



**FINDING DIRECTIONS WEST:
READINGS THAT LOCATE AND DISLOCATE
WESTERN CANADA'S PAST**
Edited by George Colpitts and Heather Devine

ISBN 978-1-55238-881-5

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

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

COPYRIGHT NOTICE: This open-access work is published under a Creative Commons licence. This means that you are free to copy, distribute, display or perform the work as long as you clearly attribute the work to its authors and publisher, that you do not use this work for any commercial gain in any form, and that you in no way alter, transform, or build on the work outside of its use in normal academic scholarship without our express permission. If you want to reuse or distribute the work, you must inform its new audience of the licence terms of this work. For more information, see details of the Creative Commons licence at: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU MAY:

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

UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS LICENCE YOU MAY NOT:

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



Acknowledgement: We acknowledge the wording around open access used by Australian publisher, **re.press**, and thank them for giving us permission to adapt their wording to our policy <http://www.re-press.org>

Introduction: Migration and Transformation in the Canadian West

George Colpitts and Heather Devine

The articles selected for this anthology reflect the innovative and myriad scholarly approaches characterizing the *Directions West: 3rd Biennial Conference on Western Canadian Studies* held at the University of Calgary in June 2012. The collection speaks to the transformative effect that westward migration has had on the people and places that characterize the region we call Western Canada.

Calgary's location at the junction of the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains is a natural starting point, or destination, for migrants journeying between the Pacific Ocean and the remainder of Canada. How the plains and the mountains are perceived by migrants – as formidable barriers to cross, or as passages to more westerly or easterly travel – depends solely on individual worldview and experience. For Indigenous peoples such as the Blackfoot (the *Niitsitapi*), travel along the eastern slopes of the mountains and into the Northwestern Plains was a regular feature of life. The seasonal subsistence rounds focused on bison hunting and collecting available plants and berries, medicines, and ceremonial materials. Therefore the *Niitsitapi* were required to visit – and revisit – certain places to perform ceremonies, retell stories, and sing songs that would ensure “the continued vitality of the rocks, springs, trees and animals, and by extension, the physical and spiritual health of the entire community, both living and dead.”¹ The mountains were not unfamiliar, peculiar, or necessarily hostile barriers. Rather, they were part of a larger holistic experience of

constant movement between places of spiritual, subsistence, and aesthetic importance. The region, seemingly, gained its very life in the movement of its people.

For the non-Indigenous visitors to the same region, perceptions of the region have evolved over time. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the region and its inhabitants were evaluated through a British colonial lens, first as a site for harvesting furs and later as a physical impediment to the expansionist ambitions of the American state. The fur trade itself was in a constant state of flux, responding to the vagaries of international and regional political and economic forces. At the apex of this liminality was the *engagé*, whose labour as a canoeist and as a freighter of goods was also seasonally driven.² The development and abandonment of trading posts and transportation routes, the strategic reorientation of harvesting practices, and the redirected demand for specific types of “country produce” altered regional ecosystems and shaped the very existence of its inhabitants.

Tensions arose between newcomer and Indigenous perceptions of the area. Peter Fidler’s mapping of “fixed” Niitsitapi spaces along the eastern slopes of the Rockies, based on interviews with Niitsitapi elders, reflect a broad territorial range, including Chief Mountain in present-day Montana, Arrow Mountain in Wyoming, or even Heart Mountain, discernible from Calgary. These landscape features, while helping to define a territorial space, were perhaps more important as navigational guides for the extensive travel of the Siksika, Kainai, and Piikani peoples through their traditional lands. The structure and symbol systems of the few surviving Indigenous maps of the region reflect the moving and changing perspective of travellers as they see the horizon on all sides and encounter specific physical features in the landscape as they moved – a river, a hillside of Saskatoon bushes, some sandstone cliffs, a former camping place or battle site.³

Even in Fidler’s time, Niitsitapi travel maps were being used to fix the region for purposes of Empire. European mapmakers seized on Fidler’s geographic points to anchor the weight of competing commercial and political interests. In the age of imperialism, way stations were attached, sometimes very erroneously, to European maps that would become the critical imaginative fixatives for British or American empire builders.⁴ Indeed, Indigenous “go-to” maps were regularly transformed into “place” maps to be used for the military, economic, and cultural subjugation of the region. Western traditions of mapmaking are biased toward observing

the world as a series of static points on a one-dimensional surface, rather than capturing the motion-contingent perceptions of Indigenous travellers, who viewed their natural surroundings as holistic environments and used points in the geography according to their navigational needs. On-the-spot navigational techniques, such as those used by Indigenous people, use the changing perspectives offered to a traveller, say, on a river to know how to travel along it: how its channel islands appear to “move” one way or the other in their approach, for instance. This approach to mapping does not “fix” the landscape on paper, but allows a traveller to move through it without necessarily staking claim to it as a place.⁵

Even the “West” as viewed by present-day scholars seems effaced when the region’s very ephemeral geographic boundaries are tested in any degree. The “Prairie West,” as the conference program bore out, becomes the lower Fraser of British Columbia, Washington’s Coeur-D’Alene, Oregon’s Vancouver. Whatever is relationally fixed on one map and purported to be a “state of being” in one coordinate system becomes uprooted when other references are added, certainly when Indigenous experiential mapping complicates the picture. Western Canadian history and literature, then, shifts restlessly as a constant.

That the Prairie West was a site of occupation and permanent settlement has been well explored by scholars. The thrust of “place” studies in Western Canadian historiography, as of late, bears out this attachment to a particular locale in which human traditions, identities, and modes of production develop.⁶ Places are not just conceived by residents but, as Sandhya Ganapathy has pointed out, are also constructed as “translocal” and imagined localities. In her study of Alaskan “places,” Ganapathy noted, “places” gained meaning as residents developed their landscaped environments over time, and as outsiders, visiting sports people, and foreign natural resource developers contributed to their definition as well.⁷ Place studies have also benefited from better understandings of western “bio-regions,” where historical narratives emerge from the interplay of particular ecologies, local modes of production, and market-driven connections.⁸

The West, therefore, was more than a place of permanent occupation. It was imaginatively shaped by individual, group, or corporate movement across it. That movement and migration offers an alternative reading of the West’s very history. Since much Canadian historical writing has centred upon the development of the region as a British colony, the actual

displacement, movement, and identity of some migrants, such as English newcomers, has often been unexplored in the literature. Even at the time, English migration supported by emigration societies and formal government programs was viewed as a means of easing social and economic tensions in Britain, or to provide stability and balance to a region in the throes of absorbing large numbers of “foreign” or “non-British” migrants.⁹ As well, the common immigrant experience shared by British and non-British alike undermined the certainty of a regional, national, and political narrative that all newcomers could embrace. Moving through or beyond a region, immigrants who come, and go, challenge the story arc of claim and conquest.¹⁰ In their recurrent waves of immigration even to the present, newcomers continue to raise questions about the West as a destination. Is a newcomer coming to really settle here or move on? What interests does he or she have in this region as a home? Is the newcomer going to conform to the dominant society’s customary rules and ways of life, or challenge them?

The West, of course, was not only a destination in a conventional sense. Immigration programs sometimes failed to target or attract what were considered the right sort of people; newcomers differed so much from Canada’s “founding peoples” that they were sometimes characterized as “misfits” and “malingerers.”¹¹ As history attests, a good portion of newcomers simply did not stay put, or took up temporary employment, work contracts, or a variety of different types of labour that kept them on the move. There was a lot of rental accommodation in the “settler” West, epitomized by the boarding house, which was a common feature of the region’s communities. Even those who intended to stay fixed to one place often changed locations. They sometimes went, quite literally, “off the grid” in Dominion Lands Surveys, with frequent homestead abandonment, unfinished “proving up,” and hurried cross-border flight. Westerners devised exit strategies in their very engagement with a locale, whether in the Indigenous, fur trade, ranching, farming, industrial, or post-industrial era.¹² Resource booms and busts, whether in coal mining, oil bonanzas or, more recently, oil sands mega-projects, have continued to hasten a modernist migration experience characterized by movement into the region during good times and migration out during the bad. Historically, resource industries have thrived on mobile and transient workforces. More recently, the distances such workers have gone to exploit the opportunities in resource sectors have simply increased. Alberta’s oil sands projects by 2014 were attracting

the comings and goings of some 30,000 Newfoundland tradesmen and skilled workers, their sheer numbers supporting ten flights weekly from St. John's WestJet terminal to Fort McMurray. As telling, perhaps, is not that modern air services support work-related travel now continental in scale, but how quickly the same services can end – in WestJet's case, abruptly in 2016, with the slump of oil prices.¹³

Migrants came alone to the West. But they often retained ancestral collective identities, and their migration, whether temporary or long term, constituted diaspora communities. In the past, the difficulties faced by ethnic groups in establishing homes, and in dealing with incidences of marginalization or persecution, left them in a state of apprehension that kept them moving, even within their intended place of destination.¹⁴

The conference sessions revealed a multiplicity of individual and corporate "identities" that emerged and/or evolved as a result of westward migration. A cursory examination of the essays in this volume reveals a number of intersecting themes. Western Canadian studies are still fundamentally rooted in archival and literary sources that provide an historiographical "home" for westerners in the past. However, the first contributions in this volume make clear that the very basis for understanding the people of this place is influenced by currents of archival practices, cultural dictates, and politics. As Kimberly Mair argues in her study of "spatial deployments" in museum display, the West's historical representation can privilege certain people, newcomers, and ways of knowing in such galleries as the Syncrude Gallery of Aboriginal Culture in the Royal Alberta Museum in Edmonton, and Chief Kwakwabalasami's House at the Royal British Columbia Museum. The organization of objects, their witnessing by visitors, and the asymmetric power embedded in documentary evidence about the era of contact in the West would suggest the historical representations of "place" that have survived may not be as accurate, or as universally accepted, as one would like. Rather, representation is loaded with meaning and normative understandings of the past. In the Edmonton exhibit dedicated to that celebrated fur trade traveller, Anthony Henday, Mair critically observes the way that the exhibition design compelled the museum visitor to focus on Henday instead of the Siksika camp in which he finds himself. Even the camp, represented in a diorama painting, was visually depicted based on the observations of an eyewitness traveller, whose multiple accounts of the same events and place vary widely. The

didactic power of the display, the dating of the objects on display, and the emphasis on the problematic Henday journal itself transforms museum visitors into witnesses of a perpetually recreated moment of contact. In the alternative case of the “Kwakwabalasami House,” Mair clearly perceives a much more complex museum place. Not rooted to a single moment in time or providing authoritative interpretive anchoring, the house plays host to visitors who remain ultimately and respectfully separate from the site’s deep cultural meanings.

Mair’s questions as to how historical texts such as Henday’s can be accepted as authoritative allows for fresh interrogation of Western Canada’s official story-scripts, vernacular histories and, ultimately, the archives themselves. The underrepresentation of certain groups in the West’s past profoundly influences historical writing. The official record provides only a fleeting glimpse of some groups and much more of others, suggesting that the nature and extent of interactions between Indigenous peoples and newcomers, for example, has much to do with how records have been preserved.¹⁵ Unfortunately, simply turning to the oral tradition to “round out” a perspective of place does not in fact remedy the distortion that written records and the archives preserving them already create concerning the region’s past.

The need to challenge western history as it has been fixed, mapped, or documented is addressed directly by archivists Cheryl Avery and Shelley Sweeney. In their study of regional archival practices, they reveal the attitudes, unofficial protocols, and strong personal determinants over what is, or what is not, collected in archives. The gay and lesbian experiences, as well as those of sexual and gendered alternatives, are “discombobulated” in the record, or effaced altogether. As a result, the archive, which is expected to serve as a permanent sanctuary for a region’s records, is incomplete. Although archival protocols are changing and some collections have grown to include LGBT memories and records, the regional narrative itself, in respect of this community, and by extension many more, becomes erroneous by omission. The article highlights the need for archivists to challenge existing perceptions of early Western Canadian society, not only to facilitate the collection of a wider range of documents for preservation but also to ensure the accuracy and completeness of historical depictions of different eras. This paper should prompt archivists and western studies scholars to inquire further as to why the gay and lesbian experience in the West has

been preserved better in British Columbia, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan than in other archives elsewhere. For westerners leaving evidence of lives that moved in and outside dominant gendered and sexual realities and engaged in quite unique experiences, the western archive still has to be broadened to accommodate these narratives in the collective memory.

Western historical writing has only recently given its just consideration to Indigenous groups, fur trade employees, and clerics whose lives more typically were not place-grounded but given over to traditional seasonal rounds, religious and social in-gatherings around wintering or summer fishing camps, and travel over large spans of western geography.¹⁶ The Department of Interior's Dominion Lands Policy, the township survey, and agricultural, ranching, irrigation, municipal, and unorganized or organized district planning left a vast paper record. However, it does not effectively account for the migration experience still inherent in the lives of many people in the region. Their histories can attain better visibility when historians remain alert to their continued movement between jurisdictions, both national and international in scope.

While treaties and reserves created a fixed, if restricted, territory for First Nations people, the process of treaties and agricultural settlement served to marginalize their Métis cousins in a cultural and economic netherworld. After the unsuccessful Northwest Rebellion of 1885, the Métis faced significant political, cultural, and racial barriers to full participation in the burgeoning settlement economy of the post-treaty west. Many Métis were displaced from their ancestral lands due to the mismanagement of scrip distribution by the Canadian government, while others fled to remote regions to continue hunting and gathering. Their displacement occurred as equally dramatic pull and push factors in Britain and Europe drew newcomers into western agricultural lands.¹⁷ Without access to treaty benefits, without permanent fixed abodes, and unable to produce a steady income or to pay municipal taxes, access to education and other benefits of citizenship was sporadic, or non-existent, for Métis living in the settled agricultural areas of the south. Newcomers, especially working-class immigrants, looked to social and economic networks to establish permanent places in the West, while still relying on long-distance seasonal work in mining, railway, harvester, and timber frontier areas.¹⁸ By contrast, the Métis, long inhabitants of the region, were isolated by their French and Indigenous languages, their mixed racial heritage, and,

in some cases, their inability to swiftly adapt to new business practices and social conditions. Many Métis chose to migrate northward to sparsely inhabited regions, or adopted various forms of cultural amnesia in order to integrate successfully into the mainstream. The Métis reality, given their circumstances, was shaped by uncertain squatting rights and community displacement. Even in the twentieth century their status as migrants, or diaspora people within their own region, reduced many Métis to the designation of “road allowance people.”

Heather Devine’s contribution to this anthology suggests the way that some Métis people coped with the economic and territorial marginalization of their communities. The case of J.Z. LaRocque reveals a family’s long legal struggle to retain title to and ownership of their land, as well as the persistent lobbying required to establish relations with incoming political elites in order to maintain employment and achieve a social and economic voice in the new society. LaRocque’s example yields a case study from “vernacular” sources that is crucial for a more nuanced understanding of a group often regarded as rootless, migrant, and dispossessed people. Devine suggests that the “established” histories of the West, as generated by elites and, with time, academic historians, require the balancing perspectives of grassroots historians already present in such communities as the one growing at Lebret, Saskatchewan. There, the LaRocque family’s strategy of backing successive federal and provincial Liberal dynasties had helped it secure land and, later, government work. Perhaps most importantly, J.Z. LaRocque invested his time in gathering the narratives of people quite marginalized in official accounts, and in doing so left behind a personal archive impressive in its own right. He and members of his family became the unofficial historians of the Lebret area, whether the official historical community consulted with them or not. Their activities served to maintain Métis heritage and identity at a time when the policies of the federal government sought to neutralize, if not eradicate, non-British identities and replace them with a hegemonic “Canadian” ethnicity.

Will Pratt’s essay on missionary John McDougall provides additional insights into how Indigenous people coped with the impact of Indian administration and reserved spaces in the western region. McDougall based his ministry to the Stoney people in the Alberta foothills west of Calgary on a foundation of stubborn paternalism and a strong initial desire to assimilate his flock. However, his growing empathy for the people appointed

to his care later fuelled an interest in preserving elements of their “Indigenous” culture in the face of rapid cultural change by the turn of the century. As Pratt argues, McDougall contended with two strong poles of reference: Ottawa as a source of Indian policy which sought to situate its wards in established occupational pursuits within bordered places, and the trans-montane ecological reality of the Stoney reserve itself. McDougall attempted to reconcile the Stoney’s desire to migrate seasonally to their traditional hunting grounds on both the eastern and western slopes of the Rockies with the Indian Department’s mandate to maintain treaty Indians permanently on their reserve land at Morley. Because their traditional subsistence activities were hardly fixed but necessarily mobile in certain seasons of the year, McDougall even advocated freedom of movement and wide-ranging hunting and gathering activities in the spaces reserved in the enlarged Rocky Mountains National Park, a relatively recent government initiative to “fix” boundaries in what was once an Indigenous “commons.”

Settler migration westward imposed new social and political identities on Indigenous people and irrevocably altered their traditional territories, resulting in catastrophic and often tragic consequences that have remained outside the national consciousness until very recently. What Henry Nash Smith suggested in the case of American history, where “national” historical narratives came to construct the West in terms of the parent empire’s progress, expansion, and prosperity, certainly holds true for Canada.¹⁹ The personality of the prototypical migrant – ambitious, acquisitive, and exploitative – left behind a mixed legacy, however, as more recent historians of the West are quick to point out.²⁰ The West was not a land of equal opportunity for all, nor was it particularly democratic. Indeed, the new social history of the last thirty years depicts eighteenth- and nineteenth-century western expansion as a process that was often racist, ethnocentric, capitalist, and environmentally destructive. In fact, it could be argued that the history of western expansion, in both its Canadian and American iterations, can only be understood properly if it is viewed as a much larger colonial process of exploiting local primary raw resources to serve large-scale commercial interests – a process that continues in the twenty-first century.

The same process can be discernible in early suffrage work in Western Canada, as Mallory Richard suggests in her contribution to this collection. Richard’s essay suggests that it was the very mobile and recently

arrived cohort of female immigrants to Western Canada that propelled the movement for enfranchisement and other forms of social justice. But it also maintains that their claims for voting rights were based on distinctions they made between themselves as white Anglo-Canadians – those claiming permanency in the West – and the newly arrived and purportedly doubtful “citizens” who were, in the war years, denied the vote. The suffrage campaign obviously oriented itself toward white and British understandings of citizenship – and therefore permanency – in opposition to the claims of “non-white Canadians, recent immigrants, or out-of-work transients.” By World War I, the intense debate about extending the franchise to wives, widows, and relatives of soldiers overseas required reformers to differentiate between supposedly “permanent” citizens and more recent immigrants whose homes, apparently, still existed elsewhere.

Sarah Carter, too, suggests that franchise claims were complicated by the visits to the West by prominent British suffragist Emmeline Pankhurst. In an article highlighting the intriguing intellectual synergy between two leading figures in the reform and suffrage movements, Britain’s Pankhurst and Western Canada’s jurist and suffragist Emily Murphy, Carter demonstrates the way two minds could agree, and indeed sharpen around, nativist ideas and Murphy’s own promotion of eugenics. The article sheds new light on Britain’s Pankhurst and, in particular, her considerable engagement with Western Canada in her post–World War I travels. In 1920 alone, she claimed to have spoken to 70,000 people and seen “more of Western Canada ... than many Western Canadians.” Her whirlwind tour of 1922 took Pankhurst to no fewer than sixty-three different towns. But as Carter points out, the product of such a tour was a narrow and blinkered view of the West as it existed at the time. Also, it is clear that Emily Murphy’s own ideas had some influence with Emmeline Pankhurst, despite the fact that Pankhurst was the more prominent and established activist. Carter argues that Emily Murphy’s expressed beliefs about racial betterment and eugenics clearly influenced Pankhurst’s own thinking in the time.

These matters touch on the very epistemological nature of journeying. Pankhurst had to travel to the West to meet Murphy, and Murphy, in turn, travelled with her own messages to England and elsewhere. Sterling Evans’s contribution to this collection would bear this out. He explores the case of Mary Beatrice Rundle, secretary to Sir Clement Anderson Montague Barlow, who led a coal commission inquiry in 1935 in Alberta. Rundle

was quintessentially a western traveller. She followed a tightly scheduled journey through large areas of the West with very little prior experience. Her written observations were filtered through a matrix of class, gender, and ethnic worldviews. In Evans's meticulous reconstruction of Rundle's western journey through her diary, he shares Rundle's perception of what should have been a well-understood part of the historical record: Western Canada's troubled coal industry during the Great Depression. But how much of the West, as a place, was revealed in this journey? Evans's article raises important questions about how travellers perceive their surroundings. Rundle noted some elements of the scene before her but excluded others. The most arresting feature of Rundle's journal writing relates to the writer herself; her occupational role; her gender, which restricted both her movement and her daily experiences; and, above all, her eating, sleeping, and travel as part of a well-appointed and funded British Royal Commission. Despite her extensive travel itinerary, it is revealing that Rundle seems to have written so little about the environmental disaster of the Dust Bowl. Did she not see the human consequences of the severe drought affecting large numbers of local residents, or the economic destitution marking the entire region?

Even the research topics that might lend themselves to an understanding of "place," such as ranching and mountain studies, were in fact sites of migration, change, and transformation.²¹ In this collection, Max Foran explores the emergence of range management practices in Alberta. Initially, set rental rates on leased land throughout the province and liberal range practices imported into the region displaced native flora and fauna. By the 1930s, ranchers saw their industry failing and their grasslands management unsustainable. Their associations advocated a management program that paid heed to the different carrying capacities of subregions in the province, as well as changing market prices. Foran emphasizes the comprehensiveness of the commissioned study of Graham Anderson in 1939 and the forward-thinking elements of the Anderson Report of 1941. The policy recommendations themselves defied a single understanding of western grass, and ended up promoting longer leases, policies reflecting the different carrying capacities of Alberta's ranchlands and, most importantly, stricter limits on herd sizes. The western ranch as a place, then, so long associated with a rather limited conceptualization of the land, gave way to ideas and practices modified for different subregions and a changing

market. The paper's great contribution, however, is found in its ironic insights into the ranching community's own limited acceptance of the very ideas that it had once promoted in the more prosperous postwar years.

In the long term, such views of western nature, not of nature as a cohesive whole, but grounded in ecological interrelationships, became accepted in the postwar period. The western paradigm was irrevocably altered in the economic and social changes occurring in Western Canada with the oil boom, international agricultural markets, and modern communications. But, as the anthology's concluding article by PearlAnn Reichwein and Karen Wall suggests, the region was not in the throes of an economic determinism by any means. Nor was its very "look" fixed. In the case of the planning and design of the Banff School of Fine Arts, the "Salzburg" ideal of architecture was thoroughly upended in favour of an internationalist and modernist alternative. The authors clarify the timing and the negotiated entry of the school into the Banff mountain landscape. They draw attention to the debate that accompanied the advent, prior to Alberta's real takeoff into oil prosperity, of an architectural modernism in the school's design at variance with the mountain profile of Banff. Under the direction of Donald Cameron, the school's flat-roofed modernist design bucked the "Swiss chalet" style that had formerly stamped Banff's town development. This new style was imported from far away – via Edmonton, where the school was originally undertaken as an out-campus of the University of Alberta – and inspired by Scandinavian, rather than Swiss, ideals. The planners of the Banff school seemed to have looked to Denmark and Sweden, and even the modernist architecture of a Kansas City art school, to both inspire and accommodate visiting art students in Alberta's Rocky Mountains.

The Canadian West was as much a direction as a destination. The literary works of two figures honoured at the *Directions West* conference, Gerald Friesen and Robert Kroetsch, provide examples of writing that, in many respects, explored the complementary themes of the west as a unique place, and the west as a destination for trickster, immigrant, or outsider experiences.²² Friesen has challenged the certainty of the Prairie West as an enduring, imaginative, or even functional construct.²³ He has asserted the need to rethink "region" as a static concept, particularly given the rapid changes in migration, trade, and communication in the twentieth century.²⁴ Perhaps its history as a place of movement, change, and

migration has been most evinced in its recent past. Friesen's work with Royden Loewen, for example, exposes the changing places of immigrants in Western Canadian cities, whether at first in distinctive ethnic enclaves or, more recently, in pluralistic, truly multicultural communities.²⁵ Whatever permanency and stability was represented in the locally focussed – and quite short-lived – family farm in the era of settlement certainly broke down in the post-World World II era, when rural areas lost their residents to cities and the entire experience of farm life was transformed due to technological and social change. Advances in the mechanization of farm machinery, which reduced the need for farm labourers, were quickly followed by the opportunities created by all-weather roads, university education in distant cities, and communications technology linking individuals to the outside world.²⁶

Kroetsch, who often revisited the theme of rootedness within place, was keenly aware of the dilemmas and uncertainties facing the individual in the West without a physical or spiritual home. The figure of Hazard, in *The Studhorse Man*, as Aritha Van Herk points out, undertakes a “quest for home” but in the end the “quest is the quest itself.” Even if “every journey is a journey home,” the character struggles to achieve that realization.²⁷ In Kroetsch's criticism of the historical tradition, which he viewed as a form of writing projecting power to a particular place, and his adoption of alternative forms of history, myth, and imagination, his writing served the function of an observant, if alienated, stranger in the region's past.²⁸ George Melnyk, who organized the panel on Kroetsch, suggests that even the particular idiom of “Alberta writing” manifests the tension of being both a place and a process.²⁹ Both historical and literary studies, then, hinge on the twin realities of the West as a fixed place, an impetus for movement, itinerant experiences on the road, whistle-stop layovers, a possible final destination, or simply the act of collecting one's possessions and accumulated stories and moving on.

One iconic figure of interest in Kroetsch's work is that of David Thompson. The life of celebrated trader and cartographer David Thompson was observed in the lead-up to the conference via historical recreations of his Columbian River journeys and transcontinental canoe trips to Hudson Bay. His peripatetic career underscores the tangential directions, if not chaotic displacement, so common to individuals in the region's past. Kroetsch's extended poem devoted to Sarah Small, the wife

of David Thompson, highlights the tension between the perspectives and interests of the historical traveller and stranger on the one side, and that of the original resident of the place on the other. “The West is tangled,” Sarah states to her surveyor/ fur trader husband, “a sheet of paper is neat. What do you choose to write down?”³⁰ While she might have thought that this surveyor “would dream the short and the long in patches of light, not in shades of conquest,” she finds to her dismay that “I was wrong.” Speaking of her traveller husband, she says, “He dreamed a passage. He dreamed a find and its fame.” But Thompson, like many westerners expressing flawed claims of permanency, was only “making a map, always, making his map of nowhere.”

The anthology contributions from the *Directions West* conference, then, reveal some of the ways that individuals, groups, and corporate interests seeking a permanent, historically situated place in Western Canada found themselves caught up in an ongoing, if not perpetual, state of displacement. Even upon their arrival to their various destinations, individuals in the region’s past found new journeys and new migrations before them.

These glimpses into the region’s past also provide surprising insights into issues that resonate today. The environmental degradation that results from unregulated resource use, whether it be from over-grazing of lease land in southern Alberta or unfettered oil sands extraction in the north, comes to mind. The advocacy and militancy of various ethnocultural and gender minorities – immigrants, indigenous people, and women – in attempting to achieve a measure of social and legal equality in the early twentieth century is mirrored by the current struggles faced by the present-day LGBT community. Fortunately, the twenty-first century offers both the opportunity and the responsibility to uncover and share these unique historical experiences with a broad and increasingly diverse citizenry in this region we call “the West.”

Notes

- 1 Gerald A. Oetelaar and D. Joy Oetelaar, "The Structured World of the *Niitsitapi*: The Landscape as Historical Archive among Hunter-Gatherers of the Northern Plains," in *Structured Worlds: The Archaeology of Hunter-Gatherer Thought and Action*, ed. A. Cannon (Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2011), 69–94.
- 2 See Carolyn Podruchny, *Making the Voyageur World: Travelers and Traders in the North American Fur Trade* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 12; 14–17. Podruchny also presented on cultural syncretism in material Métis culture, in a panel on Plains Métis identity, 23 June 2012.
- 3 Theodore Binnema, "How Does a Map Mean?: Old Swan's Map of 1801 and the Blackfoot World," in *From Rupert's Land to Canada: Essays in Honour of John E. Foster*, ed. Theodore Binnema, Gerhard Ens, and Roderick C. Macleod (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001), 201–24.
- 4 Barbara Belyea, "Mapping the Marias: The Interface of Native and Scientific Cartographies," *Great Plains Quarterly* 17, nos. 3–4 (1997): 165–84.
- 5 David Neufeld, "Learning to Drive the Yukon River: Western Cartography and Athapaskan Story Maps," in *Big Country, Big Issues: Canada's Environment, Culture and History*, ed. Nadine Klopfer and Christof Mauch (Munich: Rachel Carson Center, 2011), 16–43.
- 6 Merle Massie, presenting 22 June 2012, suggested the importance of place in vacationing and park areas in northern Saskatchewan. Her own work draws on place studies: *Forest Prairie Edge: Place History in Saskatchewan* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2014).
- 7 Sandhya Ganapathy, "Imagining Alaska Local and Translocal Engagements with Place," *American Anthropologist* 115, no. 1 (March 2013): 96–111.
- 8 The expression, of course, is Dan Flores's, from "Place: Thinking about Bioregional History," in *The Natural West: Environmental History in the Great Plains and Rocky Mountains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984), 89–106; for bioregional applications in Western Canada, see William J. Turkel, *The Archive of Place: Unearthing the Pasts of the Chilcotin Plateau* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007); and James Murton, *Creating a Modern Countryside: Liberalism and Land Resettlement in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007); Shannon Stunden Bower, *Wet Prairie: People, Land, and Water in Agricultural Manitoba* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2011).
- 9 Bruno Ramirez and Donald Avery, "Immigration and Ethnic Studies," in *A Thematic Guide to Canadian Studies*, ed. A. Artibise (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 77–116.
- 10 See Francis W. Kaye, *Good Lands: A Meditation and History on the Great Plains* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2011), 17–44.
- 11 W.J.C. Cherwinski, "Misfits," "Malingers," and "Malcontents": *The British Harvester Movement of 1928*, in *The Developing West*, ed. J.E. Foster (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1983).
- 12 See Sterling Evans, ed., *The Borderlands of the American and Canadian Wests: Essays on Regional History of the Forty-ninth Parallel* (Norman: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); and, on the reality of cross-border experience in the First Nations' world, David

- G. McCrady, *Living with Strangers: The Nineteenth-Century Sioux and the Canadian-American Borderlands* (Norman: University of Nebraska Press, 2006); Neal McLeod, "Plains Cree Identity: Borderlands, Ambiguous Genealogies and Narrative Irony," *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 20, no. 2 (2000), 437–54.
- 13 "Bursting of Alberta's oil bubble on display at St. John's airport," CBC News, Newfoundland and Labrador, 16 February 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/airport-st-johns-alberta-downturn-1.3443452> (accessed 20 June 2016).
 - 14 See Donald Akenson's diaspora studies, and, particularly his work, *The Irish Diaspora: A Primer* (Toronto: Meany, 1993).
 - 15 In his own conference contribution, Lyle Dick raised questions about the insufficient paper record in a paper suggesting a "Queer Frontier" is discernible not so much on paper as in fleeting photographic evidence. Lyle Dick, "The Queer Frontier: Male Same-Sex Experience in Western Canada's Settlement Era," 22 June 2012. Valerie Korinek elaborated the case for discovering lesbian literature, certainly not viewed, at least traditionally, as a reality of the West as a place. Valerie Korinek, "They wouldn't say they were gay if they were in bed together: The Challenges of Writing Prairie Lesbian History," 22 June 2012; Peter Boag's presentation suggests that transgendered experience and cross-dressing in the fluid social conditions of the American West has, until recently, not been recognized as a feature of the place. "Strange Country This: The American Frontier as a Transgendering Place and Process," 23 June 2012.
 - 16 The Francophone experience as migrants or as excluded residents as reflected by Franco-Americans and Métis, was explored in presentations by Jean Barman, Adele Perry, and Sherry Farrell Racette. Katrina Jagodinsky also compared two women's changing self-identification, depending on their situation in British or American territory in a paper later published as "A Tale of Two Sisters: Family Histories from the Strait Salish Borderlands," *Western Historical Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (Summer 2016): 1–23. A conference panel theme was devoted to "Transnational Migration: Mapping the Movements of Francophones, Africans, and Imperial Subjects in the West," 22 June 2012. The "Life along the Medicine Line: Forging, Reconfiguring and Renegotiating Plains Métis Identity" panel by Carolyn Podruchny, Brenda Macdougall, Émilie Pigeon, and Timothy Foran, , 23 June 2012, explored important themes. It was as itinerant hunters and labourers, and seasonal wintering camp adherents, not as permanently rooted settlers, that the Métis experience and identity in Western Canada took form. See Brenda Macdougall, Carolyn Podruchny, and Nicole St-Onge, eds., *Contours of a People: Métis Family, Mobility and History* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 2012); and Brenda Macdougall and Nicole St-Onge, "Rooted in Mobility: Métis Buffalo Hunting Brigades," *Manitoba History* 71 (Winter 2013): 21–32.
 - 17 Jean Barman, "Ethnicity in the Pursuit of Status: British Middle and Upper-Class Emigration to British Columbia in the Late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 18, no. 1 (1986): 32–51; Patrick A. Dunae, *Gentlemen Emigrants: From the British Public Schools to the Canadian Frontier* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1981). The experience of British emigrant women is offered in Susan Jackel, ed., *A Flannel Shirt and Liberty: British Emigrant Gentlewomen in the Canadian West, 1880–1914* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982).
 - 18 A. Ross McCormack, "Networks among British Immigrants and Accommodation to Canadian Society: Winnipeg, 1900–1914," *Histoire sociale – Social History*, 17 no. 34 (November 1984): 357–74.

- 19 Henry Nash Smith. *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950).
- 20 Sucheng Chan, "Western American Historiography and People of Color," in *Peoples of Color in the American West*, ed. Sucheng Chan, Douglas Henry Daniels, Mario T. Garcia, and Terry P. Wilson (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1994): 1–14.
- 21 Zac Robinson, then, explored the origins and class basis of a western travelling mountaineer, and his exaggerated claims made after climbing a Western Canadian mountain landmark in "Beyond Description?: David Douglas and the Persistence of the Brown-Hooker Problem in the Canadian Rockies," 22 June 2012. See Zac Robinson and Stephen Slemon, "Deception in High Places," *Canadian Alpine Journal* 94 (2011): 12–17.
- 22 "Prairie Present and Absent.: A Roundtable in Honour of Gerald Friesen," 22 June 2012, with contributions by Leah Morton, Jeffrey Taylor, Royden Loewen, George Buri and Marion McKay; and "Western Canadian Literature: The Robert Kroetsch Legacy," with contributions by Dennis Cooley, Laurie Ricou, and Pamela Banting, 23 June 2012. For Friesen's understandings of the West as region, see Gerald Friesen, *The West: Regional Debate, National Ambitions, Global Age* (Toronto: Penguin, 1999); "Defining the Prairies: or, Why the Prairies Don't Exist," in *Toward Defining the Prairies: Region, Culture, and History*, ed. Robert Wardbaugh (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001), 13–28; *River Road: Essays on Manitoba and Prairie History* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1996); and "Critical History in Western Canada: 1900–2000," in *The West and Beyond: New Perspectives on an Imagined Region*, ed. Alvin Finkel, Sarah Carter, and Peter Fortna (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2010), 3–12.
- 23 See Friesen, "Defining the Prairies," 13–28.
- 24 Gerald Friesen, "Space and Region in Canadian History," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 16 (2005): 1–48.
- 25 Royden Lowen and Gerald Friesen, *Immigrants in Prairie Cities: Ethnic Diversity in Twentieth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).
- 26 Gerald Friesen, Afterword, in P. James Giffen, *Rural Life: Portraits of the Prairie Town, 1946* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2004), 202–8.
- 27 See Aritha van Herk, Introduction, in Robert Kroetsch, *The Studhorse Man* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2004), xvi.
- 28 Rosalind Jennings, "Disappearing Doubles and Deceptive Landscapes in the Writing of Robert Kroetsch," *London Journal of Canadian Studies* 12 (1996): 20–27. Francis W. Kaye and Robert Thacker, "'Gone Back to Alberta': Robert Kroetsch Rewriting the Great Plains," *Great Plains Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1994): 167–83;
- 29 See Donna Coates and George Melnyk, "The Struggle for an Alberta Literature," in *Wild Words: Essays on Alberta Literature*, ed. Coates and Melnyk (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press, 2009), x; the West, conceived as a place and process, is suggested in John Mack Faragher, "The Frontier Trail: Rethinking Turner and Reimagining the American West," *American Historical Review* 98, no. 1 (February 1993): 106–17.
- 30 Robert Kroetsch, *The Last Narrative of Mrs. David Thompson* (Windsor, ON: Wrinkle Press, 2007).

