴ Surprisingly, there were few objections to the entry of the state into a field that had so far been wholly in the hands of private enterprise. The importance of the scheme as a model and the need for affordable housing for workers outweighed its challenge to “the virtues of free competition.”¹⁵

The federal housing scheme was introduced in Alberta against the background of troubled local governments, housing shortages, rising costs, and high urban unemployment. Between 1918 and 1920, Edmonton took possession of 70,000 building lots in the city, almost all for tax arrears; by 1919, Calgary owned two-thirds of the land within its boundaries for the same reason. Despite this land glut, there was a housing shortage that pushed up costs. In 1919 rent in Edmonton and Calgary was up 25 percent over the past 12 months, and even as high as 50 percent over the previous year. Most of these increases were due to a shortage of capital for housing and to the cost of materials and labour that by 1920 had risen by between 70 and 80 percent since 1914. Thus, a house that had cost between \$4,000 and \$6,000 in 1914 now cost between \$6,500 and \$9,500. The only saving grace was that land was cheap. Lots that had cost \$2,000 in 1912 could be had after the war for \$500. Inflation had caused the increase in labour costs; calls for cheaper labour were unrealistic in light of wartime hyper-inflation.¹⁶ At the same time, unemployment was high. In 1919 carpenters in Edmonton lobbied the city and the provincial government to initiate building projects to create employment. As the *Calgary Herald* editorialized, most of those who “went to the front were connected

. . . with building and construction work,” and given the need for housing and employment, house construction would solve a number of postwar social problems.¹⁷

In these conditions, it was not surprising that the provincial government was at first enthusiastic about the federal government’s housing scheme. Premier Charles Stewart estimated that Alberta would be eligible for about \$1.6 million in loans, or enough to build 530 houses at \$3,000 each. This new construction would promote urban renewal and prevent the development of “slum conditions” in downtown Edmonton and Calgary. Further, it would help to improve housing in mining communities such as Drumheller, where housing was extremely poor. Critics of the plan observed that payments on a \$3,000 house, even at 5 percent, would be about \$33 per month including upkeep and taxes, which was more than the “average workingman” could afford. The provincial government also began to reconsider its support. The provincial treasurer argued that a program that encouraged renovation and repair of houses in industrial areas, rather than one directed at new-house construction, would be more beneficial. The province also contended that the federal government should give it the money as a grant, not as a loan. As well, the provincial government was concerned about how it would enforce the minimum construction and urban planning standards required by the scheme, since both of these matters lay in the jurisdiction of local government. Most importantly, it worried that bankrupt municipalities would never repay the loans extended to them by the province. Thus, despite numerous calls for Alberta’s involvement in the program, the premier informed a delegation of mayors in 1920 that it had decided not to participate, and, “as to borrowing money from the

Dominion government on municipal securities, he was inclined to think that every municipality in the province was already pretty well up to, or past, its borrowing powers.”¹⁸

Local governments were not eager to participate in the program. Calgary was concerned that the scheme would add to its civic debt, and refused to assume responsibility for loan repayments by issuing debentures. Nor could Alberta cities agree on a uniform set of goals for the program. Edmonton, for example, argued that the money should be made available for renovating, repairing, and moving houses onto serviced lots, while Medicine Hat wanted to make loans to anyone, including landlords, to build what and how they wanted. Moreover, urban governments refused to provide land from their rapidly growing holdings, and all wanted to charge borrowers full administrative and land costs. In practical terms, this would put the houses built under the scheme even further out of reach of the intended market. Of course, had local governments participated in the program, their land holdings would have been reduced, needed houses would have been built on vacant serviced land, and some revenue would have been generated for the cities. However, no urban government took this view, which, along with the provincial government’s justifiable reluctance to take any risk in the circumstances, scuttled the program in Alberta.

By 1921, when it was repealed, every province except Alberta had passed housing legislation under the program, and all except Alberta and Saskatchewan had received advances under the program. Despite charges by the provincial opposition that Alberta’s failure to participate in the scheme lay solely with a “faint-hearted” provincial government, the program had a number of drawbacks. Indeed,

it was not particularly successful anywhere in the country except in Winnipeg. One basic problem was its reliance on local governments, which were too poor and inefficient, and too narrowly fixated on local concerns to make the program work as a provincial one. Because it made no provision for assisting rural home owners, provinces with large rural populations, such as Alberta and Saskatchewan, were also disadvantaged. In addition, Alberta’s major urban problems were not slums, as they were in some other parts of Canada, but a large number of small, poor-quality, prewar houses scattered throughout urban areas. In this light, the province’s concern for renovation and not new construction was understandable. Moreover, Alberta’s urban housing problems were the legacy of prewar land speculation and over-expansion, and the 1919 housing scheme did nothing to solve these problems and, in certain respects, promised to bring further difficulties by over-extending already-burdened civic governments.¹⁹

By this measure, the 1919 postwar housing scheme was a failure. In Alberta, no houses were built under it, despite the evident need for new housing. Some scholars have contended that its failure helped “to discredit the idea of government assisted home construction” for over a decade.²⁰ Certainly, critics claimed that government involvement in the housing sector was unrealistic, but what the disappointing results actually proved, in this respect, was that local government could not be relied upon for such programs in the housing field, and that provincial and federal governments would, of necessity, have to lead such programs in the future. And, for certain, the 1919 scheme did not change the nature of the Canadian housing market and its contradictions. As historian John Saywell

argues, although the state increasingly accepted responsibility for the safety and sanitation of housing, and thereby increased the costs of “legally adequate housing,” it simultaneously refused to control land costs or interfere with market-driven incomes. As Saywell concludes, the consequences were recurring housing crises in Canada.²¹

Yet in other ways, the 1919 scheme had an inadvertent legacy. For the first time, systematic national standards had been devised as a national baseline to measure adequacy of housing. This drew upon the prewar idealization of the modern house. While the standards that emerged in 1919 would evolve, their outline would shape Canadian housing policy for the next half century. Indeed, in 1934 the National Construction Council, a lobby group and clearing house for the Canadian construction industry, drew up minimum standards of housing under two broad categories: health and amenities. Substandard houses were defined as those dangerous to the occupants’ health or “incompatible with decency,” while amenities set out those things necessary to “provide satisfactory environmental conditions which Canadian customs and standards demand.”²² These standards owed a strong debt to the measures of housing quality that had been devised in the 1919 housing scheme in its attempt to grapple with the legacy of the war.

Notes

This paper, while written by Donald G. Wetherell, relies heavily on Donald G. Wetherell and Irene R. A. Kmet, *Homes in Alberta. Building Trends and Design* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1991), but reworks the content in some respects. The co-editors of this book would like

to thank Wetherell and Kmet and the University of Alberta Press for permission to use this material.

- 1 For examples of such concepts in popular thinking, see *Calgary Herald*, 23 October 1911, and *Farm and Ranch Review*, 20 October 1909.
- 2 Donald G. Wetherell and Irene R. A. Kmet, *Homes in Alberta: Building Trends and Design* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1991), 45–53, 87–93.
- 3 Thomas Adams, “Planning for Civic Betterment in Town and Country,” *American City* 15 (1916): 50.
- 4 A. E. Grauer, *Housing: A Study Prepared for the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations* (Ottawa, 1939), 33.
- 5 Doug Owram, *The Economic Development of Western Canada: An Historical Overview* (Ottawa: Economic Council of Canada, Paper No. 219, 1982), 14–15.
- 6 John Herd Thompson, *The Harvests of War: The Prairie West, 1914–1918* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978), 45. On the single tax, see Donald G. Wetherell and Irene R. A. Kmet, *Town Life: Main Street and the Evolution of Small Town Alberta, 1880–1947* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1995), 47–48.
- 7 Wetherell and Kmet, *Homes in Alberta*, 99–100.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 153.
- 9 John McDonald, “Soldier Settlement and Depression Settlement in the Forest Fringe of Saskatchewan,” *Prairie Forum* 6 (1981): 37–40.
- 10 *Eaton’s Farm Buildings and Equipment* (1919) (a copy of this soldier land settlement scheme catalogue can be found in Provincial Archives of Alberta, 66); *Farm and Ranch Review*, 21 April 1919.
- 11 Wetherell and Kmet, *Homes in Alberta*, 106–7.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 154.
- 13 Provincial Archives of Saskatchewan, Regina, “Report of the Committee of the Privy Council, February 20, 1919,” PC 374, 192.4/298.
- 14 *Social Welfare*, 1 June 1919.
- 15 *Conservation of Life*, January 1919, 1.
- 16 Wetherell and Kmet, *Homes in Alberta*, 155–56.
- 17 *Calgary Herald*, 24 May 1919.
- 18 Wetherell and Kmet, *Homes in Alberta*, 156.

- 19 Ibid., 157.
- 20 John Bacher, "Canadian Housing 'Policy' in Perspective," *Urban History Review* 15 (1986): 5.
- 21 John Saywell, *Housing Canadians: Essays on Residential Construction in Canada* (Ottawa: Economic Council of Canada, Paper No. 24, 1975), 4.
- 22 Wetherell and Kmet, *Homes in Alberta*, 106–7.
- Thompson, John Herd. *The Harvests of War: The Prairie West, 1914–1918*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978.
- Wetherell, Donald G., and Irene R.A. Kmet. *Homes in Alberta: Building Trends and Design*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1991.
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Social Welfare, 1 June 1919.

Soldier Settlement in Alberta, 1917–1931

ALLAN ROWE

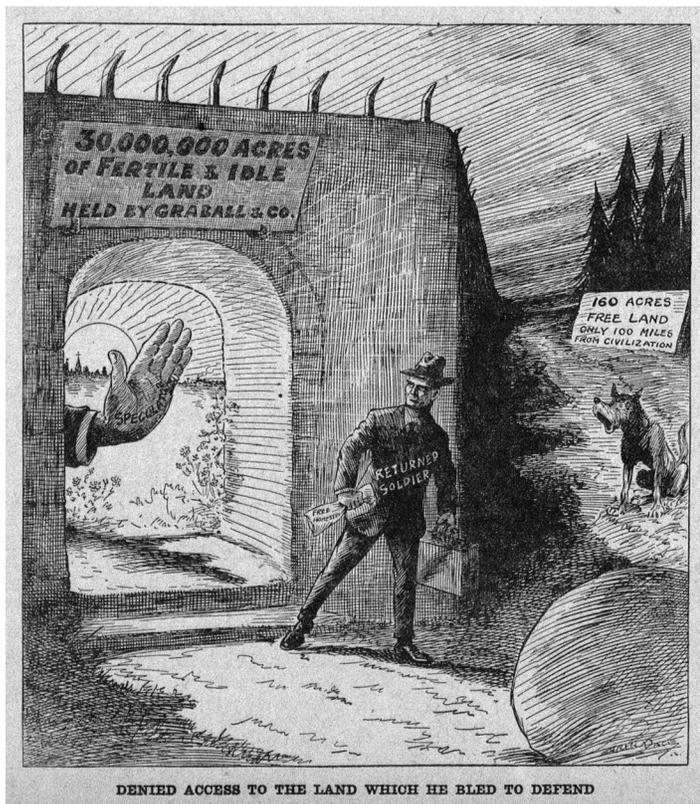
“Alberta is far in advance of the other provinces in respect to the number of soldiers settled on the land” boasted the *Farm and Ranch Review* in June 1920. The Calgary-based publication noted with satisfaction that 4,428 soldiers had taken land in Alberta under the federal government’s postwar soldier settlement plan, with thousands more eligible to participate in the coming years. The article quoted Red Deer MP Michael Clark, who explicitly linked “Alberta’s lead in recruiting” during the war and its lead “in soldier settlement on the land in peace.” “Compared with the results from the whole Dominion,” concluded the *Review*, “this is a most satisfactory position for Alberta.”¹

The program that drew such praise from the *Review* was governed by the Soldier Settlement Act. Passed in 1917, and amended in 1919, the act offered assistance to veterans who wanted to take up agriculture after the Great War. Successful applicants were eligible for land grants and financial aid. While soldier settlement was a national program, the trend of especially high participation in Alberta, noted by the *Review* in 1920, continued for the rest of the decade. No province attracted more participants

than Alberta: of the 31,670 veterans who took advantage of the program, almost one-third (9,883) settled in Alberta.²

The optimistic tone of the *Review*, however, obscured a more sober reality. While the program certainly helped many ex-servicemen transition back to civilian life, soldier settlement was far from an unmitigated success. From the outset, the scheme was plagued by significant problems, including economic depression and excessive bureaucracy. Perhaps most significant, however, was the government’s unrealistic expectation that soldier settlement would help return Canada to an idealized notion of rural, agrarian ideals—in the face of growing industrialization, class conflict, and regional discontent—by bolstering loyal, steady citizenship. These hopes were compromised by their unrealistic scope, as well as by contradictory anxieties about the suitability of ex-servicemen (and their wives) for such crucial, nation-building responsibilities. The result was a program that could never live up to the high expectations placed on it.

The scheme, launched in 1917, was rooted in a long tradition of soldier settlement in Canadian



This political cartoon from the *Grain Grower's Guide*, 6 March 1918, shows how obstacles were put in the way of potential soldier settlers.

history. Both the French and British colonial regimes had offered soldiers incentives to settle in North America prior to 1867, while the Dominion government had granted land to Canadian soldiers after the North West Rebellion (1885) and the South African War (1899–1902).³ The scope of the Soldier Settlement Act (1917), however, eclipsed these earlier military-colonization experiments. The legislation offered veterans 160-acre “soldier grants” of

Dominion land and loans of up to \$2,500 for stock or equipment. The program was administered by the Soldier Settlement Board, which reserved all “undisposed” federal land within 25 kilometres of railway lines in the Prairie West for soldier settlement.⁴ The goal of the plan, according to Minister of the Interior W.J. Roche, was “to assist the returned soldier and increase agricultural production.”⁵ The unspoken objective, however, was to fill unclaimed Dominion land—soldier settlement would help complete prairie agricultural settlement by directing veterans to regions where significant homestead land was still available.

One such region, prominent in the government's early vision of soldier settlement, was Alberta's Peace River District. Shortly after the act was passed, Ottawa dispatched survey teams to the region to subdivide land specifically for returning veterans. Critics were sceptical—Liberal MP William Pugsley scornfully predicted “not one man in a thousand would be attracted by an invitation to settle on land in the Peace River Country.”⁶ The surveyors disagreed, reporting that “a considerable number of quarter sections” were suitable for cultivation.⁷ By early 1919, 800 veterans had taken up homesteads in Peace River, and surveyors were having trouble keeping pace with demand.⁸

Despite this promising start, the government's determination to direct settlement to unclaimed Dominion land was widely criticized. In January 1918, both Alberta Premier Charles Stewart and the Alberta branch of the Great War Veterans Association (GWVA) urged Ottawa to make more land available for soldier settlement.⁹ In March 1918, the *Grain Grower's Guide* condemned the scheme for granting isolated land to veterans while leaving the best available prairie land in the hands of speculators.¹⁰

The GWVA kept up the pressure through the summer of 1918, calling on Ottawa to expropriate land from enemy aliens and speculators, and to open up “idle” Indian reserve land for soldier settlement.¹¹ Pressure on the government mounted and, in September 1918, the head of the Returned Soldier Commission conceded privately that Ottawa would be “forced to take some action” and expand the program because “returned men will not take up land 500 miles north of Edmonton.”¹²

In 1919 the government amended the act and greatly expanded the soldier settlement program. The number of staff was increased to provide better oversight and assistance for soldier settlers, while the money available to borrow was tripled to \$7,500. The board was authorized to acquire Indian reserve land and, through the 1920s, 35,000 hectares were opened for soldier settlement, including 2,700 hectares from the Bobtail Reserve near Hobbema and more than 8,000 acres from the Saddle Lake Reserve near St. Paul de Métis.¹³ The board was also authorized to acquire forest reserves, school lands, and privately owned lands, opening up significant new opportunities for soldier settlement.

In Alberta, the board acquired 7,300 hectares of land west of Drumheller from the Pope Grazing Lease, and an additional 4,500 hectares of Hudson’s Bay Company land east of Rowley.¹⁴ Most crucially, applicants could use loans to purchase privately owned land and improved farms.¹⁵ Ottawa did not abandon the hope that soldier settlement would fill unclaimed homestead land—56 townships were surveyed in northern Alberta explicitly for soldier settlement after 1919.¹⁶ However, the amendments removed the narrow focus on Dominion land and offered veterans greater choice on where to settle. The impact was dramatic and immediate. While only

2,000 men had participated in the program prior to these amendments, the board was receiving 600 applications per week by August 1919.¹⁷ A substantial majority of veterans (77 percent) who participated in the program after the amendments chose to buy private land rather than accept free homesteads.¹⁸

The expansion of the program reflected the government’s confidence that soldier settlement could serve as a pillar of Canada’s postwar transition. Canadians were justifiably proud of the country’s contributions to the Allied victory, but that sense of national achievement masked serious social, political, and economic fissures—class conflict, Anglo-French tension, resurgent nativism, and regional discontent—that threatened Canada’s orderly adjustment to peacetime. The capacity of soldier settlement to counter this threat was articulated in June 1919 by then Interior Minister Arthur Meighen:

We believe that we cannot better fortify this country against the waves of unrest and discontent that now assail us . . . than by making the greatest possible proportion of the soldiers of our country settlers upon our land. Of course, every class of citizen is necessary to constitute the national life, but the class of citizen that counts most in the determination of the stability of a country against such forces is undoubtedly the basic class—the agricultural class. That class is the mainstay of the nation.¹⁹

This speech, delivered a week after the Winnipeg General Strike, fit within in a deeply conservative vision of Canada that idealized the moral superiority of rural life.²⁰ In Meighen’s view, soldier settlement would facilitate Canada’s smooth transition to

peacetime by returning the country to its agrarian roots. And, while the program was national in scope, the emphasis on social renewal through agricultural settlement clearly pointed to the Prairie West, which had long been viewed in utopian terms by those seeking to foster social and moral improvement.²¹

Alberta remained at the forefront of soldier settlement as the program grew over the next five years.

By the end of 1924, 24,148 veterans had received loans, with just over 7,000 settling in Alberta.²² In addition, at least 2,400 veterans had settled in Alberta on soldier land grants without financial assistance.²³ Overall, soldier settlers had occupied 8.5 million hectares of land in Alberta from 1917 to 1924, representing 36 percent of the Dominion total.²⁴ Embedded within these statistics are thousands

Returned soldier's home, implements and some of his stock assisted by the Soldier Settlement Board. Tp 74-3-6, Peace River district. Alberta, 1920. Canada. Dept of Mines and Technical Surveys/Library and Archives Canada, PA-018311.



of individual and family narratives of success and failure, happiness and hardship, and the transition from military to civilian life. One example promoted by the board as representative of Alberta's veterans was Adolphus Lamoureux, who had lived there since moving to Fort Saskatchewan as a child in 1883.²⁵ A carpenter by trade, Lamoureux enlisted in the 151st Battalion (Canadian Expeditionary Force) in January 1916. In 1918, he received a medical discharge and returned to Alberta, claiming a soldier grant and accepting a \$2,500 loan from the board for stock and equipment. Despite early difficulties, Lamoureux was running a profitable farm near Mallaig in east-central Alberta by the end of 1920.²⁶

The board characterized Lamoureux's success story as "fairly typical" of soldier settlers in Alberta. Statistical evidence provides some support for the claim that the province's soldier settlers made good progress through 1921. In 1920–21, for example, 72.6 percent of Alberta's soldier settlers who had received loans were able to make their repayments, roughly in line with the national average of 77 percent.²⁷ By the end of 1921, however, Alberta and the rest of the prairie region were on the verge of an agricultural crisis. The price of wheat fell from a peak of \$2.31 a bushel (1919) to a mere \$0.77 (1922), while periodic drought took a significant toll on the wheat crop.²⁸ Though this was a hardship common to all farmers, soldier settlers were especially vulnerable, given that most had only been on their farms for one or two years before the downturn hit. By 1923 soldier settlers in Alberta were facing serious problems. In the 1922–23 collection year, only 49.6 percent of Alberta's indebted soldier settlers made repayments on their loans, and only 29 percent of the total money due was collected—statistics that placed Alberta last

in Canada.²⁹ Alberta veterans and politicians took the lead in calling for financial relief for soldier settlers. The Alberta GWVA lobbied the government to ease loan repayments and revalue veterans' land, while E.J. Garland, MP for Bow River, called for similar measures in parliament.³⁰

Despite such pressure, the federal government proved reluctant to seriously consider significant reforms. Rather than acknowledge the impact of the agricultural crisis, the government insisted through the mid-1920s that the "personal factor was a major reason for failure"—that those who had failed to meet their repayment obligations were likely morally deficient.³¹ This claim was extraordinary and illustrated a fundamental contradiction within the soldier settlement program. On one hand, the government celebrated veterans as "the backbone . . . of the nation" and "the best of its manhood"—the ideal candidates to stabilize Canada and return the country to its agrarian roots.³² At the same time, the government was clearly anxious about the possibility that veterans would return home disabled or robbed of their personal initiative, accustomed to taking orders rather than making their own decisions.³³ This concern was embedded within the settlement board's own preliminary screening process, designed to disqualify anyone who was "indifferent," "thrifless," "careless," or otherwise represented a "moral risk"; only applicants who exhibited "self-reliance," "initiative, competence and resourcefulness" would be accepted—qualities that one would expect the "best of Canada's manhood" to have in abundance.³⁴

This essential contradiction manifested itself in the government's suspicion that difficulties encountered by settlers were of their own making rather

than the result of larger economic forces. The example of Henry Weed, farm inspector for the Monitor sub-district in southern Alberta, illustrates how this suspicion could turn the board's bureaucracy into an intrusive system of micromanagement. The farm inspector system was originally put in place in 1919 to provide support to soldier settlers but, as J.M. Powell notes, it could evolve into an "extremely intricate, if somewhat paternalistic" process of oversight and control.³⁵ In early 1921, Weed sent out a remarkable letter detailing his instructions and expectations for the upcoming year. The inspector noted that he wanted more soldier settlers to have "a definite goal, a plan for the future, a well thought out system in laying out the farm."³⁶ He instructed farmers to "take a complete inventory, in duplicate" of their equipment to prove they were ready for the upcoming year. In perhaps the most paternalistic part of the letter, Weed wrote: "I plan to take a picture of every settler's place this summer and send some to Ottawa. I took a few this summer and Ottawa is well pleased with my settlers' houses; try and have your place as neat and attractive, and a good clean garden, as it is a pleasure to feel that my settlers show up as well as any."³⁷

While the farm inspector system undoubtedly rendered important service to many veterans, Weed's letter illustrates how it could also result in extreme (and unwelcome) levels of supervision. When asked to provide a character reference for Weed, local businessman George Lucas praised the inspector for taking "an almost fatherly interest in the settlers," though he conceded that some settlers complained Weed was too "busy with their business."³⁸

This paternalism also extended into the domestic sphere through the Home Service Branch. The branch was established across Canada as part of the expansion of the soldier settlement program,

and included offices in Edmonton (opened in August 1919) and Calgary (January 1920).³⁹ It was led by Jean Muldrew, who had spent several years in Alberta as principal of Red Deer Ladies' College before serving as the director of household economy with the Canada Food Board during the war.⁴⁰ The mandate of the branch was to assist wives of soldier settlers (particularly newly arrived brides) through publications, home visits, and short courses in home economics. Through the end of 1921, the branch in Alberta made more than 1,500 home visits and held short courses in Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, Lethbridge, Grande Prairie, and Peace River.⁴¹ It also connected wives to other women's organizations, including the United Farm Women of Alberta and the Women's Institute, which helped ease transition to rural life. Perhaps most significantly, the home visits revealed the "lack of maternal care in rural and isolated areas." Responding to this problem, the branch served as an important health resource, providing information on pre- and post-natal care and arranging for nurse visits to remote homesteads.⁴²

Despite these valuable contributions, the branch was ultimately guided by the same approach that manifested itself in the farm inspector system—namely, that those involved in soldier settlement could not be trusted with the responsibilities assigned to them. The board conceded that good wives could be a "great help" to a farm, but also warned that wives could be a "serious handicap" if they were "discontented, not interested in farm life, or unthrifty and indolent." It bluntly warned that it was "impossible to estimate the financial injury" a wife could do to a farm if her "mental attitude and her physical condition" undercut her spouse's efforts and "rendered him incapable of repaying" his loan.

Women were thus viewed at once as an asset and a potential threat to the success of soldier settlement; like the farmers, they required careful oversight.⁴³

The federal government finally agreed, in 1927, to revalue downward soldier settlement land, thus providing some economic relief to veterans by lowering debt. By that time, however, the agricultural economy had recovered and Alberta's soldier settlers were on a stronger footing. In 1927–28 indebted soldier settlers in the Edmonton District managed to pay back 72 percent of the money they owed, ranking the district first in Canada for repayments; veterans in the Calgary District paid back 66 percent, which was slightly above the national average of 63 percent.⁴⁴ The recovery, however, was short-lived, as the Great Depression dealt a massive blow to the province's remaining soldier settlers. The vast majority of Alberta's veterans were unable to make their loan payments after 1930 and, by the end of 1931, only 3,371 (34 percent) of the province's original soldier settlers remained on the land.⁴⁵ In 1931 the Soldier Settlement Board was dissolved and the government's experiment in postwar colonization was over.

In the end, judging the success or failure of soldier settlement in Alberta is a highly subjective exercise. The program certainly failed to achieve the lofty goals set by the federal government. Soldier settlement was not a catalyst for rural revitalization, as Alberta (and the rest of Canada) continued to urbanize throughout the interwar years. The program did not contribute meaningfully to national unity—indeed, given the extent to which the farmers' movement (and particularly the United Farmers of Alberta) championed the veterans' cause against Ottawa, the program was likely an additional irritant in the federal government's relationship with the

province. Statistically, the program certainly appears to have been a failure, with two-thirds of Alberta's soldier settlers giving up on farming by 1931.

A different perspective, however, is offered by John Black and Charles Hyson in a 1944 article published in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*. The authors quote a letter from Charles Murchison, director of Canadian soldier settlement, who argued that it was misguided to measure the success of soldier settlement strictly on the basis of "cold figures of an orthodox balance sheet." Rather, Murchison contended that the program had allowed veterans "to get their war experiences out of their systems" before moving on with their lives. He suggested that many soldier settlers had never intended to farm permanently but rather had used the program as a springboard to other ventures where they were "soundly integrated" back into the Canadian mainstream.⁴⁶ Murchison may have been rationalizing the program's lack of success, but his analysis raised a very important point: judging soldier settlement on the basis of how many men successfully farmed through the early 1930s assumes that they all shared the same ambition to take up farming as a permanent vocation. The program may not have achieved all that the government hoped, but as Murchison suggests, it may have helped thousands of veterans successfully transition to civilian life, including those who had already quit farming by 1931.

Notes

- 1 "Alberta Leads in Soldier Settlement," *Farm and Ranch Review* 16, no. 12 (21 June 1920): 35.
- 2 J.M. Powell, *Soldier Settlement in Canada, 1915–1930* (Clayton, AU: Monash University, Department of Geography, 1979), 27.

- 3 Desmond Morton and Glenn Wright, *Winning the Second Battle: Canadian Veterans and the Return to Civilian Life, 1915–1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 10.
- 4 Soldier Settlement Board (hereafter SSB), *First Report of the Soldier Settlement Board of Canada*, 31 March 1921, 25.
- 5 Kent Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes: Reconstruction and Soldier Settlement in the Empire between the Wars* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1995), 63.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 64.
- 7 Canada, *Sessional Paper No. 25a*, Report of the Topographical Survey Board, 1920, 19. See also Judy Larmour, *Laying Down the Lines: A History of Land Surveying in Alberta* (Calgary: Brindle and Glass, 2005), 177–78.
- 8 Canada, Report of the Topographical Survey Board, 1920, 19.
- 9 Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes*, 107.
- 10 *Grain Growers' Guide*, 6 March 1918; Sarah Carter, “An Infamous Proposal: Prairie Indians and Soldier Settlement after World War I,” *Manitoba History* 37 (1999): 14.
- 11 Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes*, 74; Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, 103–4.
- 12 Glenbow Museum and Archives, Garnet Ellis Fond, M 363: letter from Ellis to his mother, 6 September 1918. Ellis was recruited to be part of the scheme as a land surveyor in 1918, and later served as a farm inspector in northern Alberta.
- 13 Carter, “An Infamous Proposal,” 9; SSB, *Fourth Report of the Soldier Settlement Board of Canada*, 31 December 1925, 8; SSB, *Sixth Report of the Soldier Settlement Board of Canada*, 31 December 1927, 7.
- 14 SSB, *Fourth Report of the Soldier Settlement Board of Canada*, 8–9.
- 15 Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes*, 77.
- 16 Larmour, *Laying Down the Lines*, 180.
- 17 Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, 145.
- 18 Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes*, 80.
- 19 As quoted in Powell, *Soldier Settlement in Canada*, 10.
- 20 The idea that postwar soldier settlement would act as a bulwark against the forces of class conflict and urban disorder was very popular in Australia as well. See Ken Fry, “Soldier Settlement and the Australian Agrarian Myth after the First World War,” *Labour History* 48 (May 1985): 29–43.
- 21 R. Douglas Francis and Chris Kitzan, “Introduction,” in *The Prairie West as Promised Land*, edited by R. Douglas Francis and Chris Kitzan (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007), x–xii.
- 22 SSB, *Third Report of the Soldier Settlement Board of Canada*, 31 December 1924, 13.
- 23 As noted by Powell (*Soldier Settlement in Canada*, 27–28), there are significant variances in the year-to-year tallies of this group in the board’s annual reports. Whether this reflected problems with recordkeeping or (as Powell suggests) a deliberate effort by the board to skew numbers to improve the statistical measurement of the program’s success is unclear.
- 24 SSB, *Third Report of the Soldier Settlement Board of Canada*, 15.
- 25 SSB, *First Report of the Soldier Settlement Board of Canada*, 161–62.
- 26 Biographical information on Adolphus Lamoureux taken from SSB, *First Report of the Soldier Settlement Board of Canada*, 161–62; Mallaig History Committee, *Precious Memories = mémoires précieuses: Mallaig – Therman, 1906–1992* (Mallaig, AB: Mallaig History Committee, 1993), 565–66; and Lamoureux’s attestation papers, available on the Library and Archives Canada website, *Soldiers of the First World War – CEF*, URL: <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/cef/index-e.html>, retrieved 15 November 2013.
- 27 SSB, *Second Report of the Soldier Settlement Board of Canada*, 31 March 1923, 28. The collection year in western Canada, when indebted soldier settlers were expected to make repayments on their loans, ran from early October to early August.
- 28 Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, *Alberta: A New History* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1990), 198.
- 29 SSB, *Second Report of the Soldier Settlement Board of Canada*, 30.

- 30 Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, 152; Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes*, 103.
- 31 Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes*, 99.
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- 33 Desmond Morton, “The Canadian Veterans’ Heritage from the Great War,” in *The Veterans Charter and Post-World War II Canada*, edited by Peter Neary and J.L. Granatstein (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998), 21.
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- 35 Powell, *Soldier Settlement in Canada*, 8–9.
- 36 Provincial Archives of Alberta, W.J. Blair Fonds, PR 1507, ACC.1984.407/206. The letter is undated; however, it offered New Year’s greetings, and the chronological order of the file suggests that it was sent out in January 1921. Unless otherwise stated, all of the quotes are taken from this letter.
- 37 Ibid.
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First World War Centennial Commemoration in Alberta Museums

RORY CORY

For the centennial of the First World War, museums across Canada are rallying to commemorate this important and formative event in our nation's history. What is often lacking in commemorative efforts is the material culture—the physical history. Viewing historical objects is the primary way in which many people connect with history, and to reach this audience, museums must be key players in providing this means of commemoration. To fulfill this public trust obligation, The Military Museums in Calgary are coordinating a consortium of western Canadian museums that are presenting exhibits on the conflict, on display from 2014 through to 2018. This cooperative effort has allowed joint advertising, but also coordination of access to resources such as artifacts. The following article provides a summary of exhibits across Alberta that are part of this initiative.

Among the most significant commemorative events in the province was the exhibit developed and hosted by The Military Museums in Calgary (28 July to 15 December 2014). The *Wild Rose Overseas: Albertans in the Great War* exhibit comprised 2,000 square feet and was one of the largest temporary heritage-based exhibits mounted in the museum's

Founders' Gallery. The planning began in 2006 when it was slotted into the exhibit schedule. The original intention was to embrace a national perspective. However, in the course of identifying artifacts and thematic areas, it quickly became apparent that a more focused approach was necessary to fit within the available space. Therefore, the geographic scope was modified to centre on Alberta. Similarly, the thematic focus was narrowed to only military themes, again partly because of space constraints and also in keeping with the museum's mandate.

The core organizational structure of the exhibit was focused on the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) and the infantry battalions. This provided the best way to present balanced coverage of military service from across the province, since the battalions were raised on municipal or regional lines. Artifacts associated with these battalions were also the easiest to identify. However, supporting units such as the artillery and medical services also needed to be discussed to give the most complete picture of Alberta's military commitment. Since The Military Museums is a tri-service (navy, army, and air force) organization, it was necessary to represent all three.

A total of 27 battalions were raised in Alberta, with an additional eight battalions partially raised in or otherwise associated with the province. Since there were too many battalions to have individual themes shaped around each one, groupings were required and, ultimately, the focus came to be on units that had perpetuated their memory after the war. To provide context for the overseas experience and what Albertans did during the fighting, it was also necessary to discuss key battles and the role played in them by units from Alberta and some of their individual members. Other themes were explored to give a full picture of military service during the war, including training, prisoner-of-war experiences, weaponry, German militaria, demobilization, and remembrance.

Once themes had been identified, it was necessary to select representative items that would engage the public. Regimental badges, medals, and uniforms were known to have less appeal than items that connected with personal stories. A broad spectrum of different artifact types was also needed for maximum visual interest and impact, as well as to give better representation of First World War material culture in general. With the stories of the battalions as the core organizational principle of the exhibit, it was also important that the artifact either be clearly associated with a battalion or have interesting provenance connecting it with one.

Artifacts for the exhibit came primarily from the collections of The Military Museums. Since planning began long before the exhibit was mounted, exhibit organizers were also able to draw on new donations. Some additional artifacts not in the museum's collections needed to be acquired, and an intensive search for them began in 2013. The organizers next looked to the province's senior museums: the

Glenbow Museum in Calgary and the Royal Alberta Museum (RAM) in Edmonton. Items from regional museums were obtained to cover gaps; for example, from the Galt Museum and Archives in Lethbridge and the Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre in Medicine Hat. Searches for artifacts went hand-in-hand with investigations of archival holdings. For several years, temporary displays at The Military Museums had relied, in large measure, on archival materials as display objects. For example, certificates have great visual appeal and convey much information; letters have much stronger emotional impact when presented as originals. Museum collections and archival holdings are too often held completely separately when, in many cases, an original donation came in with components for both that together tell a complete story.

Initially there were gaps, as some of the battalions had few artifacts associated with them, beyond badges. However, as more donations came in from the public and more research was done, all themes and units had good representation of material culture items. These ranged from swagger sticks to pistols, trench art to commemorative medallions, flags, and more. Rare items included a message canister used by carrier pigeons and a jewelled Turkish officer's sword captured by one of the few Albertans to serve in Palestine during the war. All had very good provenance connecting them to a specific Alberta individual or battalion, and there was very little reliance on badges in the end. Many items had compelling stories associated with them, for example a book that had been damaged by shrapnel while being carried by an individual killed by the same shrapnel. Many represented noteworthy individuals such as Frederick Augustus Bagley, one of the oldest to enlist, having come out West with the North-West



(left) Pigeon message canister. This particular canister was used by a signaller from the 187th Battalion from Alberta to send messages across the battlefield when the wires on field telephones were cut. Collection of the Army Museum of Alberta. Photo: Julie Vincent Photography; (right) Next of Kin Medallion issued for Thomas Ralph Shearer (pictured here), one of three brothers who enlisted at Medicine Hat. Two were killed, including Thomas Ralph, and one came home wounded. Next of Kin Medallions were minted by the British government and given to the families of all soldiers from the Empire who were killed. Thomas Ralph served in the Royal Naval Air Service and was killed in an airplane accident. Collection of the Naval Museum of Alberta. Photo: Julie Vincent Photography.

Mounted Police 40 years earlier; the three Shearer brothers who enlisted at Medicine Hat but only one of whom survived the war; and Harold McGill and Emma Griffis, whose love letters were presented along with their uniforms. Well-known Albertans—such as Wop May (who was the last Allied pilot

chased by Baron Manfred von Richthofen, “the Red Baron,” on the day the Baron was shot down in 1918), Harold Riley (a former MLA and one of the founders of the Old Timers’ Association), and Sam Steele (who had fought in the 1885 North West Rebellion and the Boer War)—were also featured.

Some of the more interesting and unusual objects were not associated with battalions but rather with the more general themes. These included a wheelbarrow issued to a returning soldier as part of the Soldier Settlement Act, which sought to direct veterans into farming; and the table created by a disabled soldier while convalescing as part of a work-reintegration project. While mundane, these items conveyed important information about the theme of demobilization. In the end, many more objects were identified than could be used in the exhibit, and these were culled based on such criteria as lack of provenance, limited availability for loan, and the high cost of borrowing them. While provision had been made to acquire highly desirable objects from national institutions such as the Canadian War Museum, in the end this proved unnecessary.

Photographs were needed to illustrate the text panels, and a wealth of them were available from

various archives, in particular the Glenbow and Library and Archives Canada. Since both institutions post their holdings online, their photos were the easiest to access. As with the artifacts, a variety of visually interesting subjects was desired, rather than just posed group company or battalion photos. Representations of training, frontline service, or other “action” photos were preferred and generally obtained.

With respect to museum interpretation, use of the “first-person voice” for impact and audience engagement was preferred. This has been a practice in Founders’ Gallery exhibits since 2009. The Military Museums, for example, have enriched exhibits pertaining to the Second World War by conducting oral history interviews with veterans, portions of which were then played, with both video and audio components, at listening and projection stations. Because such oral history research could not be conducted



Wheelbarrow issued to a veteran of Alberta’s 31st Battalion after the First World War to help integrate him into agricultural production as part of the Soldier Settlement Act. Collection of the Army Museum of Alberta. Photo: Julie Vincent Photography.

for *Wild Rose Overseas*, taped interviews were sought. Some were found in the museum's own collections and others were obtained from the Glenbow Archives. This allowed the exhibit to include the "first person" voice as well. An unexpected benefit of the need to use these materials was that the museum was able to pay for the digitization of these analog materials that would otherwise have continued to degrade and eventually have been lost.

A number of regional museums in the province have military content as part of their permanent exhibit galleries. These include the Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre in Medicine Hat, the Crowsnest Museum in Coleman, the Fort Museum in Fort Macleod, the Musée Héritage Museum in St. Albert, the Claresholm and District Museum in Claresholm, the Galt Museum and Archives in Lethbridge, the Museum of the Highwood in High River, and Lougheed House in Calgary.

For their First World War centenaries, several museums chose to highlight specific units associated with their communities. The Esplanade focused on the 175th Battalion, 3rd Canadian Mounted Rifles, and 13th Canadian Mounted Rifles, which were specifically raised in and associated with Medicine Hat. As with *Wild Rose Overseas*, the Esplanade borrowed materials from a variety of collections across the province including the Glenbow, the RAM, and The Military Museums. In this sense, the centennial represented a real convergence and opportunity for collaboration among Alberta museums. The exhibit (titled *Medicine Hat's War 1914–1918*) ran from August to November 2014. Similarly, the Crowsnest Museum chose to highlight the role of the 192nd Battalion, the only one raised in the Crowsnest Pass. The exhibit is timed to coincide with the centennial of the formation of the 192nd Battalion in 1916, rather than

the more general centennial of the start of the war. The Fort Museum also concentrated on the sole unit raised locally, the 191st Battalion. However, similar to the Esplanade exhibit, it also sought to feature individuals from the Fort Macleod area who joined other units such as the 13th Canadian Mounted Rifles. There was also coverage of First Nations' soldiers, in particular the Mountain Horse brothers

Steel helmet, 31st Battalion Canadian Expeditionary Force. This helmet was painted as a commemorative souvenir with the battle honours for all the battles that the 31st Battalion out of Calgary fought in. Collection of the Army Museum of Alberta. Photo: Julie Vincent Photography.





War Deed—Story Robe created by Mike Mountain Horse, from the Kainai (Blood) First Nation in southwest Alberta, with the assistance of Ambrose Two Chiefs, to commemorate his overseas service with Alberta's 50th Battalion. Collection of the Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre.

from the Blood (Kainai) Reserve. Albert Mountain Horse enlisted soon after the beginning of the war and served in the Canadian Army Service Corps, but died of pneumonia a little over a year later. His brother, Mike Mountain Horse, enlisted in the 191st

Battalion but fought in the 50th Battalion. He created a wonderful “story” robe as a pictographic record of his overseas exploits, which is held in the Esplanade collections. The Fort Museum’s display ran from May to October 2014.

Other museums chose to tell the story of noted individuals, rather than specific units. The Musée Héritage Museum had a unique topic—that of Francophone participation from the area. The exhibit focused on experiences of local men who had been born in Belgium or France and left Alberta to serve with those armies, as well as other Francophones from the area who enlisted in the CEF. Titled *Joining Up! Our Men and Women in the First World War*, the exhibit ran from June to November 2014 and filled half of the temporary gallery at the museum. A separate exhibit titled *Brigadier-General Raymond Brutinel and the Motor Machine Gun Brigades* focused on one of the most notable soldiers from the area and ran from September to November 2014. Brutinel

established the Motor Machine Gun Brigade during the war with his own money. A third exhibit, *The Home Front: Life in St. Albert during the First World War*, was also shown from June to August.

The Claresholm and District Museum also told stories of local individuals, but with the unique perspective of comparing and contrasting the experiences of 18–21-year-olds serving in the war to the experiences of that age group today, and different attitudes toward patriotism. The Claresholm exhibit extends from May 2014 to December 2018, one of the few to run through the centennial of all the war years.

For the Galt Museum and Archives' exhibit *Lethbridge's Experiences in the First World War—1914/1915*, the focus was on the life of Lethbridge's most

Summary panel for the Musée Héritage Museum exhibit *Joining Up! Our Men and Women in the First World War*. The exhibit, in part, focused on experiences of local men who had been born in Belgium or France and left Alberta to serve with those armies, as well as other Francophones from the area who enlisted in the CEF. Courtesy of the Musée Héritage Museum.

St Albert Remembers...

Help us commemorate the start of the First World War through three very special exhibits.

The Musée Héritage Museum is presenting three exhibits to mark the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War. The first recognizes the contributions made by those who served, introducing the visitor to the individuals who gave so much. The second looks at the impact of the war at home and what the community did to support the war effort. The third exhibit is about an amazing one-time resident of St. Albert, Brigadier-General Raymond Brutinel, who after having more than one exceptional career in Alberta, went on to play a major role in the defence of his homeland, France.



Image Credit
Musée Héritage Museum, St. Albert Historical Society funds, P52201

CHRONIQUE LOCALE

COMPAGNIE FRANÇAISE DE L'ALBERTA
1914
 Les Français ont mobilisé, dans les rangs de l'armée canadienne, un grand nombre de volontaires. Parmi eux, beaucoup ont rejoint l'armée française pour servir en France. Ils ont été envoyés dans les unités de l'armée française et ont participé à de nombreuses batailles. Parmi eux, beaucoup ont été tués. Un d'eux, le capitaine Raymond Brutinel, a été promu brigadier-général et a joué un rôle important dans la défense de la France.



Image Credit (top to bottom)
 Excerpt from le courrier de l'ouest, September 10, 1914, pg. 4, Bruce Peel Special Collections Library, University of Alberta
 Emile Zeman in France, 1919, Musée Héritage Museum, St. Albert Historical Society funds, 2003 01 189

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The Home Front

Life in St Albert during the First World War
June 17 – August 31

What was St Albert like at the outbreak of the war and how did its citizens react to the conflict? Roughly ten percent of the population of this small, primarily Francophone town went to serve in Europe. Those at home were left to keep the town running, raise money and supplies for the war effort and harvest crops to send overseas for the troops. They rallied to support not only the war effort but also each other in this time of stress and great loss. Through photos, news clippings and artifacts, this exhibit looks at what life was like in St Albert leading up to, during and immediately following the First World War.



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Musée Héritage Museum, St Albert Historical Society fonds, 2003.01.1764
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Brigadier-General Raymond Brutinel

and the Motor Machine Gun Brigades
September 9 – November 16





This exhibit is the remarkable story of a remarkable man. After serving on one of the last sailing ships, the young Brutinel joined the French Military. In 1904, he moved his family to Alberta. His contributions to the fledgling province include serving as editor for *Le Courrier de l'Ouest*, Alberta's first French language newspaper, surveying routes and resources for the Grand Trunk Railway, playing a central role in the development of the Coal Branch and building the Interurban Railway between Edmonton and St Albert. When the First World War began he served in the Canadian Forces, creating the Motor Machine Gun Brigade which he tirelessly championed as a new tactical force in modern warfare. His brigade played a vital role in many crucial battles. During the Second World War he continued the fight, working with the French resistance, to yet again free his homeland.

Image Credits (top to bottom):
Musée Héritage Museum, St Albert Historical Society fonds, 2003.01.795
Brutinel archive
Brutinel archive

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Two commemorative exhibits at the Musée Héritage Museum, St. Albert, showcased home front history and artifacts and highlighted a local settler and entrepreneur, Raymond Brutinel, who established the Motor Machine Gun Brigades. Courtesy of the Musée Héritage Museum.

well-known soldier: General J.S. Stewart. In addition, the exhibit explored the initial response and mobilization efforts, Lethbridge's militia history, the spread of patriotism, the rise of xenophobia, and recruitment. It ran from May to August 2014.

The Museum of the Highwood also had a small exhibit in 2014 on local individuals who served, including the poignant story of its local championship polo team whose members enlisted together but none of whom returned. This museum's contribution to the centennial deserves special mention, in light of the devastation of 80 percent of its collections as a result of the June 2013 flood in southern Alberta.

The exhibit set up at Lougheed House in Calgary from October 2014 to January 2015 offered an interesting mix focusing on specific units and local

individuals. Highlights included photos and artifacts from the Lougheed House collection exploring the roles that Clarence and Edgar Lougheed played in the war, as well as objects provided by The Military Museums showing connections between the Lougheed family and several regiments that fought in the war, namely Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and Lord Strathcona's Horse. Senator Sir James and Lady Isabella Lougheed's work during and after the war, including helping to establish what is now Veteran's Affairs, was also explored. The display comprised almost 1,000 square feet. Also, the City of Calgary Corporate Archives mounted a largely photo-based exhibit in City Hall on the theme of "Calgary in the First World War," which ran from March to September 2014.

Finally, it is rare to see new war memorials created in any municipality, but the town of Blackfalds built one to recognize the 22 men who served from the community in the First World War, as well as those who fought in the Second World War and other conflicts. The complete poem “In Flanders Fields” was sandblasted into the circumference of the circular memorial, which also features glass mosaic work representing poppies and other motifs. It was unveiled and dedicated in a ceremony on 23 May 2014. A companion publication told the story of each of the 77 individuals represented on the memorial. In a parallel initiative, the community of St. Albert found that three soldiers killed during the First World War had not been included on its pre-existing cenotaph, and worked to get their names added.

These efforts are just some of the highlights of First World War commemorations around the province. Museums, as keepers of the communities’ artifacts and documents, have an important role to play in such activities. They collect, study, and interpret material relating to their communities and are “treasure-houses of memory.” This is why, whenever any significant community event is commemorated, they are the “go-to” places for setting up remembrance projects. All Alberta communities were touched by the war, and the fact that museum-based centennial commemorations were so widespread is a testament to the conflict’s broad impact and profound legacy to this day.

The community of Blackfalds constructed a war memorial in commemoration of the centenary of the First World War. Lieutenant Colonel (Ret’d) Moffat, a Korean War veteran, lays a wreath at the dedication ceremony on 23 May 2014.



