



NEIGHBOURS AND NETWORKS: THE BLOOD TRIBE IN THE SOUTHERN ALBERTA ECONOMY, 1884-1939

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2: 'Free Range or Private Property': Integrating Blood Reserve Land into the non-Native Economy

INTRODUCTION

Once the Blood reserve was established and occupied, there was considerable pressure on the Bloods to lease their reserve land to non-Native neighbours. This pressure was tied to the often-expressed opinion that the Bloods possessed land in excess of their needs and more than they were entitled to hold. Such belief was encouraged by the influx of land-hungry settlers in the southern Alberta region. The Bloods and their leaders, however, refused to recognize the legitimacy of these views. They were also reluctant to recognize arbitrary attempts by the Department of Indian Affairs to unilaterally determine the disposition of Blood property. The Bloods, and often their agents, were determined to guide the reserve's economic development in tandem with the DIA's course of *civilization* for the Bloods. However, one fact remains clear, during the development of the economy of the region between 1880 and 1939, there was little, if any, decline in demands by non-Natives for access to the reserve and its resources. Under such circumstances, the Bloods' perseverance, and the guardianship responsibility of the DIA for the Bloods and their property, was put to the test.

This chapter has two interrelated themes. The first is a discussion of changing perceptions of the economic value and utility of land in southern Alberta.¹ Integral to this analysis is a recognition that increased demands for more land resulted from these changes. Consequently, the Blood reserve was integrated into the non-Natives' land-use schemes. Although the focus here is on a small region of southern Alberta, these changes were but

a microcosm of larger trends in land use affecting the Great Plains region of the continent.² The second theme is centred on the decision-making procedures employed by the Bloods and the DIA to determine the role the reserve played in local land-use plans.

An important and largely unexplored aspect of this economic agenda for Native reserves is the management of land and resources. The reserves were central to the overall policy of having Natives pay their own way. However, this raises the question why the use of the Bloods' land was so often manipulated to suit the needs or demands of non-Native neighbours, despite Blood protests. The Blood people clearly understood their neighbours' desires and the government's intentions and only their staunch defence of their rights prevented more interference in reserve affairs. The Bloods were not reluctant to enlist the aid of their agents in attempts to repeal or soften the DIA's determination to adhere to its set *civilization* and assimilation agenda. In conjunction with their agents, the Blood chiefs, headmen, and concerned individuals achieved some success in influencing the policies that were to affect them. Their efforts ensured that their will could not be entirely ignored.

Pressures resulting from competition for space, initially among ranchers, and subsequently by increasing population and environmental factors, brought about the first attempts to gain access to the resources of the Blood reserve. The onset of farming and mixed farming in turn increased the demand for the land of the reserve, while competition from settlers and towns near the reserve placed additional pressures on the reserve's borders. By the first decade of the twentieth century, the Blood reserve faced demands not only from non-Natives but also from the Bloods' own economic development objectives. The Bloods' awareness of the reserve's economic value also influenced the development of access policies. These contending forces, in one form or another, carried through to the end of the Great Depression.

The Bloods may properly be seen as important players in the local economic activities into which their land base was integrated. The non-Native view of the Bloods and their reserve was as resources that could be used either to relieve the growing need for more land or, alternatively, exploited for the benefits of the neighbouring non-Native community. The Bloods' decisions, and those of the Department of Indian Affairs on their behalf, to a large degree determined the character of the ranching industry and later the mixed farming enterprise in the southern Alberta locale surrounding the Blood reserve. Eventually the Blood tribe, by leasing their

land to those in need of extra grazing or hay range and through attempts to forestall illegal access, helped determine the nature of the resultant economic association.

The second theme regards decision making by the Bloods. Such decisions, often communicated through their reserve agent and the DIA, also determined the role the reserve played in unfolding local circumstances. The main economic objective for administering Natives was to make them economically self-sufficient or at least 'self-supporting' to the extent of reducing costs to the DIA.³ The government believed that the best way to achieve this end was to encourage the Indians to become 'peasant farmers' on forty-acre lots and thus to make more appropriate 'civilized' use of their land.⁴ The DIA imposed paternalistic regulations on the Bloods and their land, necessitating calculated and determined responses from the Bloods. Clearly, with competing interests vying for access to Blood reserve land much antagonism developed. However, it was never sufficient to deter a melding and mutuality of economic interests and endeavours. In the face of change required by the loss of the buffalo and non-Native incursions into traditional Blood lands, the Bloods worked out patterns of accommodation.

INITIAL ARRANGEMENTS: THE RANCHING ERA

Indians, and in the case of the Bloods, their extensive land holdings, have not been credited with any positive formative or lasting influences on ranching commerce. Shelagh Jameson remarked that the Blood Indians were, because of their poverty following the decimation of the Plains bison, "probably the greatest potential danger" to early cattle interests.⁵ Kelly opined, for example, that Natives "stole cattle when they willed."⁶ It is important to recognize that this danger was never truly realized, and historians have generally rescued the Natives from the negative impression left by often groundless complaints of a small minority of ranching interests regarding the part played by Natives in the destruction of range cattle.⁷ Indeed Macleod and Rallason have proven that such views of Native peoples cannot be sustained. Natives' rates of crime, including livestock theft, "were lower than for the rest of the population."⁸

The incursion of large- and small-scale ranching interests, their operational needs and environmental suitability have been analyzed and detailed by Elofson and Evans. Elofson's view that the uncertainty of the environmental demands of business, especially that of showing a profit,

leads to the conclusion that the Blood reserve could remain neither detached nor immune to environmental and economic processes ranching interests brought into play.⁹

Among the first of the large Canadian ranching concerns in the vicinity of the Blood reserve was the Cochrane Ranche Company, headed by Senator Matthew H. Cochrane. Cochrane had been instrumental in encouraging Sir John A. Macdonald's Conservative government to formulate legislation favouring ranching ventures. The resulting land lease arrangements of twenty-one years to a maximum of 100,00 acres per lease reflected the mid-1880s belief, based on previous Plains exploration, that the region was fit only for a grazing economy.¹⁰

As significant parcels of public land in the North West Territories were taken in, leasehold demand for grazing space grew. The *Macleod Gazette*, April 28, 1893, revealed that 1,680,964 acres were given over to grazing on the prairies. The numbers of stock on these lands were given at 139,283 cattle, 20,579 horses, and 86,087 sheep.¹¹ In fact, during their peak the four largest ranching enterprises leased nearly one-third of land in the southwestern prairies, practically all the foothills region from Cochrane south being held in lease or homestead.¹²

Encouraged by initial favourable Canadian government legislation Cochrane cattle were on the Bow River in late 1881.¹³ This heralded the arrival of large cattle interests, businesses that leased tens of thousands of acres of land and ran herds of cattle numbering in the tens of thousands. These large concerns directly competed with the small stock holders, many of whom engaged in mixed farming and ran small herds of up to forty cattle, which now found their positions considerably weakened.¹⁴ The large Blood Reserve bordering the Cochrane lease grant on the east, and separated only by the Belly River, must certainly have looked inviting in the face of competitive pressure. As a result, the reserve soon figured prominently in the Cochrane Company's operational planning.

Cochrane Ranche cattle, driven by the need for more land, were already grazing the Blood Reserve in 1885 after an informal contract was initiated with the Bloods.¹⁵ As early as 1884 grazing land was at a premium, and by 1885 all land bordering the reserve on the north and west was leased.¹⁶ By 1886 significant blocks to the east of the reserve were taken and by this time there were an estimated 100,000 range cattle grazing four million acres of leased land. The Cochrane Ranche, the only large company with unimpeded access to the Bloods' land, regarded the reserve as a natural extension of their own grazing lease, an approach later taken by many

settlers bordering the reserve.¹⁷ The company was also driven to extend its competitive edge in the face of stock losses in the thousands in the first years of operation brought on by poor management decisions worsened by bad weather.¹⁸ Similar future experiences continued to stimulate demands for hay.¹⁹

It soon became brutally clear that, contrary to ranchers' first impressions, the apparently limitless land was indeed limited and so was its cattle-sustaining capacity. The same range could not be used for summer and winter foraging, and it could not be used at all during extended dry periods or if ravaged by fire as during the winter of 1884–85. Evans has commented on the very complex relationship that exists between 'carrying capacity,' the number of animals, relative "timing and intensity" of grazing as well as precipitation and the fact that "biomass of a particular plant community is fine-tuned to climate." Early ranching interests were aware of this relationship and tried to accommodate environmental cycles to conserve grass supplies.²⁰

It was this immediate circumstance that necessitated the initial arrangement with the Blood tribe, namely the need to graze Cochrane cattle on the south end of the reserve because of the burned ground on the north end of the Cochrane lease. From the Bloods' perspective, the agreement was essential because their attempts to keep Cochrane cattle from invading the unfenced reserve had been futile. After some difficulty caused by the absence of the influential Chief Red Crow from the initial negotiations, a deal was struck. The benefits were soon apparent, Cochrane later reporting that the cattle were doing well on the reserve's good feed.²¹

Subsequent arrangements followed when, in February, 1890, Blood Agent William Pocklington, initiated a meeting between Red Crow and W.F. Cochrane regarding a further accommodation for Cochrane cattle. Red Crow voiced no opposition to grazing Cochrane cattle on reserve land, and even expressed a willingness to forgo payment. He cited as his reason the fact that Cochrane cattle were used to supply the Blood beef rations.²² Red Crow's understanding of the relationship between his people and the Cochrane Ranche Company, *vis-à-vis* the Department of Indian Affairs, is unclear. It is possible that Red Crow incorrectly felt that the source of the Bloods' rations came with obligations to the company. A similar arrangement for the placement of two hundred cattle on the reserve was concluded in August of 1890, but this time the company agreed to purchase all the hay Blood farmers and harvesters could provide. By December, however, Cochrane Ranche relations with the Bloods had soured. Agent

image not available

Figure 2.1.

"Men on Blood Reserve putting up hay for Cochrane Ranche, Alberta, [ca. 1892]." Glenbow Archives, NA-4461-1. Blood farmers and labourers meeting some of the demand for hay from the Cochrane Ranche, one of the Blood reserve's neighbours.

image not available

James Wilson, likely with the Bloods' encouragement, requested that the company remove its cattle from the reserve or face "less agreeable" means of encouragement to do so.²³

The value of the Blood Reserve's significant open spaces were, by 1891, recognized by other ranchers and illegal incursions onto the reserve land became frequent. When Indian Commissioner Hayter Reed visited the reserve, Blood representatives complained about cattle illegally placed on their land and demanded their removal. Agent Pocklington duly wrote the Maunsell Brothers, Macleod, requesting removal of their stock, and similar requests were made of at least eleven others who the agent believed to be the offenders including the Cochrane Rancho Company. Agent Pocklington reported that responses were favourable.²⁴

Such incursions were not easily prevented despite the assurances of the offending parties to remedy the problem. In the case of small stockmen and homesteaders these offences, at least in the view of the offenders, were necessary. David H. Breen points out that, after the advent of the commercial ranching ventures with their large areas of leases, small ranchers with little capital were left with no option except speculative ranging on increasingly limited free space.²⁵ Homesteaders and townsfolk, in the search of subsistence and profits therefore lacked adequate 'free space' to increase the scale of their operations. Sitting on the borders of and, in their view, the underutilized Blood reserve, it was natural for settlers to regard the area as part of their sphere of exploitation. After a complaint by Blood Indian Day Chief about the unauthorized grazing of stock in the area around Boundary Creek, Agent James Wilson detected some prevarication on the part of the settler/owners, believing that despite their protested need of right of way "there is not the slightest doubt that these men mean to hold their stock on the Reserve."²⁶

Little wonder that, by 1893, Agent Wilson believed the area in the vicinity of the reserve was "over[run] with cattle."²⁷ Trespass, and apparently the DIA's reduced rations policy, frustrated many of the Blood Reserve's residents, and they angrily resorted to expelling cattle from the reserve, straining relations with ranchers and settlers still further and inevitably receiving the blame for cattle losses that could be ascribed to other factors.²⁸ As Elofson points out, the fact of open range and easy access likely coloured perceptions against the Indians.²⁹ In March 1893, as Macleod and Rollason point out, the *Gazette* ignoring its own evidence and exaggerating Native complicity railed against Indians roaming the countryside killing cattle and called for the enforcement of the pass system. The

Gazette was willing to see the establishment of a punitive system that restricted Native rights and liberties and opined that “any Indian found off his reserve without a pass, should be promptly arrested.”³⁰ Needless to say, such restrictive laws were not intended to be applied to settlers trespassing the Blood reserve.

At times adverse environmental conditions affected the reserve, as in a severe dry spell in the fall of 1894, and heightened Blood ranchers’ concern for their substantial horse herds and their rudimentary cattle interests begun when three “influential men” exchanged horses for twenty-three head of cattle.³¹ Not only could the Bloods not offer relief to others but they were themselves forced to seek off-reserve grazing, thereby bringing them into direct competition with settlers and ranchers looking for assistance through grazing their stock on Dominion lands. The non-Native community’s reluctance to accept that Native ranchers had equal access to non-leased Dominion lands between the Belly and Kootenai rivers brought Agent Wilson to their defence. Wilson cited hardship and expected loss of stock if Dominion lands were denied the Bloods. He reminded critics that in similar circumstances in previous years, the Blood tribe had generously permitted stricken non-Natives access to the reserve. Consequently, the Bloods could not be expected to forsake the only conveniently available free range in their own hour of need. In conclusion, he summed up the Bloods’ view: “the Indians all very truly say it will be time enough for the white people to kick after they have taken their cattle off the reserve.”³²

Within the area around the Blood reserve, both co-operation and competition forged an economic relationship based on land use and need. From its inception, the Bloods had seen their reserve drawn into the pool of grazing land to which ranchers and settlers expected access. The treaty rights of the Bloods to sole utilization had been largely ignored, even under strenuous protest, as circumstances beyond the reserve required. Contractual arrangements, when resorted to, were of a nature deemed by ranchers as informal, and in many cases no such arrangements were attempted. The Bloods complained and the agents, within the limits of their capacity, or will, acted. Attitudes and exigencies, however, militated against easy or permanent solutions. No man-made physical structure set the Blood reserve apart. Furthermore, non-Natives did not regard the Belly and St. Mary’s Rivers as borders delineating absolute separation of the reserve from grazing leases and the commons or land that was an open exploitable resource. It would take the Bloods’ own strategies and persistence to make the border more recognizable and impermeable.

THE BLOODS TAKE CONTROL

During the first decade and a half after the reserve was established, it offered limited accommodation to the grazing needs of neighbouring ranchers. The results were, however, far from satisfactory, and resulted, in June 1895, in a shift in policy. The pressure exerted on reserve lands by its location in a “grazing district” and the inability to stop livestock trespass dictated that a readjustment in the relationship between the Bloods and their neighbours be attempted.³³ At the limits of their endurance, and likely concerned about the well-being of their own small cattle herd, Blood leaders were determined to forge a more formal and financially rewarding relationship with those companies or individuals wishing to use reserve land and resources.³⁴

Consequently, Agent Wilson identified two classes of trespass and trespassers needing to be addressed: 1. those invading the reserve in search of feed; 2. those unable to confine their stock to their own lands. The former posed the greatest threat, and chief among the villains, in Wilson’s opinion, were the Mormon settlers of Cardston. To counter the problems, Wilson intended charging grazing dues for summer and winter grazing. The levying of dues would, he anticipated, make owners more cautious about the whereabouts of their stock and substantially reduce the first kind of trespass. Wilson assumed, with good reason, that as the Bloods acquired more cattle of their own they would take more interest in keeping the stock of others at bay.³⁵ Wilson had little trouble convincing Red Crow and his followers of the soundness of his plan.³⁶

The negative response from potential trespassers to the proposed change was much as Wilson had anticipated and indicated a determined reluctance among ranchers and settlers to pay for that which they had previously often acquired for free. Chief Red Crow denied any knowledge of an arrangement with one settler, and Wilson asserted: “Red Crow says ... he never gave you any authority to put your cattle on [the reserve] and does not see why payment should be refused.”³⁷ However, Cardston’s residents proved to be most difficult. In January 1897, Charles O. Card, the leader of the Cardston settlers, wrote Wilson requesting an exemption from grazing dues of fifty cents per head per annum for the previous season.³⁸ This attempt to achieve a better deal was based on the argument that the Cardston settlers owned mostly dairy cattle, which grazed only during the day and therefore consumed less feed than range cattle. To further complicate matters, Wilson, believing that some of the settlers were

poor, recommended to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs that those who could afford it be charged at fifteen cents per head for half a year, while the others would be given free grazing.³⁹ How the Bloods responded to this proposal can only be imagined. However, Wilson's caution to Cardston residents against putting cattle on the reserve without a licence to do so probably sheds some light on the Bloods' response.⁴⁰

There was also other potential for loss of grazing revenue. The files reveal that seventeen individuals had placed fifty-one cattle for which dues had been paid, but there were 130 cattle still to be collected on for a total of 181.⁴¹ This accounting did not include those owned by larger concerns such as the Oxley Ranche that brought the total to 968 head.⁴² The easily breached reserve boundaries, the termination by the federal government of the no settlement leases and the election of Wilfrid Laurier's Liberal government with its settler-friendly policies in 1896 gave added impetus to the assault on the reserve's integrity.⁴³

The Bloods, however, were battling more than reluctant pocket books in their attempt to collect grazing dues. They often fell victim to the bottom line and to the attitudes many Anglo-Canadian settlers held towards Native peoples at this time. In July 1897, Wilson successfully collected dues from A.R. Springett, New Oxley Ranche Company "under protest." In Agent Wilson's opinion, Springett believed that because the reserve was unfenced the Bloods could not legally claim grazing dues for cattle wandering onto it or placed within its borders. Despite several conversations, Agent Wilson was unable to convince Springett of the legitimacy of the Bloods' request.⁴⁴ While he conceded that the lack of reserve fence contributed to the problem, Wilson argued that Indians, unlike other settlers, were under no obligation to fence their land. Why he took this view is unclear, but he was likely referring to the logistics and cost of fencing over five hundred square miles of land. He also pointed out that the Indian Act contained a section that protected reserves against trespass. Wilson further realized that if such attitudes from ranchers were countenanced to any degree "our Reserve would soon be over run." He refuted the argument, from ranchers, that living in stock range country brought special privileges with regard to the Blood reserve. Wilson, in argument, expressed his view that "the Indians['] Reserve is not free range but private property" for which use payment was required or alternatively ranchers would be threatened with having their cattle dispersed.⁴⁵

The frequency with which the Bloods had difficulty collecting legitimate grazing dues suggests forces at work other than the mere inability to

pay.⁴⁶ Attempts to collect monies owed resulted in evasion and denial of obligation. One possible explanation is that ranchers faced with the sod-buster invasion, and the attendant shrinkage of accessible Dominion lands, were driven to seek out alternate space and to protect grazing land through the setting aside of stock water reserves; that is, land with accessible water reserved for the use of cattle. There is little doubt that such reserves were increasingly necessary to ranchers for, as Jones points out, at one place along the Belly River, homesteaders' fences "blocked access to water for thirty continuous miles, rendering useless 30,000 acres of grazing land."⁴⁷

The western Plains, however, eventually became a lure to many others who saw their economic salvation and prosperity in the vast open spaces. Thus by the 1890s ranchers needed no convincing that the increased settler demand for land threatened the survival of their operations. The hostility of farmer settlers, and the public alike, to the cattle ranchers had resulted in the federal government announcement in 1891 of the planned termination of all closed leases by the end of 1896.⁴⁸ Land grants to the Calgary and Edmonton Railway, in 1892, both reduced and disrupted the leases driving the tenants to seek other outlets.⁴⁹

The election of the Liberals in 1896 saw the formation of a government sympathetic to both the wishes of farmers and the ideals of agrarian life. The Minister of the Interior, Clifford Sifton, actively supported the establishment of irrigation projects to increase settlement and prairie agricultural potential.⁵⁰ Only the creation of stock water reserves around crucial bodies of water and the prohibition of settlement ensured the continued viability of ranching enterprises in many areas. Nevertheless, the heady optimism and security of lease tenure that had initially attracted large-scale ranching to the southern Alberta area in particular, and to the west in general, was not sustained.

Ultimately, however, the security promised by such reserves proved transitory. Immigration was a driving force that threatened to displace ranchers. Little wonder that hard-pressed ranchers neighbouring the Bloods looked to the reserve to alleviate some of their growing concerns over inadequate pasture. The combination of irrigation technology and the science of dry-land farming, notes Andy den Otter, brought a "consensus among politicians, businessmen, and settlers ... that the rangelands were suitable for cultivation."⁵¹ Government policies reinforcing this belief had been put into place and when dry-land techniques failed to meet expectations in years of drought, mixed farming, Paul Voisey points out, came

to be touted, though erroneously, as an even better way to successfully cultivate the prairie.⁵²

The rapidly growing population and surging economy in the period 1896–1913 were, in part, due to Clifford Sifton.⁵³ Sifton, as Liberal Minister of the Interior between 1896 and 1905, envisioned western agricultural development based on an expanding immigrant population that would eventually people the prairies with fifteen to twenty million new citizens.⁵⁴ The trickle that began in the 1890s became a deluge by the first decade of the twentieth century.⁵⁵ Two or more persons per square mile, for example, occupied all townships bordering the Blood reserve, by 1906.⁵⁶ By way of illustration, the Annual Royal North West Mounted Police for Fort Macleod for 1904 reported 329 entries for homesteads at the Fort Macleod land office from January 1 to November 30 and further observed that “In the Pincher Creek district, within a radius of twenty miles from the town, there is no land available for homesteading, some 200 settlers having taken up land there during the year.”⁵⁷ Although the numbers envisioned by Sifton never materialized, government advertising that promised “fat black land, cheap or even free, in the region of sufficient rainfall” lured hundreds of thousands.⁵⁸

Under pressure of expanding population demands, the Blood reserve came to be regarded, by many, as open territory to which settlers had a right without obligation. The view that the open expanse of the reserve was thus available reduced some of the anxiety and pressure caused by increasing settlement and reinforced the notion of boundless space.⁵⁹ This position was possible, however, only with the denial of the Bloods’ equality as people, and their equality in possession of property. In this the settlers were buoyed by their own sense of superiority, and the Indian Act, which had established the legal wardship status of the Indians. Clearly some ranchers and settlers were determined to frustrate the Bloods’ decision to set the agenda for reserve grazing privileges. They believed that the Blood tribe’s claim to the land was not inviolate, that they were underutilizing it, and therefore stood in the way of progress and the settlers’ own pressing needs.

The ranchers’ fear and loathing of the newly developing agrarian frontier and its farmers illustrated the absolute necessity of the Blood reserve for grazing land. The *Cardston Record*, which observed in August, 1898, that over a hundred homestead entries had been made at the Cardston land office during the summer, highlighted this desire. The result was that once-abundant grazing land was “converted into prosperous farms and ranches.

Hundreds of miles of fence have been erected; hundreds of houses have been built and thousands of head of cattle and horses now subsist upon grass.”⁶⁰ It was this process that had, by the turn of the twentieth century, compromised intuitive ranching practices so that alternating grazing land as a conservation measure was largely terminated.⁶¹

Now the cattle and horses of the homesteader, as well as the rancher, became a matter of concern for the Blood ranchers, farmers, haymakers, and reserve residents in general. Wilson warned local cattle owners that they would be forced to keep their stock off reserve land.⁶² There were, of course, occasions when horses or cattle strayed onto the reserve, but the numbers that were continually brought to Wilson’s attention could not simply be attributed to accidental straying.⁶³ Likely the expansive size of the reserve led some to believe that they could acquire free grazing either without being discovered or before being eventually discovered. Homesteaders, while making the agrarian ethos as much a reality as possible and engaging in land speculation ventures when opportunities existed, themselves demanded land use beyond the boundaries of their inadequate 160-acre quarter sections.⁶⁴

By 1899 the pressure on public land caused by the declining acreage of open range was clear, as was the belief among non-Natives of their pre-eminent right to what little remained.⁶⁵ The attitude of one rancher/settler named Hillier put the issue in sharp relief. Hillier complained that Indians grazed their horses off the reserve, consuming grass essential to ranchers while keeping the reserve closed to non-Native-owned cattle. In Hillier’s view the Indians’ stock should be confined to the limits of the reserve or “ranchers should have equal privileges on the Reserve, that the Indians have off it.” Not surprisingly Hillier did not see any reciprocal obligation for non-Natives to also keep their cattle on their own land. Amazingly, DIA Secretary J.D. McLean agreed with Hillier instructing Agent James Wilson to restrict Blood stock to the reserve.⁶⁶ In the interests of the non-Natives, the Bloods were to be denied the use of the commons.

Much to his credit, however, Wilson believed that the Blood right to equal use of public domain was protected by treaty. In a letter to McLean, he indignantly questioned the settlers’ claim to preferential treatment. Wilson’s query struck a sensitive nerve and eventually legal opinion bore out Wilson’s observation that Indians had the same rights as others and that both Indians and ranchers required a permit if they wished to graze their stock on government lands. “Though the practice of using Dominion lands be prevalent with white men in the Territories,” Law Clerk Reginald

Rimmer observed, “they can have no ground of complaint against the Indians while they themselves are wrong doers.”⁶⁷

Implementing a dues structure proved to be no panacea for controlling the use or abuse of the reserve. In a further effort to reduce conflict between the Bloods and their neighbours and to curb illegal cattle trespass, a barbed wire fence was constructed along the reserve’s southern boundary with Cardston in 1899. The easy destruction of the fence, along with the difficulty in getting the Cardston settlers to pay their grazing dues, led to Wilson’s advice, no doubt prompted by the Bloods, to discontinue the settlers’ grazing privileges.⁶⁸ The fence, in Wilson’s view, had been deliberately cut to permit “stock to pass of[f] and on the reserve at pleasure.”⁶⁹

The records for 1902 reveal that numerous people or groups had legitimate reserve grazing privileges at this time. A report on the leases for 1903 shows that some 6,750 cattle inhabited the reserve under lease arrangements, of one sort or another, with the Bloods. Agent Wilson noted of these lessees that Wallace and Hauks had not paid dues, Sergeant Hilliard had no grazing permit, and although Wilson allowed Hilliard’s cattle on the reserve, he could not convince him to pay his dues.⁷⁰ Considering Wilson’s concern over the lessees’ “habit” of removing stock from the reserve in contravention of the Indian Act, and their continued evasion of the understandings contained in grazing agreements and permits, the outcome could be predicted.⁷¹

CIRCUMSTANCE AND CHANGE

In response to growing problems with grazing leases, the Blood leadership again changed their reserve lease policies. In 1903 the tribe cancelled the grazing permits of local homesteaders and ranchers, preferring instead to lease excess reserve grazing capacity to one or two large companies. The easier supervision of the land and prevention of illegal trespass and theft were necessary given the Bloods’ own substantial cattle and horse interests of around 5,000 animals in total.⁷² Although clearly warranted, the new policy was bound to receive a poor reception from homesteaders bordering the reserve.

Such encouragement of large leaseholders was in fact a return to the practices of the pre-homestead days. The Bloods were deliberately flying in the face of the agrarian development that had already taken place and were attempting to reverse the trend that helped bring about the end of the large lease era. A.A. Lupton argues that ranching on the range in the Fort

Macleod area finished in 1903 and Lethbridge followed suit in 1905.⁷³ The result of the Bloods' action was inevitably to threaten, or stifle, the ambitions of settlers with small holdings who desired to engage in mixed farming and to expand their cattle operations. The Bloods, for their part, simply wished to halt the plundering of their property.⁷⁴

The first agreement under the new leasing arrangement was with the Donald McEwan Company of Brandon, Manitoba. The lease restricted the company cattle to the east and south areas of the reserve and committed the company to graze a maximum of 7,000 cattle for ten years for \$5,000 a year. Importantly, the lease also contracted the company to purchase seven hundred tons of hay from Blood farmers, should they decide to supply it, and required that fences be kept in good repair to keep company and Blood stock apart. Blood cattle owners were free to graze their own stock as desired. The arrangement was exclusive to the company under the condition that it could not sublet.⁷⁵

This contract, if effectively enforced, would, in effect, legally and practically sever the reserve from the surrounding ranching/mixed-farming environment for a ten-year period. The only possible avenue open to those settlers and ranchers still demanding grazing access to the reserve was an illegal invasion, which may account for the destruction of some reserve fencing during 1903.⁷⁶ The new arrangement was also eminently more profitable for the Bloods than the old arrangements, if for no other reason than there was unlikely to be a default on lease payments. Hugh Dempsey points out that the going rate for an Indian Department lease at this time was two cents per acre while the Blood lease was closer to one and one quarter cents per acre.⁷⁷

The impact on other potential users of the exclusive arrangement with the McEwan Co. was immediately evident, and it drove some Cardston residents to attempt an alternate lease acquisition of three thousand acres through an appeal to the Honourable Clifford Sifton. The Blood tribe, however, "absolutely opposed" approval of this effort.⁷⁸ Despite the Bloods' clearly expressed wishes to the contrary, the Department's intention was to grant the Cardston settlers grazing privileges without further reference to the Bloods.⁷⁹ The Bloods were not pleased, believing that Cardston's residents had enjoyed years of free grazing despite Agent Wilson's repeated efforts to collect moneys owed. Even though not paying lease dues, the Mormons' latest effort intended to establish a closed lease "excluding Indians as well as others from making use of the land," and they were even looking to the possibility of acquiring some reserve land through purchase.⁸⁰

Dissenting voices among the Bloods “complained of being annoyed by white men seeking to secure possession or the use of the land.” Indeed, the “self-supporting squad,” as the financially independent residents of the reserve were called, questioned the legitimacy of the McEwan lease.⁸¹ These individuals saw their own interests compromised by the influx of 7,000 lease cattle that would further tax the reserve’s resources. Their fears were substantiated. The McEwan company was soon interpreting its lease agreement liberally and with callous disregard permitted its cattle to roam the reservation and threaten the Bloods’ much-needed hay supplies.⁸²

In 1903 the Blood reserve sustained cattle in numbers that met or exceeded Agent Wilson’s estimate of capacity at eight to ten thousand head. The Blood cattle owners themselves grazed 3,000 head of horses and 3,000 head of cattle. Others grazed 6,750 head. Of this total, the Cochran Ranche had 3,000 head and the Mormons 250. Wilson’s estimate was put to the test when on May 5, 1904, Donald McEwan & Company began placing cattle from Mexico on the reserve.⁸³ Taking Wilson’s upper estimate as a reasonable number, the reserve was, even before the arrival of the McEwan herd, overstocked by 22.5 per cent or 2,750 animals. When one considers that illegal trespass was constant and sometimes considerable, it is almost certain that, except for short periods around roundup and sale, the reserve was continually overstocked.⁸⁴ Grazing regulations for the West, issued by the Department of the Interior in 1905, stipulated a ratio of one cow or five sheep per twenty acres.⁸⁵ Should McEwan stock the lease to the 7,000 allowable limit, the approximate acreage required to hold all the stock was 395,000 acres, more than the reserve’s total of approximately 350,000 acres.

The Bloods’ move to consolidate their grazing leases coincided with public recognition of a shift in land use to mixed farming. However, the Bloods’ views of the part they would play in this shift collided with the public’s wishes. This trend placed added pressure on declining grazing space and signified that the ranching era had peaked.⁸⁶ Touted by government, business, press and public alike, conventional wisdom at this time held that the diversification in the use of a homestead’s limited acreage, offered by mixed farming, was the key to farmer prosperity and the cure for the dangerous reliance on a one-crop system. Interestingly W.M. Elofson has argued that, except for the initial period of ranching in the West, ranchers engaged in mixed farming to maximize benefits and to fulfill their needs.⁸⁷

MIXED FARMING INTERLUDE

Despite the Bloods' lease to the McEwan Company in the view of the press, the 'dark years' for ranching were imminent.⁸⁸ The prediction proved all too credible as commercial agriculture and the disastrous winter of 1906/07 devastated large-scale ranching across the prairies.⁸⁹ The farms and fences that dotted the stockmen's former grazing range were a clear indication of the ranchers' declining importance. Helpless in the face of the advance of the fence, ranchers offered an unheeded note of caution about the suitability of the region for farming, warning that "If this land is homesteaded and farming is not a success, there is not only the one industry crippled, but two."⁹⁰ Historian Gerald Friesen, in echoing the ranchers' sentiments, calls the opening of this region to farming settlement "a great error in Canadian domestic policy."⁹¹ The environmental limitations that were to restrict the agricultural potential of southwestern Alberta, however, were in the future. No amount of warning, especially from ranching interests, could dampen the heady expectation that agricultural diversification could bring the unlimited prosperity that wheat growing had so far denied.⁹²

In November 1912, the *Macleod Spectator* expressed its view of the local situation. As far as the paper was concerned, single-crop agriculture such as wheat was now passé. Large-scale ranching, according to the *Spectator*, was at an end and at any rate both mixed farming and ranching were dependent on access to the Blood reserve. This eventuality the *Spectator* both promoted and anticipated.⁹³ The *Macleod Advertiser* reported that farmers of Cardston, Magrath, Raymond, Spring Coulee, and Lethbridge districts wanted big cattle leases stopped and the reserve land made available to all other interested parties through lease. This agitation was driven by the belief that the 350,000 acres of reserve was a suitable inducement to the expansion of local mixed farming enterprises.⁹⁴ For the *Spectator* mixed farming was the answer to the conundrum of ever-elusive prosperity in 'next year country,' especially now that the big ranches were "being cut up."⁹⁵ The hope for future prosperity lay in a "few cows and chickens," and the alienation of Blood land.⁹⁶

It was, therefore, with considerable shock and apprehension that the *Macleod Advertiser* greeted the news in June 1912, that the Winnipeg-based company of Gordon, Ironsides & Fares was to take a ten-year lease on the available Blood reserve land and stock it with 17,000 cattle. The company was a major western beef producer and packing company that ran tens of thousands of cattle in Alberta and Saskatchewan on

hundreds of thousands of acres of leased Crown land. Simultaneously Knight and Watson, a local company, was also given a lease.⁹⁷ Responding to the arrangement with Gordon, Ironsides & Fares, the *Macleod Advertiser* predicted a serious challenge to Fort Macleod's potential for growth as the lease pre-empted, for at least a decade, any possibility of acquiring the reserve through a surrender. Hence the town would remain hemmed in from the east by the Blood reserve and by the Peigan reserve to the southwest.⁹⁸

Ignoring any benefits accruing to the Bloods from the lease, the *Advertiser* denigrated the cattle trade, which they saw as serving eastern markets and not western needs, while the *Spectator* trumpeted both the 'need' for mixed farming and for the "many thousands of [wasted] fat acres" of the Blood reserve.⁹⁹ Admitting entrenched and hostile Blood opposition to the proposed surrender, and expressing the mistaken but prevalent attitude that Indians were doomed to extinction, the *Spectator* speculated on the benefits of a ninety-nine-year lease. In the interim, disease would destroy the Bloods as a people and thus the most substantial stumbling block to Fort Macleod's growth would be resolved.¹⁰⁰ However, opposition to large leases developed not only in response to the lease policy on the Blood reserve. It was also a backlash against cattle barons like Pat Burns who had cornered the Alberta beef market and whose large leases, the paper believed, restricted the ability of mixed farming operations.¹⁰¹

There appears to have been great local demand for leased portions of the Blood reserve with the *Macleod Advertiser* reporting applications for 126,000 acres of reserve land.¹⁰² One farmer in Magrath, for example, wanted 15,000 acres of reserve land, just two miles west of his farm, to go with the 320 acres of his homestead. If granted a twenty-year lease, he planned to stock it with cattle, horses, and sheep. Ever hopeful, the *Advertiser* reported that government officials, including Dr. W. Roche, Minister of the Interior, were in favour of leases being granted to local farmers, a contention not borne out by subsequent debate in the House of Commons.¹⁰³

The agitation was, however, out of step with the desires of Blood leadership and band members. By 1913 they had accepted the fact that the large leases were preferable to general subletting, both for animal control and income, and so they rejected local bids to lease reserve land.¹⁰⁴ The tribe voted unanimously "to give *all* the grazing privileges possible" to Gordon Ironsides and Fares with a guarantee in place that the rental due the Bloods would never be less than \$10,000 per year.¹⁰⁵

Though the *Cardston Globe* hoped that preaching would bring converts to the support of mixed farming, denial of reality and castigation of ranching were no sure means of expelling the cattle barons from the Blood Reserve.¹⁰⁶ On May 30, 1913, the *Globe* demanded that the lease held by Gordon, Ironsides & Fares be cancelled and the land be made available for general leasing. Resolutions to this effect came from farmers in the communities of Cardston, Magrath, Raymond, Spring Coulee, Lethbridge, and Orton, and the Bloods were said to be in favour.¹⁰⁷ This was wishful thinking given the Bloods' past experience with rent collection and illegal trespass and the recent election of Shot Both Sides, a staunch defender of the Bloods' rights, as chief. Ignored and thwarted, the locals eventually blamed their failure on the power of mammon: "The chiefs have been having a lot of long green bills of late and their attitude in opposition to the leasing of their lands to the small mixed farming may be explained thereby." In desperation, the *Globe* predicted that the lessees, because of their corruption, would not carry the day.¹⁰⁸

Despite the predictions the Bloods renewed the Gordon, Ironsides and Fares lease in 1913. Dismayed, the *Spectator* reported that "not a single member of the tribe was in favor of the policy" of granting leases to small ranchers.¹⁰⁹ Given the previous coverage of this matter, one might expect the press to announce the death knell of mixed farming and small-scale ranching. Glen Campbell, Superintendent of Indian Agencies, told the *Spectator* that the Bloods opposed leases to small interests because it led to endless confusion. The tribe also appreciated the increasing value of their grazing and in the future, Campbell predicted, the rental would rise.¹¹⁰

The local press, however, continued to promote a different reality from that encouraged by the Bloods through their insistence on large lease grants. The impression now reinforced was that the West was full and space was at a premium.¹¹¹ The bounds of the homestead no longer sufficed to sustain a settler's financial ambitions and thus caused a movement towards expansion. Settlers on the Blood reserve's boundaries cast a covetous eye on its seemingly open and neglected spaces. Just as the reserve had alleviated pressure on overextended cattle herds in the past, it could now relieve the pressure on homesteads that were too small. The solution was for the government to open the Blood reserve to lease and rescue stockmen "forced to sell their cows and cut down their herds on account of the diminishing of the range."¹¹² To expect such a solution, however, was a denial of the history of relations with the Bloods and their intention not to surrender but instead to defend their own considerable interests. The Bloods' decision, in

March 1915, to renew the Gordon Ironsides and Fares lease, “if they meet our terms,” of \$10,000.00 per year for not more than 5,000 head of cattle on the reserve subject to a \$2.00 per head penalty, reminded the locals of their inability to change the *status quo*.¹¹³

THE BLOODS’ CONTINUED RESISTANCE

The full impact of the closure of the reserve to the surrounding community through restricted lease policies only became apparent as settlers determined to get through stealth what had been denied them by decision. By far the largest illegal breach of the reserve’s integrity was the constant invasion of stray animals, especially horses. Serious problems with strays dated back to the early reserve years and had gotten progressively worse. Agent Dilworth reported in December 1914, that “With the coming of winter those ranchers living adjacent to the reserve on the north and east ... as has been their custom for 10 years past, have turned their horses onto the reserve for winter grazing.” The practice had gone on unchecked for years and in 1913 Dilworth found strays sufficient to compromise the Bloods’ interests.¹¹⁴ Again in 1914, 234 strays were rounded up with between forty and fifty being eventually claimed by owners.¹¹⁵ The Cardston *Globe*’s report, May 1916, of numbers of strays bearing the same brand suggests that some individuals were intentionally and illegally running their stock on the reserve. On this occasion the roundup netted ninety-four horses.¹¹⁶ In January 1918, 195 horses were captured with at least seventeen bearing the same brand.¹¹⁷ Agent Dilworth caused a momentary outcry when he impounded both stray horses and cattle and claimed a grazing fee of three dollars per head. On this occasion the numbers posed no apparent threat to the reserve’s resources so Dilworth proposed accepting the animals for a grazing fee.¹¹⁸ The offenders, meanwhile, had managed to acquire free grazing for their animals from the Bloods. The costs to the tribe and savings to the owners are difficult to evaluate, as there is no way to accurately determine how long some animals were on the reserve being fattened on free grass.¹¹⁹

In August, 1920, 102 animals found on the reserve were impounded.¹²⁰ The Alberta Provincial Police constable W.W. Henderson, Cardston, reported that some individuals went to great lengths to surreptitiously graze their cattle on the Bloods’ land. As this was an offence under the Indian Act, some wrongdoers attempted to evade detection by resorting to the use of a hair brand.¹²¹ Henderson declared that this tactic so incensed the

Bloods that they killed the strays in retaliation. He reported that three Indians were awaiting trial charged with this offence.¹²² Meanwhile, the belief that reserve access was “essential to successful stock-raising in this district” continued, even though continually thwarted by the Bloods.¹²³

A 1922 report to R.H. Campbell, Director of Forestry, Department of the Interior, suggests that grazing land continued to be at a premium and that large blocks of land, such as the Blood Reserve, could be critical in determining success or failure for ventures in mixed farming and stock ranching. Though the report focused on the use of forest ranges for grazing, the conclusions were equally applicable to the area around the Blood Reserve. In his report Campbell discussed several classes of ‘ranchers’: those with large economically viable acreages purchased when land was cheap, ‘local’ ranchers who mostly leased Dominion lands and who therefore had to live with the spectre of cancellation, those who farmed and ranched with about two hundred head of stock and limited pasture, and finally farmers who kept a few head of stock for home consumption. The general conclusion reached was that they all needed grazing land in addition to their holdings. The depressed markets, in conjunction with acute grazing shortages, led to intense pressure on forest reserves and other government lease lands.¹²⁴

Substituting the term “Blood reserve” for “forest reserve” one immediately realizes that the same arguments had been made by all manner of ranchers and homesteaders living next to the Blood reserve since its inception. Though the report blamed the current depressed state of the industry on the drought beginning in 1917 and peaking in the winter of 1919–20 and the expense of feed requirements, these were problems produced by nature, not by a perceived need or a claim to the right to utilization.¹²⁵ Agent J.T. Faunt aptly summed up the apparent attitude of one homesteader, McGovern, charged with the abuse of reserve land: “He has some land just across the river from the Reserve & is running a herd of horses & cattle away out of proportion to his land holdings,” Faunt wrote, “with the result that for years his stock have been running on the Reserve & in fact they were practically all raised on the Reserve & won’t stay off.”¹²⁶

According to Indian Commissioner W.M. Graham, in 1922 there were sixteen leases on the Blood reserve, not counting the grazing leases and three other farming leases “of which you are aware.” Because of Graham’s wording, only six of these can be determined to have been paid up, four did not respond to inquiries and three had rent deferred or some owing. Some lessees, such as J.E. Neilson, sought longer leases but Agent Faunt

suspected that they wanted to graze until the feed was gone and then abandon the lease, a fear not supported by Graham.¹²⁷ Most of these leases were likely holdovers granted without Blood consent as a consequence of the amendment to Section 90 of the Indian Act in 1918. This amendment permitted the government to implement its Greater Production Campaign, during World War I, by conscripting ‘idle’ land and resources on Native reserves. The Bloods were involuntarily conscripted into this program.¹²⁸ Hugh Dempsey suggests that the amendment was partly precipitated by the Blood refusal of a land surrender.¹²⁹ Locally, however, the *Macleod Times* still viewed securing grazing as “one of the vital problems of our farmers.”¹³⁰

WORLD WAR I AND GREATER PRODUCTION

For a brief interlude during and after World War I, the government imposed a land-use policy on some western Native tribes, including the Bloods. At best the government’s agenda was a serious inconvenience to the Bloods; at worst, according to some accounts, there was a serious negative impact on the Bloods’ economic well-being for decades to come. This Greater Production Program, introduced in 1918, was the brainchild of Inspector of Indian Agencies William Graham and grew out of the erroneous belief that some Native tribes had excess and unused lands that could be pressed into national service during the wartime emergency. The plan was aimed at the increased production of food to meet wartime needs. Graham pointed out to the government that his western inspectorate alone contained 340,000 acres of pasturage most of which, in his view, was unused. To facilitate the development of the program, Graham also noted that many Indian bands had “idle” money that could be conscripted in aid of implementing the Greater Production Plan. Consequently the Meighen Government amended the Indian Act, it being noted that the consent of the Natives with regard to their land and resources could be dispensed with. Graham was duly authorized to establish Greater Production farms on Indian reserves in the West. Included with the plan was the leasing of Indian lands to non-Indians for farming and grazing. Any proceeds from the program would accrue to the band after expenses were deducted.¹³¹ At least one member of the House of Commons, however, noted that farmers with lands adjoining the reserves stood to benefit and that “there is something in connection with this enactment which does not seem square to the Indians.”¹³² Although of questionable necessity, the program was in

keeping with the broad scope of power the government had appropriated to itself under the War Measures Act.

Under Greater Production surrender of 1918, the Bloods granted the government “the free use of whatever land on the Blood Indian reserve it may require for the greater production of food producing grains.” Consequently 4,800 acres of Blood land was organized into a Greater Production farm and another 6,000 acres were granted to Whites as well as 90,000 acres given to grazing leases.¹³³ Ultimately the grazing leases were touted as the most profitable aspect of the entire greater production scheme.¹³⁴

Although the government claimed much success with the program, there was little, if any, positive impact on the Bloods. All indications are that the Bloods were doing well agriculturally, and especially with their cattle and horse herds, before the implementation of the program and suffered considerable loss while the program remained in force. The problem arises in separating losses directly attributable to the Greater Production Plan from those caused by environmental factors. Regardless, the negative fallout during the period of Greater Production scheme was dramatic. With regard to cattle, for example, the Bloods had 4,406, 3,742, 2,074, 1,230, and 1,481 for the years 1918, 1919, 1920, 1921, and 1922, respectively. Clearly, cattle losses by 1921 and 1922 were tremendous. There was a similar dramatic decline in bushels of grain harvested with a high of 92,130 bushels harvested in 1917 and a low of 992 bushels in 1920, despite an increase in acres sown with 3,374 in 1917, while that for 1920 was 4,709. The horse herd experienced smaller fluctuating declines. Interestingly, a DIA statement of cost per acre to run five Greater Production farms has only the Blood farm showing a no-cost expenditure for “Compensation to Indians.”¹³⁵ The Bloods had reason to be unhappy with their forced conscription into the Greater Production scheme.

The government offered, in its own defence, the mitigating factor of a weather disaster and pointed out that Blood losses in cattle and horses were typical of the southern Alberta area during this time.¹³⁶ The research of David Jones suggests that there may be some legitimacy to the government’s claim. The Lethbridge area, for example, experienced generally drier conditions, and 1918 was “the driest year ever, before or since, totaling only 7.63 inches of moisture.” Consequently total crop yields were down for 1917, 1918, and 1919, and this calamity was followed by a severe grasshopper infestation for 1919–21.¹³⁷

Although some historians are skeptical, the Bloods accept the veracity of former Indian Agent R.N. Wilson’s charges against the government

delivered in his self-published "Our Betrayed Wards" in 1921. Wilson recognized the part played by the weather but unreservedly states that there was a deliberate effort by the government and ranchers to sabotage the Bloods' developing cattle and agricultural business in an effort to sustain the profitable rations system.¹³⁸ This deliberate act, Wilson charges, was compounded by the general neglect of the Bloods' interests. To support his claim, he listed a litany of offences; cattle and horses had been permitted to destroy an unfenced wheat crop, deliberate overgrazing of the range was ignored, and a herd of cattle had been sold at a substantial loss. In this latter case the agent, not the government, took the blame and he was fired.¹³⁹

It has been argued that the emphasis on Greater Production and the siphoning off of resources and machinery for that program deprived the Bloods of their use when needed and therefore negatively affected the Bloods' own agricultural and ranching efforts. The result was an economic decline that set the Bloods back decades and brought about destitution.¹⁴⁰ One is left to speculate, however, whether the Bloods' losses would have been so acute if Greater Production had not been, among others, an additional complicating factor, a fact mooted by Graham when he admitted that the DIA might not emerge unscathed from an investigation.¹⁴¹

As Taylor points out, however, Greater Production declined in importance after the war and resulted in no permanent alienation of reserve land.¹⁴² The major problem with Greater Production for this study is the difficulty in assessing its impact on the Bloods due to the absence of hard data. Unlike other aspects of Blood reserve integration; involvement in Greater Production was totally involuntary. Greater Production was forced on the Bloods as on other Natives, by the perceived wartime emergency and they appear to have had no part to play in determining its course or in mitigating the worst of its consequences.

In the end the government was not totally convinced of the practicality of the Greater Production program. Superintendent General D.C. Scott informed Graham on February 22, 1922, that with the war emergency past there was little need to continue Greater Production. It was realized that the rationale of the scheme's farms and leases was beyond the scope of the department and hampered its main aim of securing the advancement of the Natives. Farming leases should be discontinued on expiration, as they were contrary to the development of an appropriate work ethic. Scott wanted the Bloods, and other Natives, to earn rewards from the sweat of their own brows rather than "sit by and derive an unearned income from

the work of others.” Grazing leases could continue but so should efforts at securing surrenders of ‘idle lands.’¹⁴³

Ultimately Greater Production did not succeed in assimilating the Bloods as willing and wholehearted participants in efforts to force greater economic rewards from them and their land. Unfortunately for the government’s plan, the dictatorial way in which the scheme was forced on the Bloods and its administration by the most rigid of bureaucrats in the person of William Graham increased their resolve to be the masters of their own fate once the regime of Greater Production ceased to exist.¹⁴⁴ By the end of the program, the Bloods were certainly in no mood to contemplate any alienation of their land.

THE CHALLENGES OF LEASE

A First Nations convention held at Macleod, in November 1924, brought the matter of grazing leases to a head. The Indians themselves had decided, according to the *Lethbridge Herald*, that some leasing policies were an infringement of Treaty 7, a view upheld by both Chief Shot Both Sides and local M.P. George Coote.¹⁴⁵ The troublesome flash point was a Blood reserve lease to the Hon. A.J. McLean. McLean had trouble stocking the lease to the maximum allowable 5,000 head of cattle and wanted the cost adjusted accordingly, a proposal rejected by Agent Faunt, who demanded the full \$10,000 payment. McLean also wanted to fence his lease, which Blood ranchers objected to because their own cattle tended to drift along the fence and over the riverbanks to their destruction.¹⁴⁶ These concerns, communicated to Minister of the Interior and Superintendent General of Indian Affairs Charles Stewart, were dismissed as possibly “imaginary,” rather than legitimate grievances resulting from the still unrepealed Section 90 of the Indian Act.¹⁴⁷

While the records are generally mute on the issue of grazing in the mid- to late 1920s, Dempsey points to the general prosperity of farmers on the reserve in 1927.¹⁴⁸ This suggests that reserve grazing remained good and so demand remained high. The reserve could accommodate some export demand because many of the reserve residents were employed outside of the reserve and only some of the reserve land was suitable for farming.¹⁴⁹ The year 1927, however, was an “abnormally wet year,” an anomaly in the climatic pattern for the region that experienced, Marchildon observes, practically continual drought conditions from 1917 through the 1930s.¹⁵⁰ Jones points out that “the three Alberta dry belt census divisions had more

Table 2.1. Lease Monies Due Bloods for use of their land.

CLIENT	LOCATION	YEAR	RATE / \$1.25
Blackmore, H.J.	Cardston	1934	194.60
		1935	194.60
		1935	32.00
Penney, W.T.	McGrath	1935	570.54
Patterson Ranching Co.	Lethbridge	1935	600.00
Parker, R.	Orton	1935	112.15
?, B.G.	Lethbridge	1935	11.00
Horn, F.	Lethbridge	1935	70.68
Stringham, G.L.	Glenwood	1935	1100.18
Crest, C.S.	Lethbridge	1935	869.09
Jensen, L.	Lethbridge	1935	916.06
Meldrum, J.	Mcgrath	1935	322.41
Pitcher, WFM	Cardston	1935	824.59
Smith, J. / Kearl, S.	Cardston	1935	248.80
		1935	.60
Whitney, A., et al.	Kipp	1935	429.28
McNab, W.H., et al.	Macleod	1935	153.60

Above statistics taken from LAC, RG 10, vol. 1538.

[farm] abandonments in 1926 than the *five* most heavily vacated Saskatchewan census divisions in 1936.”¹⁵¹ By 1933, in the midst of the Depression, the reserve was deemed, by a Department of Agriculture Report, to be “without a doubt, the best stock raising land in Western Canada” and supported more sheep per acre than any other part of Alberta. Still lessees tried to force a fee reduction from ten to eight cents an acre by submitting payments based on the reduced rate. Though Blood leadership and the DIA determined not to give in, eight different leaseholders were in arrears by August 1933. As the leaseholders changed, or encountered economic difficulty, the problem with collecting rents was increasingly difficult (Table 2.1).¹⁵² Max Foran describes the 1920s as an increasingly burdensome period for ranchers because of accumulating debt from leasing tax arrears. This problem was compounded by the collapse of beef prices during the 1930s, which left Alberta ranchers in “dire straits.”¹⁵³ These national economic problems likely were reflected in the dealings locals had with the Bloods and in their attempts to force down lease rates.

Historical experience, reserve politics, and environmental conditions combined, in 1933, causing official hesitation to accommodate the needs of the non-Native community. In November the DIA was approached by the Jenkins Brothers, Fishburn, Alberta, for a lease of ten years on a southern portion of the reserve in order to ensure winter range: "it makes it very hard for us to carry on with our cattle if we are not sure of winter range for them." To this point, the Jenkins Brothers indicated, their arrangement with the Bloods had been both cordial and satisfactory.¹⁵⁴ Inspector of Indian Agencies M. Christianson's response regarding the 6,000-acre lease was not encouraging. Although several ranchers had been given leases to winter cattle on the reserve in 1932, environmental conditions on the reserve had deteriorated in the interim. Agent J.E. Pugh thus reported that the chief and headmen were "absolutely opposed" to further leases in the southern portion of the reserve, which was the tribe's essential grazing range and hay land.¹⁵⁵ Although the reserve was a significant factor in determining the stock policy of off-reserve individuals, or groups, the Bloods were unwilling to compromise their own anticipated future grass reserves.

Agent Pugh summed up his view of the basic economic conflict that existed in the demands placed on the reserve by the non-Native community. "Are we as a reserve," queried Pugh, "to be more or less tentatively responsible for the carrying of outside ranchers, who wish to protect their range in winter for summer, at the expense of the Indians" while he, as agent, was obliged to protect the Bloods' similar interests.¹⁵⁶ It was clear that local stock raisers regarded reserve land as critical to their success. Stock raising in the area adjoining the reserve could not thrive without access to more grazing land than was available outside the reserve's borders.

Beginning in 1933, there was an apparent attempt by some Bloods and cattle owners to circumvent the power of the agent and the DIA. Becoming entrepreneurs in their own right, they engaged in leasing contracts with non-Native stockowners to graze outside stock on individually fenced land. Christianson thought this policy wrong as it would encourage others to follow suit. He predicted that such actions would result in a reserve overrun with stock "and the whole management of the agency will simply 'go up in smoke.'" Despite such reservations twelve such agreements were eventually concluded.¹⁵⁷

Christianson was aware that the survivability of the reserve was at stake if overgrazing occurred. He was equally aware that this new direction in managing grazing on an individual contract basis posed a severe challenge

to DIA authority. Certainly there was potential for serious management confusion but Christianson was going in the face of reserve and regional economic history when he speculated: "The only system that we can adopt is to keep the Indians from trucking and trading with outsiders."¹⁵⁸ In attempting to stifle such commercial exchange, Christianson advocated an impractical policy that existed only in the overzealous minds of Department bureaucrats. Although official government policy had at least ideally been aimed in this direction, the history of grazing contracts, and the demands and expectations of the Bloods' neighbours, had mitigated against such a policy ever becoming reality.

DEPRESSION AND DROUGHT

Through deliberate arrangements and enforcement of their policy in the past, the Bloods and their agents had managed, with difficulty, to practically keep control over the reserve's grazing land and hay. The onset of the Depression, however, along with the devastating environmental crisis, increased both the settlers' need for land and their determination to have it. As a result, the DIA became more responsive to the needs of non-Natives living in the area of the reserve and attempted to improve the crisis at hand. Ultimately what control the Bloods had been able to gain during the previous decades was slowly eroded away.¹⁵⁹

Economic and financial conditions in the Great Depression played a significant part in the desire for the use of Blood reserve land and determined the attitudes lessees exhibited once the land was made available to them. A bone of contention was whether or not the lease terms granted the lessee right of exclusive use. The case of W.T. McCaugherty, Lethbridge, illustrates this point. In November 1935, he complained to Agent Pugh about certain Indians camped on his lease. In an effort at encouraging McCaugherty to be more conciliatory, Pugh reminded him that a clause in the lease provided for removal of land from a lease if desired by "those Indians living on the lands leased." This McCaugherty could not, or would not, accept and he threatened the Indians with "criminal action ... for trespassing."¹⁶⁰

The McCaugherty problem came to a head in January 1936, with his assault on a reserve resident and resulted in Agent Pugh raising serious questions about leasing technicalities and procedures. Despite the fact that a lease was a "conditional surrender," Pugh recognized that ejecting the Indians from leased land in favour of the lessee would result in much

bitterness and disaffection among them.¹⁶¹ McCaugherty, however, was unmoved and furthermore believed that the lease legally permitted him to treat the Bloods as “trespassers” on his leased land.¹⁶² Pugh’s attempts at mediation failed, leading the Department to conclude that McCaugherty was “unreasonable” in his assumptions.¹⁶³ Tribal members, of course, did not accept Pugh’s explanation that by not being resident on the leased portion of the reserve prior to the granting of the lease they had “forfeited all rights to the lease lands.”¹⁶⁴

The abuse of individual Blood property and individual rights, at times, went to such provocative extremes as permitting sheep to invade Indian homes during their absence. In another case, a Blood was lassoed and dragged around by a lessee. Such incidents, Christianson said, were “too numerous to mention.”¹⁶⁵ The attitudes engendered by such behaviour magnified the already negative aspects of the leasing system. The behaviour of lessees such as McCaugherty dictated that such leasing arrangements should have properly been discontinued.¹⁶⁶

By 1935 conditions on the reserve suggested an environmental catastrophe of major proportions in the making, and sound management practices dictated that leasing be ended, or at least temporarily curtailed. According to Pugh, 145,000 acres of range (approximately 41 per cent of the reserve) on the north end of the reserve was in serious condition from soil erosion due to drought and overgrazing. Land to a depth of four miles from the rivers was ‘beyond restoration’ unless grazing was halted. The effects of stress on the land are indicated by the fact that one lease of 4,627 acres, with a stocking capacity of 250, had in excess of 500 cattle. The inevitable consequence of such conditions was intense competition for grass with the result that lessees had resorted to the illegal and chaotic practice of invading each other’s ranges.¹⁶⁷

This inevitably resulted in a great deal of dissatisfaction among both the Bloods and the lessees. Blood ranchers and farmers found their movement and access to their own land continually restricted as lessees, driven by harsh environmental conditions, neglected the spirit of their leases and interpreted the letter of the lease to their own benefit. The Bloods, at the end of their patience, wanted the leases ended. Pugh supported that sentiment when he recommended that, based on grass conditions, the leases be cancelled.¹⁶⁸

Despite the informed opposition of the Bloods and Agent Pugh, the Department chose to ignore the weight of evidence and opinion and proceeded to implement its own agenda. The Bloods’ cancellation of the

Town of Cardston lease, in 1936, for example, was based on environmental concerns and “economics,” while locals needed the land to expand their operations. The DIA, however, decided to renew Cardston’s lease for another year. The rationale for the renewal, as explained to Pugh, was that in the Department’s estimation “the Town of Cardston will continue to require these pasturage privileges.” The only remedial action taken by the Department was to remind the town to be more appreciative of the use of the Bloods’ property.¹⁶⁹

The Bloods, however, saw nothing magnanimous in the Department’s gesture. This became abundantly clear when, in a vote taken on May 26, 1936, “on the question of renewal of Grazing lease granted by the Blood Band of Indians in 1924,” they voted 186 to 4 for cancellation.¹⁷⁰

Environmental conditions continued to deteriorate and, although the DIA often ignored the wishes of the Bloods, it could not ignore the condition of the land. In June Agent Pugh estimated that drought and grasshoppers affected 60,000 acres of the reserve, threatening both current lease use and winter grazing prospects.¹⁷¹ Lessees, of course, did not want to pay for land ravaged by grasshoppers. As a consequence, some lessees were both unwilling and unable to carry on with their agreements. In September, for example, Agent Pugh reported that Christian Jensen and W.T. Passey, Magrath, holders of leases Nos. 133 and 131, respectively, wished to relinquish their holdings. “The reason for vacating in the Jensen case,” Pugh wrote, “is because of shortage of grazing, due to drouth and this lease being very heavily hit by locusts. In the case of Passey, I think it is a matter of inability to carry such a large acreage.” It is highly likely that Passey’s ability to carry his “large acreage” was adversely affected by climatic conditions. At least one lessee, the Pitcher Sheep Co., went out of business.¹⁷²

When Pugh received petitions for the continuation of leases in August, he advised the Department against it because conditions had worsened to such an extent that the reserve could not sustain the stock. In fairness, and because of the Indians’ decision in the recent vote, Pugh recommended that the leases be ended and that lessees be given final notification.¹⁷³ Christianson was noncommittal, agreeing only to cancel one troublesome lease which had no grass and from which the owner drove his cattle onto Indian pasture and succeeded in ruining it.¹⁷⁴ That Pugh was “very nearly run off[f] his feet at times trying to adjust disputes between lessees and Indians,” is a clear indication that the Bloods were not passive observers with regard to the economic well-being of their reserve.¹⁷⁵

The problems faced by the local homesteaders, and their impressions of how to best gain relief, were well illustrated by M.E. Ririe, Magrath, and his accomplices, who sent an inquiry about lease land in August 1935 to Lethbridge MP J.S. Stewart. They told Stewart that the lessees were in dire straits and they resented having to purchase hay outside of their leases from the Indians. Ririe was set straight when told that the money from haying was practically the only income for some Bloods and that hay land could therefore not be leased.¹⁷⁶ It is hard to escape the conclusion, however, that Ririe felt that he had a right to the wealth and convenience of the reserve as if it were public domain. He was likely encouraged in this view by the increasingly difficult circumstances, which, historian James Gray says, would have driven ranchers out of southern Alberta, had they been able to extricate themselves.¹⁷⁷

At the end of 1935 the Department acknowledged the Indians' frustration with the leases and their desire to cancel the lease agreements about to expire in 1936 and 1937. The matter was urgent in that the lessees had to be given proper notification. The existing arrangements meant that some 145,000 acres of the north end of the reserve were alienated in lease contracts. Admittedly the income from the leases had been uncertain and now there was the issue of environmental damage that further reduced the value and use of the land to the Bloods.¹⁷⁸

Despite this, in December 1936, the Department contemplated leasing 70,000 acres of Blood reserve land.¹⁷⁹ The only consideration given to the Bloods' feelings was to stipulate ten basic provisions for the lease. Among the most important were that the land could be used only for grazing, wood or timber could not be cut, and that the lease could not be sublet. The lease further stipulated a stock limit of one sheep to ten acres, one cow to twenty-four acres, and one horse to twenty acres. Lessees were also prohibited from concluding private business deals with individual Natives without the express permission of the Bloods. Given previous experiences, the most important provision was likely number ten: "That if in the lessee's area Indians reside thereon, their property shall at all times be protected from the lessee's stock, and that the Indians shall be permitted to retain their live stock holdings on the undefined reservation within his lease."¹⁸⁰

The Department's determination to lease was probably triggered by the desire to reduce growing relief bills. The problem of relief expenditures bolstered the perception that the Bloods, among other tribes, had large unproductive land holdings that should be more aggressively used in the furtherance of self-support. Inspector of Agencies C. Schmidt believed

that the benefit of an increase in cattle and grain production accrued only to the small minority who had cattle or who farmed, while at the same time relief costs increased. The Department's response was to encourage the Inspector to convince the Indians to lease their 'idle' lands.¹⁸¹

By late 1938, however, it appears that leases were being closed out and related issues were being wound up.¹⁸² Despite new requests for leasing, the DIA determined that, given the condition of the land, and considering the needs of "our Special Welfare I[ndian] D[e]partment Herd," the granting of new leases was inadvisable. The Department's perception of the well-being of the Bloods and their land and increasing DIA expectations, if not the Bloods' wishes, now appeared to be uppermost in determining the new policy.¹⁸³

CONCLUSION

One can only conclude that the absolute defining motivation for the leasing system, from the perspective of both the lessee and the DIA, was the general view that unleased Indian land was wasted land. Clearly, however, this view far from completes the picture of the reserve's incorporation into local ranching market structures characterized mainly through lease and hay sales. The true picture is much more complicated. For the Bloods, their reserve land was a resource on which to draw, though they had to balance their own and others' usage with its market disposition. As well, its long-term sustainability had to be factored in. Agents often approached the issue from an economic and legal perspective, concerned about both the Bloods' income and their legitimate rights. Many agents took the fiduciary responsibilities inherited with their positions more serious, or at least interpreted it more favourable to Native wishes, than did the DIA's upper bureaucracy. The Bloods' neighbours wanted access to enhance their economic wellbeing. Time and changed circumstances and the Bloods' refusal to be cowed, however, did not permit the uniform generalizations that often propelled the DIA's approach and rancher/settler views.

Perhaps there was no uniform approach that could cater to the variety of conflicting agendas that emerged over time. The Bloods acted on their perceived needs for use of their land, their desire to control their own affairs and for the income. The agent, caught in a difficult situation, had to take into account the Bloods' desires, his duty to protect their interests and the application of the Department's dictums. The Department, an arm of the government of White Canada, held the Bloods in legal and paternalistic

wardship and was generally responsible to the direction of the non-Native population. Angry ranchers and homesteaders petitioning Frank Oliver, circa 1902, summed up the enduring economic and political reality of the West: that the Indians were wards of the government and the government “servant of the people” and the Indians were, therefore, in a position to be coerced according to the will of the White man.¹⁸⁴

The unpredictable environment and the demands of local ranchers and homesteaders further militated against the smooth functioning of the bureaucratic machine. Little wonder that the Bloods’ needs were often placed last on the agenda. It was generally the case that those in charge of administering the Bloods’ affairs felt that they knew best what the Bloods wanted and needed. Allan G. Harper has stated that protecting the integrity of Indian land “is perhaps the principal purpose of the Indian Act.”¹⁸⁵ In the case of the Blood reserve and the lease system, both the Act and the government often failed to fulfill that mandate.

Many agents, however, took their guardianship of the Bloods seriously and did their utmost to protect Native interests, even to the point of disagreeing with bureaucratic bosses in Ottawa. This behaviour is very much at odds with the stereotype of corrupt and dictatorial Indian agents lording it over their wards. The Bloods, in conjunction with the agents were, at times, able to set and control the reserve land agenda. They deliberately chose to integrate their reserve into a larger community land base even if in a limited way. It was not, however, always easy to enforce the limits of this integration as they defined them or wished them to be. Too often the clients of the Bloods sought to evade their legitimate responsibilities.

The Department of Indian Affairs brokered the relationship between the Bloods and their neighbours and in the end satisfied neither. But business carried on driven by the need for a scarce commodity of much value and in great demand, accessible grazing and hay land. By an ironic twist, the Bloods, though dispossessed of their vast traditional land holdings by treaty in 1877, now possessed a large area of reserve land that had become a most valued commodity in the agrarian-based culture of southern Alberta. Beal notes that it was the intention of the DIA that reserve lands not be regarded as ‘commodities’; in reality, however, during the reserve period land and labour were not “fictitious commodities” as markets existed for both.¹⁸⁶ It was this reality that both encouraged and determined the nature of the economic dynamic between them and their neighbours. The Bloods possessed land for which their neighbours had a real and imagined need. However, because the Bloods’ powers to protect the reserve’s

integrity were limited, an economic co-operation developed between the Bloods and their neighbours. For those individuals driven to, or inclined to, the use of the Blood reserve, for which no suitable alternative existed, its availability was a critical factor in their future planning. Treaty 7, by taking Indian land surrenders, had laid the basis for the establishment of the ranching and agricultural frontiers. But by setting out the principles for institutionalizing the Blood reserve, the treaty had determined there would be economic interplay between Native and non-Native in the locale surrounding that reserve.

