

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
THE UNITED FARMERS OF ALBERTA:
A SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL MOVEMENT

by

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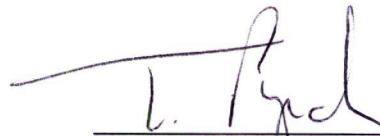
THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "The United Farmers of Alberta: A Social and Educational Movement", submitted by Carrol L. Jaques, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to illustrate that through participation in the Study Groups of the United Farmers of Alberta (U.F.A.), ordinary people gained the knowledge and self-confidence which enabled them to influence the economic, political, and social development of Alberta in the early years of the 20th century.

The people who came together to form the U.F.A. were looking for ways to understand and gain control over conditions in the agricultural community. Farmers who joined U.F.A. locals studied ideas which helped them understand and change the economic, political, and social conditions which influenced their lives. They acted upon the knowledge they gleaned through their study. Through the process of learning together in their local unions, Alberta farmers developed an individual self-respect and collective self-confidence which gave them strength and courage to gain some control over their lives.

The U.F.A. was part of a farmers' movement which influenced events in Canada in the early years of the 20th century. This thesis will trace the roots of the Alberta

farmers' movement in previous British, European, American, and eastern Canadian experiences. By providing examples from contemporary newspapers as well as from records, documents, letters, and unpublished biographies and autobiographies in the Glenbow Museum and Archives in Calgary and the Provincial Archives in Edmonton, this thesis will attempt to re-create the sense of excitement which existed in the local study groups of the U.F.A. The people who participated in this social and educational movement have left some evidence of the commitment, excitement, and involvement which they felt. The farmers' movement, as embodied in the activities of the United Farmers of Alberta, was fuelled by the thousands of ordinary people who participated and worked together to achieve the changes they felt were necessary.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND DEDICATION

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It is with great sadness that I also recognize the late Dr. Howard Palmer who had words of encouragement when I discussed my ideas for this thesis with him.

This thesis is dedicated to all the ordinary people of Alberta who participated in U.F.A. study groups and believed so strongly in the importance of education and co-operation. In particular, I dedicate this thesis to my Paternal Grandfather, Sydney L. Hooper, Secretary of Mere Local No. 513 and my Maternal Grandmother, Vera Andrews, Secretary of Midway U.F.W.A. Local.

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CHAPTER 1

Research in Adult Education History

The actions of farmers on the Canadian prairies during the early part of the twentieth century had a profound impact on Canadian political and economic development. Western Canadian farmers developed the interest, motivation, and confidence to insist that they should be taken seriously by the people who conducted the business and ran the government. This thesis proposes that it was the acquisition of knowledge through the group process and the sense of confidence and power that resulted which encouraged western farmers to believe that they could change the way business and politics were conducted. By coming together to exchange ideas in the study groups organized under the auspices of the United Farmers of Alberta (U.F.A.), farmers ultimately gained control over their economic well-being and their quality of life.

Historians have tended to neglect the importance of the ordinary men and women in the grassroots agrarian movements which swept the prairies in the early part of the 20th century. Historians have seriously studied this era, but most of them have studied it through the records left when

the movement was in a more mature state of development. Historians of the 1950's concentrated on the radical politics of the prairies and produced works such as C.B. MacPherson's Democracy in Alberta,¹ W.L. Morton's The Progressive Party in Canada,² and L.G. Thomas's The Liberal Party in Alberta.³ These works are valuable and necessary, but they do not touch on the lives of the ordinary people who were collectively responsible for the radical nature of Alberta politics.

Recently, however, historians have become aware that it is necessary to study between the lines of documents to discover all the people who provided the momentum which resulted in changes in society. Narrow political, economic, and military histories have given way to a study of broad social histories. In France, an historian from the "Annales" school of history states that history can be written from the "point of view of the masses ... the repeated movements, the silent and half forgotten story of men and enduring realities which is immensely important but made very little noise."⁴ A German school of history,

¹ C.B. MacPherson, Democracy in Alberta: Social Credit and the Party System (Toronto: Univ of Toronto Press, 1953)

² William L. Morton, The Progressive Party in Canada (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1950)

³ L. G. Thomas, The Liberal Party in Alberta: A History of Politics in the Province of Alberta, 1905-1921 (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1959)

⁴ Fernand Braudel, Capitalism and Material Life 1400-1800 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), xv.

"Alltagsgeschichte", or the study of everyday life, recognizes that the common people are worth studying.

The Role of Education Historians

Education historians are responsible for tracing the history of educators and educational institutions as well as the history of less formal educational experiences. Not all people acquired their knowledge and skills from traditional educators in educational institutions. People have learned together in less formal circumstances. The experience of learning together was an important factor in the development of activist farmers' groups on the prairies. This method of learning is as important a subject for education historians as is the type of education which occurred in more formal settings. Histories of education have been written which attempt to examine the informal learning which does not take place within the four walls of a classroom.⁵

American Education History

One of the books written to explore informal education is Bernard Bailyn's Education in the Forming of American Society. This work covers the history of the settlement of the American frontier when thousands of immigrants came to the United States and moved west to earn a living through farming. These people did not have any education or

⁵ Bernard Bailyn, Education in the Forming of American Society (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960). J. Donald Wilson, Robert Stamp, and Louis-Phillipe Audet, Canadian Education: A History (Scarborough: Prentice Hall of Canada. 1970)

training to prepare them for the experiences they would have. It was a very difficult time for adult immigrants because they had come from European societies which assumed that adults had learned all the necessary skills from members of the previous generation and that they would then pass those skills to the next generation. But the immigrant adults did not have the skills; they were left to learn for themselves, and that is what they did. Farmers in the American west co-operated and taught each other what they needed to know to survive. In spite of the fact that Bailyn writes sympathetically about how these adults learned from each other, most of his book is devoted to how children learned on the American frontier.

Canadian Education History

Canadian Education: A History has similar limitations.⁶ The book is a broad study of education in Canada which purports to focus on the widest definition of education, but a large part of the book discusses the education which took place within traditional educational institutions. The book mentions the importance of Mechanics Institutes, which were workingmens' clubs organized to provide adult education. The Antigonish Movement, a self help co-operative movement of the Maritimes; and Khaki College, adult education for Canadian soldiers of World

⁶ J. Donald Wilson, Robert Stamp and Louis-Phillipe Audet, Canadian Education: A History (Scarborough: Prentice Hall of Canada, 1970)

War 1, are mentioned briefly in the book. The agrarian groups which sprang up on the western prairies to co-operate and learn together were not mentioned at all, even though the book set out to study non-traditional education.

Histories of Adult Education

If the histories of general education fail to cover informal education, what about the histories of adult education? American and Canadian adult education historians have written about some aspects of the nontraditional, nonformal education that occurred outside regular educational institutions. Eduard Lindeman wrote about the history of American adult education, while books and articles have been written about Canadian adult education history by J. Roby Kidd, Gordon Selman, Ron Faris, Michael Welton and Padraig Blenkinsop.

American Adult Education History

Eduard Lindeman, the premier contributor to North American adult education literature, understood and wrote about the importance of the group process in adult learning.⁷ He realized that adults needed to learn together so they could understand and contribute to the democratic process.

Lindeman was an adult student himself who, at 22, returned to school to a sub-freshman program at Michigan

⁷ Eduard Lindeman, The Meaning of Adult Education (New York: New Republic, 1926)

Agricultural College.⁸ In 1920 he obtained his first university teaching post and in 1924 became professor of Social Philosophy at New York School of Social Work. He published The Meaning of Adult Education in 1926 and also contributed many articles on the importance of adult education. He was editor of "The Gleaner," a Michigan agricultural journal before he accepted his first university position.⁹ In this capacity, he would have been aware of the agrarian unrest and the efforts of farmers' groups to understand and do something about their problems. He could have been thinking of these groups when he wrote in 1935 that ". . . all education which does not train the learner to utilize facts within a social setting is incomplete and faulty."¹⁰ and "he who possesses knowledge but lacks the facility to render his knowledge useful in actual experience is only partly educated."¹¹ Although Lindeman may have been unaware of the specifics of Canadian farmers' groups, he would have been impressed by the educational program of the U.F.A. because farmers learned as much as they could about economics and politics and then used that knowledge to change the system.

⁸ Stephen Brookfield, Learning Democracy: Eduard Lindeman on Adult Education and Social Change, ed. Peter Jarvis (London, Croom Helm, 1987) 2.

⁹ Brookfield.

¹⁰ Brookfield, 44.

¹¹ Brookfield.

Canadian Adult Education History

Canadian Adult Education historians have been searching for their roots in a variety of Canadian experiences. In one chapter of J. Roby Kidd's book on the history of adult education,¹² David Smith discusses the participation of adults in some types of study groups.¹³ David Smith's chapter mentions Khaki College, Frontier College, the Workers' Educational Association, and the Women's Institutes. Frontier College provided education to workers in isolated work camps; the Workers' Educational Association was formed to provide educational experiences for labourers, and the Women's Institutes met to raise the level of knowledge for women and children. Smith does not mention the study groups associated with the farmers' movement which spread across the prairies even though the women's section of the U.F.A., the United Farm Women of Alberta (U.F.W.A.), was as active in rural Alberta as the Women's Institutes.

In another chapter of Kidd's book titled "Is It Education", Alexander Laidlaw points out that some activities may be excluded from a study of adult education because of how education is defined.¹⁴ One definition of

¹² J. Roby Kidd, ed., Adult Education in Canada, Canadian Association for Adult Education (Toronto: Garden City Press Co-operative, 1950)

¹³ Kidd, 37.

¹⁴ Kidd, 121-3.

adult education is that it is the dissemination of culture in the British liberal tradition. Under this definition, something as utilitarian as the agrarian study groups would not be considered adult education. Farmers got together with other farmers to study the economic and political systems for a reason. They were not content just to understand their world; they wanted to change it. For the purpose of this thesis, the definition of adult education is not limited to the dissemination of culture in the British liberal tradition. The learning that occurred in the farmers' groups in western Canada is adult education in one of its more exciting phases because it provided the impetus for the social and political changes which occurred. It should be celebrated, not ignored, because it had such a profound effect in the agricultural community.

In "Between Social Movements and Profession - a Historical Perspective on Adult Education," adult educators Gordon Selman and Jindra Kulich note that three significant Canadian innovations of the period prior to 1935 were Frontier College, The Women's Institutes, and the Antigonish Movement.¹⁵ One more should be added to the list. The formation of the U.F.A in 1909 was significant because it influenced the political and economic development of the Province of Alberta. In 1919, the people who had worked so

¹⁵ Gordon Selman and Jindra Kulich, "Between Social Movements and Profession - A Historical Perspective on Canadian Education," Studies in Adult Education 12 (2) (1980) 109-116

hard within the U.F.A. branched out to form a political wing. They had learned many things in their local study groups, including the fact that if they wanted change, they had to work for those changes themselves. The U.F.A. political party won the provincial election in 1921 and governed the province until 1935. Their counterparts in Ontario and Manitoba formed provincial governments; and in the 1921 federal election the federal organization of United Farmers sent 65 members to Ottawa under the banner of the Progressive Party. The grassroots movement which started when farmers got together to learn to deal with their problems had a great effect on the whole country.

In The Passionate Educators, historian Ron Faris discusses the reform movements in the Maritimes and the Prairies. He states that the reform movements developed as a reaction to the dislocation of the Post World War 1 era and that they were essentially anti-urban and anti-central Canada in their outlook.¹⁶ This work could have provided a framework for an understanding of the role of education in the prairie reform movement. Rather than getting involved in this, Faris looks at some of the educational programs of the United Farmers' of Ontario (U.F.O) which formed the government of Ontario from 1919 until 1923. It would have been far more interesting to study the movement in Alberta because the government remained in power here until 1935.

¹⁶ Ron Faris, The Passionate Educators (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1975), p. 16-17.

The decision to discuss the farmers' movement in Ontario to the exclusion of the movements in the western prairies is unfortunate, but it points out the need for more research into the history of the people who did get involved in learning in the study groups on the prairies.

The historian and adult educator, Michael Welton, has stated that there is a need for more research into the history of adult education.¹⁷ He mentions the Antigonish Movement, the prairie co-operative movement of the 1930's, extension programs, and Farm and Citizen's Forum, but he neglects to mention the agrarian movement which swept the prairies in the 1910's and 1920's. If Welton had researched this western development, he would have found an excellent illustration of the basic excitement that prevailed when people got together to learn what they had to do to improve their own lives.

In his study of the history of adult education in agrarian Saskatchewan, Padraig Blenkinsop¹⁸ discovered that farmers there were actively engaged in adult education sponsored by the CPR,¹⁹ the Agricultural Societies,²⁰ and

¹⁷ Michael R. Welton, ed., Knowledge for the People: The Struggle for Adult Learning in English Speaking Canada: 1828-1973 (Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1987).

¹⁸ Padraig J. Blenkinsop, "History of Adult Education on the Prairies: Learning to Live in Agrarian Saskatchewan, 1870-1944" (Ph.D. Diss., Univ. of Toronto, 1979).

¹⁹ Blenkinsop, 70-76.

²⁰ Blenkinsop, 79-133.

various levels of government.²¹ Blenkinsop did not concentrate his study on the spontaneous learning that occurred in the Saskatchewan farmers' groups because he found it difficult to provide documentary evidence of activities at that level.²² Something must have been happening in Saskatchewan though, because Blenkinsop reports that membership in the farmers' groups began to rise rapidly after 1909 and interest was awakened.²³ There was something happening; there was a spirit and an enthusiasm developing in the farmers' organizations which had roots in the excitement of learning what was necessary to have an impact on the economic and political system. Because it is hard to document spirit and enthusiasm so future historians can study it, this aspect of our history has been overlooked.

The experiences of the ordinary people on the prairies in the early part of the 20th century were important in the historical development of the area. The people who became so influential gained strength and determination from their associations within the farmers' groups which developed on the prairies. The learning that occurred within the groups provided a focus for the associations and gave the members

²¹ Blenkinsop, 76-79; 93-103.

²² Blenkinsop, 172.

²³ Blenkinsop, 181.

the excitement and determination to carry their organizations into the political arena.

Adult Education in Farmers' Groups

Sometimes learning occurred because members of a farmers' group invited a guest speaker or one of their own members to give a lecture on a subject of importance. Someone may have been available to read an essay or article from the Grain Growers' Guide or another farmers' publication. One of the most popular ways of enlightening people about the facts surrounding an issue was to stage a debate. The debaters gathered details about the assigned question and prepared to support their side by arguing forcefully and intelligently. In this way the participants and the observers learned something more about issues of the day. Farmers' meetings also provided a forum for cultural expression when members performed vocal, instrumental, poetic, or dramatic works.

Learning from Experience

Another type of learning occurred when farmers established their own business ventures such as the Alberta Farmers' Co-operative Elevator Company in 1913 and the Alberta Wheat Pool in 1923. In order to run these ventures, farmers had to become knowledgeable about economics and business because these are the factors which determined how much money went back into the farmer's pocket. They learned on the job and in their local meetings because everyone was interested and felt an obligation to remain involved. James

Speakman, President of the U.F.A., reported that in 1915 nearly 170 locals were involved in co-operative business ventures and that members considered this an important factor in ensuring success of the unions.²⁴ P.P.

Woodbridge, Secretary-Treasurer, touches on the educational value of such ventures when he declares that "we cannot enter into this work without coming into direct contact with many of the causes of our present economic oppression."²⁵

Indoctrination

There was another type of education which involved indoctrination. The literature of the day does not back away from the concept of indoctrination as a valid goal of the farmers' movement. The goal of the Society of Equity to educate the young men of the nation on their rights, duties and responsibilities, so that they may understand the evil effects of vicious legislation upon their calling, to watch legislation on public questions, and discuss the effect on the wealth producer²⁶

²⁴ James Speakman, "Organizational Report," United Farmers of Alberta, Official Minutes of the Executive and Board, 13 May 1915: 34.

²⁵ P.P. Woodbridge, "Secretary-Treasurer's Report," United Farmers of Alberta, Official Minutes and Reports of the Annual Conventions, 1919: 52.

²⁶ Constitution and By-Laws of the Canadian Society of Equity; Article 11 (Purposes and Objects) No. 7. Also in the Constitution of the United Farmers of Alberta, 1909. United Farmers of Alberta, Business & Political Papers 1905-1965, Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

suggests a hint of indoctrination. This article of the constitution of the Society of Equity also became part of the U.F.A. constitution. The Co-operative Movement was also based on indoctrination in the idea of co-operation rather than competition.

The connection between education and indoctrination in the Grain Growers' Movement is explained in The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada when the author writes that

education was the chief emphasis of the grain growers' associations. By education they really meant indoctrination, and in this they were completely successful. The growers' societies were given financial help by the Grain Growers' Grain Company in the form of annual subsidies, without which the associations could hardly have carried on their ambitious programs.²⁷

Between 1909 and 1914, the Grain Growers' Grain Company donated twenty-five thousand dollars to the three prairie associations. In addition to this, sixty thousand dollars was pumped into educational work in the three provinces.²⁸ As the voice of the Grain Growers' movement, the Grain Growers' Guide was an effective voice of indoctrination.²⁹

²⁷ Paul F. Sharp, The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada: A Survey Showing American Parallels (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1948) 34.

²⁸ T.A. Crerar, letter to the Manitoba Grain Growers' Grain Association, Grain Growers' Guide, 3 June 1914: 12

²⁹ Sharp, 36.

Its annual circulation between 1909 and 1914 was nearly thirty thousand in the three prairie provinces.³⁰ It had a wide reliable circulation because it was the official publication for the three growers' associations. The Guide employed a directness of attack, a simplicity of argument, and an aggressive attitude that was highly effective. (It). . . won the undivided loyalty of thousands of farmers, and the hatred and suspicion of merchants, bankers, and industrialists.

. . . thus the farmers of western Canada were educated in the social, economic, and political aspects of grain growing. With the aid of the Guide, the Grain Growers' associations performed in western Canada a great feat of indoctrination, welding the individualistic prairie farmers into an effective unit which thought and acted with uniformity.³¹

Western farmers' groups did not spring up in a vacuum. Farmers' organizations which had evolved in Ontario and eastern Canada throughout the nineteenth century provided a model for some of the developments in the west.³² There

³⁰ Sharp, 36.

³¹ Sharp, 36-37.

³² Louis A. Wood, A History of Farmers' Movements in Canada (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1924), 17

are also records of similar groups in the Cotton Belt as well as throughout the wheat growing areas in the United States.³³ Many of the farmers from Great Britain had been members of the Mechanics Institutes or other working class study groups which recognized the importance of education.³⁴ This tradition was not peculiar to Britain. The new settlers who came from Germany, Scandinavia, and eastern Europe also brought with them a tradition of group discussion and interaction to help solve problems.³⁵

Summary

A great deal of research has been done and studies have been published about the history of education and, more specifically, the history of adult education. Many of these works have concentrated on the history of educators and educational institutions. There is a lack of historical research being done in the area of nonformal, nontraditional education, the type of "education" which occurred when people learned together and then went on to accomplish something which they considered important.

This type of nonformal education occurred in the farmers' organizations which sprang up on the Canadian

³³ Lawrence Goodwyn, The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 17.

³⁴ Ian MacPherson, Each for All: A History of the Co-operative Movement in English Canada, 1900-1945 (Ottawa: The Carlton Library, 1979).

³⁵ Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, Peoples of Alberta (Saskatoon, Sask: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1985)

prairies at the turn of the century. The farmers who participated in the study groups under the auspices of the U.F.A. or any of its forerunners were part of a movement which had developed, with greater and lesser intensity, over several centuries and in various parts of the world. The United Farmers of Alberta was influenced by social and political movements in Great Britain and Europe. It was also affected by the agrarian movement in the United States. The U.F.A. was organized in Alberta in 1909 as a result of an amalgamation of independent farmers' organizations which had evolved right in Alberta, so it was also influenced by the local history as well as by the local economic and political situation.

The essence of the U.F.A. can be found in the sense of confidence and sense of empowerment which developed when farmers came together to interact with each other and study their situation and then collectively take action to improve their lives. This phenomenon developed against the backdrop of the history of Alberta as well as the history and experiences of the people who chose to move to the province.

CHAPTER 2

Historical Background

In order to understand how the U.F.A. developed and why it gained so much influence, it is necessary to look at the history of Alberta and the relationship of Alberta to the rest of Canada. Since the purpose of this thesis is to document the extent to which a belief in the importance of education was at the root of the success of the U.F.A., it is also necessary to continue the examination of some of the history of adult education. The U.F.A did not grow up in a vacuum, so there will also be a discussion of some of the other British, North American, and European groups which influenced the people who joined the U.F.A.

Brief History of Alberta

Alberta became a province when it and its sister province of Saskatchewan were carved out of the North-West Territories on September 1, 1905 and given provincial status. Alberta's history was affected by the policies of the Canadian government and by the forces which resulted in large scale immigration into western Canada.

Following Confederation in 1867, the Dominion Government saw the need to create an economically viable

country and to fill the empty spaces between Manitoba and British Columbia. The federal government set out to accomplish these goals through the National Policy. Under the National Policy, the west was to be settled to provide the agricultural products, mostly wheat, and the raw materials for the east. In return, the west was expected to become a market for the goods produced in the east. Westerners were also expected to use and pay for an infrastructure of railroads and marketing agencies, provided by the east. Under the National Policy, Canadian manufacturers were protected by the tariffs applied to goods manufactured in the United States to make them more expensive than Canadian products. The most important factor in the National Policy was that the population of the west had to increase substantially, so the Canadian government advertised extensively in eastern Canada, the United States, England, and Europe for people willing to settle there. As a result, the population of Alberta increased from only 15,533 in 1885¹ to 73,022 in 1901 and 374,295 in 1911²

Other factors encouraged immigrants to come to the Canadian west. At a time when the Canadian government was encouraging settlers to move into the Canadian west, the supply of good farm land in the United States was running

¹ Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, Peoples of Alberta (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1985) 2.

² Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, Peoples of Alberta, Introduction.

out. Farming north of the 49th parallel has always been a risky business because the land is more arid and the frost free season is much shorter.³ However, faced with a shortage of land in the U.S., settlers were prepared to take their chances. One of the reasons settlers were prepared to take risks in the Canadian west was because the demand and therefore the price paid for wheat was increasing.⁴ As Europe became more industrialized, land was taken out of production and Europeans were willing to pay more for the wheat they imported from North America. At the same time, new agricultural methods were being developed for farming in the semi-arid regions of the Canadian west.⁵ The research was done under the auspices of the National Policy and the information was disseminated to settlers preparing to come to Canada.

Immigration

By the beginning of the 20th century, immigrants from eastern Canada, Britain, the United States, and Europe were filling up the Canadian Prairies. The majority of the settlers were from eastern Canada and Britain.⁶ These people were fairly comfortable in their new homes because

³ Kenneth Norrie, "The National Policy and the Rate of Prairie Settlement," The Prairie West, ed. R Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer (Edmonton: Pica Pica Press, 1985), 242.

⁴ Norrie, 240.

⁵ Norrie, 243.

⁶ Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer. Introduction.

they spoke the same language and were familiar with the British style institutions which were extended into the Canadian north-west. Ontario settlers with English backgrounds came to the towns and villages of Alberta where they dominated the teaching, legal, and medical professions as well as the political scene because they already understood Canadian political institutions. Farmers from Ontario were also influential in the western agricultural communities and the farmers' groups.

Immigration from Britain was encouraged through extensive publicity and assisted passages for British immigrants. While most of the British settlers gravitated to the towns and villages because they did not come from farming backgrounds,⁷ there were plenty who settled on the land. The farmers' groups which developed on the prairies were heavily influenced by British settlers.

Alberta was also strongly affected by the American farmers who came when land became scarce south of the 49th parallel. Many of the Americans had farmed in the Dakotas, Montana, Nebraska, and Oklahoma, so they were familiar with the problems of farming in dryland areas. These Americans also spoke English, so they settled into the established communities without too much trouble and became very influential in the farmers' organizations which were established.

⁷ Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, 10.

The 1911 census indicated that 40% of the population was of non-British extraction.⁸ This group included Germans at 11% of the population, Scandinavians at 8%, and eastern Europeans at 12%.⁹ Immigrants from these European countries also contributed to the farmers' associations that were formed in Alberta.

Agricultural and Market Conditions

The newcomers who settled on raw undeveloped farms were at the mercy of the weather and the international market for grain as well as for manufactured goods. Fluctuations in rainfall and the early onset of frost in the northern latitudes made farming a very precarious occupation. In many cases, farmers were in debt to the banks for equipment and supplies, and they were required to pay their debts despite weather conditions or the price of wheat. The price of wheat, established on the international market, fluctuated according to worldwide supply and demand. Prices were set in Winnipeg and Minneapolis, far from the wheat fields and even farther from the London money market.¹⁰ It was impossible for farmers to understand such a remote system even though it affected them so deeply.

⁸ Howard Palmer, Patterns of Prejudice (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982) 21.

⁹ Palmer, 27.

¹⁰ Paul Sharp, The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada: A Survey Showing American Parallels (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 1948), 23.

The international market operated without controls. This resulted in fluctuations in the price of wheat paid to farmers which had nothing to do with what was happening to the local economy where farmers did their banking and bought their supplies and equipment. Western Canadian farmers were forced to purchase supplies in a protected market with high tariffs, implemented as part of the National Policy which aimed to protect Canadian industry. Farmers bought machinery which was expensive because of transportation costs from the east or because of a tariff on American produced goods. Canada was still an exporter of primary products. There was no industrial or financial base to provide stability when the prices for primary goods fluctuated. Farmers on the western frontier were particularly vulnerable because they were far removed from any support which might exist closer to the heartland. It was very difficult to understand things which happened so far away.

Local Unrest

Farmers did not see that their problems might be caused by the international economy or because there was a weak industrial base to provide support for the agricultural community; they saw the problem as it was reflected closer to home. The railroads appeared to be charging too much without providing adequate services. Elevator companies were accused of using dishonest weights, undergrading the grain, and excessively docking for dirt, weeds, and seeds.

The grain exchanges seemed to go to extremes to buy at low prices and sell at inflated prices. The terminal elevators were accused of fraud. Government grain inspectors were thought to be unnecessarily harsh even though they were setting standards and attempting to preserve confidence in Canadian wheat on the international market.¹¹

British Influence

The people who lived on the land in the Canadian west did their best to cope with all of these conditions. In their efforts to do this they turned to each other, but they also used understandings gained from previous experiences to help them do something about their situation. The British settlers who came to Alberta to farm were prepared to co-operate to fight what they considered unfair treatment.

These farmers were familiar with some of the social reform movements which existed in Britain to force changes in British society and British politics. People there were searching for answers to the problems caused by the rapid industrialization of Britain in the previous century. Many of the social reformers felt that increased levels of education could provide solutions to some of the problems that existed. Education is defined very broadly in this context. Social reformers were concerned about the education of children, but they were also concerned about the education of adults. Many adults were concerned about

¹¹ Sharp, 23-33.

their own education and were prepared to do something about it, with or without the prompting of well-meaning social reformers. People of all ages and all walks of life had become aware that education must be readily available if conditions were to improve.

Several movements evolved to try to bring about changes in Britain, but it is not the purpose of this thesis to mention all of them or to examine any of them in any detail. Two of the more well known movements were Owenism and Chartism, but there were other movements and organizations which promoted the importance of education. These will be discussed briefly to show that there was a thread that connected what happened in the farmers' groups on the prairies with some of these British groups. Even though many settlers on the prairies may not have belonged to any of these groups at home, these associations were part of the British social milieu. When settlers faced tough times, they organized into groups to try to solve their problems, just as others had done in Britain.

British Social Movements

Nineteenth century social development in Britain was influenced by one of the early social movements, which in its day had a large following. This was Owenism, the name given to the ideas of Robert Owen, a New Lanark factory owner who was distressed by what he saw in the industrial areas of Britain. When he observed his factory, the factory workers, and the society around him, he realized that

changes had to be made. He believed that workers were influenced by the environment in which they lived and worked. To test his theory, he set up a model factory and paid good regular wages. Hours of labour were reduced, and children under ten were not employed, although the industry standard was to employ them as young as six years old. Owen provided full time schooling for those up to the age of ten as part of his model community.¹² He also tried to provide opportunities for adults to learn, but factory workers of the day worked such long hours that they did not have enough leisure time to take advantage of the opportunity. Robert Owen spread his ideas through pamphlets and lectures and developed a large following of people who also believed in the importance of education for adults as well as children.

The Chartists were another group of social reformers who gave lectures and circulated pamphlets to spread their ideas. The Chartists had a many-pronged reform platform which originally included six points: universal male suffrage, equal electoral districts, annual parliaments, payment of members, secret ballot, and no property qualifications for M.P.'s.¹³ These were all very political concerns, but the Chartists saw the need to change the political system in order to change the social system. The

¹² G.D.H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, The Common People: 1746 - 1946 (London: Methuen and Company, 1976) 215.

¹³ Cole and Postgate, 280.

Chartists developed a large following and had a great influence on British politics for many years.

The leaders in both of these movements took it upon themselves to spread their ideas by touring the country giving lectures and distributing pamphlets. In this way they involved vast numbers of people who demanded change. One of the by-products of all this activity was a recognition that education and learning were very important if conditions were to be improved, so a movement to provide opportunities for education went hand in hand with the movements to reform the political system in Britain.

British Adult Education

The many forms of the British education movement are discussed in Brian Simon's work Education and the Labour Movement 1870-1920.¹⁴ There were open air lectures given on weekends by reputable lecturers who discussed many of the socialist and philosophical ideas of the day. Societies and clubs of all types sponsored speakers, built lecture halls, and published journals in an effort to educate the working classes in the possibilities of socialism.¹⁵ Brian Simon makes it clear that the groups which met to discuss "socialism" between 1870 and 1920 were simply continuing a trend which started with the Corresponding Societies of the

¹⁴ Brian Simon, Education and the Labour Movement 1870 - 1920 (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1974), 26.

¹⁵ Simon, 27

1790's and continued with the Owenites and Chartists when he says that

it was in these organized socialist groupings that serious and systematic study of economics and politics was begun - a revival of the tradition of independent working class education which can be traced back through the Chartists and Owenite Socialists to the Corresponding Societies of the 1790's.¹⁶

There were many threads which made up the skein of British adult education in the 19th century. In the first place, the education of children was improving. The Education Act of 1870 established universal elementary education for the working classes.¹⁷ Churches got involved and taught reading and writing in Sunday Schools, so children who attended these Sunday Schools expected that life would be different.¹⁸ Young people were taught to read and write in organizations such as the YMCA, YWCA, Boys Brigade, Church Lads Brigade, and Girls Friendly Society.¹⁹ People became familiar with the idea that it was important to have the ability to read and write as well as to have some knowledge of literature and the maths and sciences, so

¹⁶ Simon, 31.

¹⁷ Simon, 13.

¹⁸ Simon, 51.

¹⁹ Simon, 61.

they joined such organizations as the Mechanics Institutes, Working Men's Clubs, Adult Schools, University Extension, and the Workers' Educational Association.²⁰

Mechanics Institutes had been established in the early 1800's to provide courses of instruction for the working classes. The Mechanics Institutes "had the clear political aim of meeting the growing demand of the working class for education and knowledge while under the control of the industrialists who provided the resources."²¹ J.F.C.

Harrison in Learning and Living states that the original Mechanics Institute was established in London in 1823²² with the aim of teaching sciences such as chemistry and mechanics to members of the working classes to prepare them to compete in an increasingly industrialized world.²³

Other institutes were established to accomplish similar aims, but they all "failed" on both scores. In the first place, members of the working class did not register for courses. There were probably many reasons for this. Members of the working classes did not have the reading and writing skills to understand advanced courses in the sciences.²⁴ The real need was for elementary classes to

²⁰ Simon, 72.

²¹ Simon.

²² J.F.C. Harrison, Learning and Living: 1790 - 1960 (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press. 1961), 58.

²³ Harrison, 62.

²⁴ Harrison, 65.

teach reading and writing. Also, the atmosphere in the Mechanics Institutes may have been condescending and patronizing. The middle class organizers of the institutes felt they had a mission to help members of the working classes, but this attitude was not well received by the working classes.

However, the Mechanics Institutes were well received by the lower middle classes who registered for courses in adequate numbers to keep the Institutes flourishing for decades. The focus changed from a desire to educate the working class in the sciences to providing literary and cultural subjects for the upwardly mobile middle classes. Through the Mechanics Institutes, middle class shopkeepers and clerks attended classes in politics, economics, literature, and history; through these classes they came to understand and adjust to the changing social conditions in which they lived. They raised money and built substantial buildings to house the activities of the Mechanics Institutes.²⁵ The physical presence of the Mechanics Institutes as well as the awareness of what occurred in the buildings was a reminder that the education of adults was important and useful.

The working classes may not have joined the Mechanics Institutes in great numbers, but they had their own educational traditions even though the working and living

²⁵ Harrison, 58.

conditions of the majority of workers made it difficult for many of them to learn even the basic rudiments of reading and writing. They did have a tradition of the self made great scholar which Harrison discusses in his book Learning and Living. In the working classes there were a few exceptional artisans who were prepared to "educate themselves to the full extent of the term."²⁶ Some of these had the reputation for being great scholars simply because they read the daily newspapers. These scholars were wise and worldly, and their reputations increased over the years. Working class individuals who were lucky enough to be exposed to some rudiments of reading and writing might develop into scholars if they had the determination to build on the few skills they had acquired. Their inadequate skill level was followed by self-study of whatever books were available - usually the Bible. With this background, the working class scholar went on to devour theology, philosophy, political economy or possibly geology, botany, or astronomy.²⁷ Many became worker-poets.²⁸

Members of the working classes in Britain often got together to form "mutual improvement societies."²⁹ In these British self-improvement societies, a few members met

²⁶ Harrison, 44.

²⁷ Harrison, 48.

²⁸ Harrison, 49.

²⁹ Harrison.

in each others' homes. There were few rules, a program of classes, essay readings and discussions, and, possibly, a small library. Instruction, mostly in reading, writing and arithmetic, was provided by members. Other subjects such as chemistry, geography, history, or languages might be studied. There was a discussion circle which provided an opportunity to practise public speaking. These societies were very simple and lasted only as long as they served the interests of the members or until participants had taught each other everything they knew.³⁰

These mutual improvement societies existed throughout the 19th century although they were more popular after 1844.³¹ No records were kept or left because nothing was formalized. Information about these groups can be found in the reminiscences and autobiographies of those who participated in them.³² In Learning and Living, Harrison says

nevertheless, the flowering of humble mutual improvement societies was as significant as the development of more elaborate organizations. Every voluntary association of such a type represented the approach of some group to problems which they felt were important enough to demand a

³⁰ Harrison, 50.

³¹ Harrison.

³² Harrison.

solution. The very spontaneity of such adult educational activities is a guarantee of their relevance to felt needs - probably more so than formal, institutionalized adult classes. If one of the fundamental aims of adult education was to enable people to come to terms more effectively with the problems of living in an industrial community, and if such adult education was best pursued in a small democratic group, then the mutual improvement societies must be accounted at least as successful as some longer-lived and more pretentious adult educational institutions.³³

The individual great scholar and the mutual improvement societies became part of working class culture. As conditions improved, more and more members of the working classes learned to read and write and then went on to study history, literature, or the sciences.

The social ferment after 1840 resulted in the growth of many other types of adult education organizations and institutions in addition to the Mechanics Institutes and the mutual improvement societies. Members of the working classes as well as those who were concerned for the welfare of workers recognized that the ability to read and write was an essential weapon in the fight for better conditions. The churches provided a core group of people who were prepared

³³ Harrison, 50-1.

to work to teach reading and writing to the masses. In many cases, this depended on the enthusiasm of the church leader, so this cannot be followed as a consistent movement across the country. There were pockets of great enthusiasm at various times and in various locations. Sunday schools were started to teach young people to read so they could understand the scriptures. These expanded to include adults as the older people showed up to learn what they had missed in their childhood. The fact that some Sunday schools taught reading but not writing indicates that the institutions were very aware of the power of education in spreading ideas which might lead to unrest.

Adult schools were established in the 1850's by several young members of the Society of Friends, otherwise known as Quakers.³⁴ These schools were based on the Sunday School concept, but classes were held on other days of the week. The goal was religious training through the teaching of reading and writing.³⁵ Several generations of the Rowntree family were involved in these adult schools; John and Joseph Rowntree wrote and spoke about their great appreciation for what they had learned from their adult students.³⁶ The students who attended the classes were

³⁴ Harrison, 198.

³⁵ Harrison, 199.

³⁶ Harrison, 200.

from the poorest homes in the districts.³⁷ Since basic reading, writing, and scriptures were taught, the clerks and shopkeepers of the lower middle classes were not interested. Eventually more established churches began to get involved, and the concept of adult schools spread.

By the late 19th century, it was apparent that conditions were improving for many in the lower middle classes and the upper echelons of the working classes. Harrison gave credit for this phenomenon to the adult education experienced in the Mechanics Institutes, mutual improvement societies, Sunday schools and adult schools.³⁸ The Bradford Mechanics Institute adopted the motto, "Knowledge is Power" for their library bookplate.³⁹ Mechanics Institutes became increasingly identified as a means of getting on in life.⁴⁰ Between 1832 and 1861, the population of Great Britain increased by 40% while scholars in day schools increased by 68%. Membership in Mechanics Institutes went from 7,000 in 1831 to 200,000 in 1860. Evidence that many more people were able to read and write may be found in the fact that newspaper circulation in Britain increased by 273% in the same time span.⁴¹

³⁷ Harrison.

³⁸ Harrison, 217.

³⁹ Harrison, 211.

⁴⁰ Harrison, 212.

⁴¹ Harrison, 217.

By the 1880's and 1890's, the nature of adult education had become politicized. Socialist Sunday Schools and Adult Schools existed to indoctrinate workers in the need to change conditions to benefit the whole working class rather than as a means for some people to rise above their working class status. The Social Democratic Federation (SDF) and the Socialist League combined to organize some working class study groups based on Marxism and the study of Marx's book Wage Labour and Capital.⁴² The Fabians, a less revolutionary group of middle class intellectuals, concentrated on giving public lectures on the benefits of socialism. The most radical groups called for a dismantling of the economic system as it existed, while less radical groups preferred to change the system from within. All groups sought to accomplish their goals by educating people to believe that their ideas were valid. Adult socialist study groups in Britain became important conduits in the spread of socialist ideas. Even though these groups did not bring about radical change in the system, large numbers of people were exposed to new ideas which influenced the way they saw their lives and the world and which ultimately led to reforms.

The families who came to the Canadian prairies from Britain had probably been influenced by the discussion and debate that had occurred in the public lectures, the study

⁴² Simon, 31.

groups, and the press. When they encountered difficulties, they met to share their knowledge and exchange ideas. The British immigrants who became activists in the farmers' movement were joined by their American counterparts who also had experience with traditions of adult education.

American Influence

The Americans who came to the Canadian west had been influenced by what has become known as the Populist movement, a mass democratic movement which swept across the United States after the Civil War ended in 1865. At the end of the war, powerful entrepreneurs in business and financial institutions were very influential in the Democratic and Republican parties and, as a result, they dominated the political process.⁴³ There was a monetary crisis after the Civil War which deeply affected two groups: farmers and urban labourers. This monetary crisis developed as a result of the borrowing which had been necessary to finance the Civil War. Financial entrepreneurs and politicians planned to solve this crisis by allowing population and production to increase without increasing the money supply. With a stable money supply in the face of more population and production, there was less money to chase more goods. As a result, prices paid to producers were forced down, and farmers received much less for their crops in 1888 than they

⁴³ Lawrence Goodwyn, The Populist Moment (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978), 7.

had twenty years earlier in 1868.⁴⁴ They had less cash available for paying bank loans, and those who fell behind in their payments lost their land and became tenant farmers or share croppers. A group of people who came to be known as "greenbackers" tried to develop a monetary system which would prove flexible enough to provide producers and labourers with a reasonable return for their labour. This movement threatened bankers and other members of the business community who felt that it would destroy the economic system which was at the heart of the American nation, so the idea was defeated. Civil War debts were paid in gold, the money supply was decreased, population and production expanded, and farmers who became financially insolvent were told that they were guilty of over-production.⁴⁵

The Farmers' Alliance

The Populist Movement crystallized to protest the conditions that existed in the agricultural sector as a result of these developments. In the southern States, this took the form of the Farmers' Alliance which was organized in 1877 and grew from 10,000 in 1884 to 50,000 members in 1885.⁴⁶ The goal of the Farmers' Alliance was to form co-operatives to buy and sell supplies and crops. The co-

⁴⁴ Goodwyn, 12.

⁴⁵ Goodwyn, 15.

⁴⁶ Goodwyn, 32.

operatives that were formed were not completely successful. There was so much opposition from the established banks and businesses that, in spite of how dedicated they were, the farmers were not able to establish successful co-operative ventures. In spite of the very limited success of the farmers' co-ops, something else happened in the Farmers' Alliance. Through the Alliance, farmers developed individual self-respect and collective self-confidence or what some would call "class consciousness".⁴⁷ This self-confidence held people together and gave them the courage to try to change their lives.

One of the other goals of the Farmers' Alliance was to provide information on a variety of subjects to the members of the farming community. Lecturers were hired to tour the country to present "Alliance" ideas to gatherings of farmers in schools and community halls. Sometimes lectures were given to larger audiences who travelled long distances to hear the speakers. At the peak of its popularity, up to 20,000 people attended some of these meetings or "encampments" where they listened to Alliance speakers and discussed ideas with each other. There seemed to be great possibilities in the fact that "the Alliance is the people and the people are together".⁴⁸ Populism was

⁴⁷ Goodwyn, 33.

⁴⁸ Goodwyn, 34.

grounded in a common experience, nurtured by years of experimentation and self-education, ... (it) produced a party, a platform, a specific new democratic ideology, and a pathbreaking political agenda for the American nation. But none of these things were the essence of Populism. At bottom, Populism was, quite simply, an expression of self-respect.⁴⁹

The self-respect that was at the heart of the Populist Movement came from the fact that farmers were learning how to cope with contemporary conditions. The people who came together to listen to Alliance lecturers became excited and developed the confidence that they could use their knowledge to make changes.

The Patrons of Husbandry

As prices for wheat declined in the northern States, farmers looked around for some way to explain the shocking changes in their standard of living. They gathered together to study the situation and eventually some of them formed an organization called the Patrons of Husbandry, also known as the Grange. The roots of this organization were the same as the roots of the Farmers' Alliance in the southern United States and the socialist study groups which formed in Britain. Large sections of the population were adversely affected by policies established by powerful financiers and

⁴⁹ Goodwyn, 35.

politicians. Farmers gathered together in meetings of the Grange to study economics and politics in an attempt to come to terms with the system. After studying conditions in the wheat farming belt of the United States, Grange members adopted some ideas which they thought would ease their situation. One of the platforms of this organization was to request government ownership of the railways. Since the railway companies had a monopoly on grain transportation, farmers depended on them to pay a fair price for their wheat and get it to market. The farmers asked for government ownership of the railways because they doubted that government regulatory bodies were powerful enough to make regulations in the interests of the general public and against the railway companies.⁵⁰ Farmers' organizations also campaigned against the banking institutions because of the banks' control over loans and interest rates.

The significance of this movement is not in the actual details of the grievances or the proposed solutions, but the process of coming together to discuss the problems. The Farmers' Alliance in the south hired Alliance lecturers to conduct educational programs at local affiliated suballiance meetings. The Grange also facilitated the organization of adult education study groups. Farmers came together to discuss the national crisis of the late nineteenth century and to find solutions to it. The Populist Party which

⁵⁰ David W. Noble, David A. Horowitz, and Peter N. Carroll, Twentieth Century Ltd (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), 7.

developed out of these grass roots meetings had a powerful impact on the American political scene in the late 1800's.⁵¹

When American farmers came to the Canadian west in the early 20th century they were familiar with the concepts of co-operation and adult education. To deal with the problems of farming in unfamiliar conditions, American immigrants formed or joined various agrarian protest groups to study the economic and political structure which seemed to put the western Canadian farmer at a disadvantage. The ideas of the American settlers meshed with the tradition of co-operation and group learning of the British settlers. These groups were joined on the prairies by settlers from Europe who also had traditions which included a reliance on study and co-operation.

European Influence

According to an article entitled "Adult Education in Denmark", adult education was an important aspect of Danish Society.⁵² Education in Denmark was undertaken for political reasons. After the Napoleonic Wars, Denmark had broken away from Norway after being connected to it for four hundred years. As a smaller country, Denmark was in danger of being overly influenced by Germany, so adult education was used to spread knowledge and reduce German influence.

⁵¹ Noble, Horowitz, and Carroll, 4.

⁵² "Adult Education in Denmark," The World Association for Adult Education Bulletin xviii, November 1923.

Education was carried out in the form of study circles which were encouraged and supported by the government.⁵³ Denmark also had a system of Folk High Schools for adults who did not complete their education as children.

At the turn of the century, Europe was also undergoing the social upheaval that accompanies rapid industrialization and change. The people of Europe responded to this upheaval in the same way as the people of Britain and North America. They got together to form the same types of groups which co-operated and studied together in an attempt to change conditions. European immigrants to the Canadian west formed their own organizations which met regularly to hear lectures on educational, literary, agricultural, and political topics.⁵⁴ This inherent belief in the importance of education and the familiarity with the concept of adult education study groups was part of the culture of the immigrant groups which settled the province of Alberta. Because so many people and so many groups were receptive to the idea that co-operation and education were possible solutions to the problems within the agricultural community, there was a great deal of interest in the various farmers' organizations which were being established on the prairies.

⁵³ "Adult Education in Denmark."

⁵⁴ For a more detailed account of individual groups see Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, Peoples of Alberta, (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1985)

Summary

The people who immigrated to the Canadian north-west chose to move because they had convinced themselves that there was more opportunity in this new area than they could hope to expect in their present locations. They arrived with high expectations which, unfortunately, were not always met. Rather than giving up or moving on, many remained and attempted to do their best to establish a successful farming operation. It was difficult to succeed on their own, so they turned to each other. When they did this, they were echoing the actions of other generations of people in difficult times.

The people who came to the Canadian west at the turn of the century were influenced by everything that was occurring in their places of origin. The Owenists, Chartists, Socialists, and Trade Unionists in Britain were revolutionizing the way people looked at their society. Each one of these movements benefitted from an increasingly literate membership. The Owenists and the Chartists called for educational reforms. Legislation was passed which made it compulsory for more children to remain in school longer. This meant that more and more people could read and write and then go on to study literature, history, and the sciences. The Socialists and Trade Unionists capitalized on the fact that more and more adults were literate. These groups encouraged adults to get together to study socialist and co-operative theory as a means to improve conditions for

themselves. The phenomena of adults getting together to study and try to change conditions became very prevalent. This was part of a wave that had started in the 18th century with the Corresponding Societies and had ebbed and flowed through the 19th century with the mutual improvement societies, Owenists, Chartists, Socialists and Trade Unionists. These broad developments resulted in the establishment of institutions such as church schools and the Mechanics Institutes. European Society was touched by the same waves and established similar institutions.

People who came from Britain and Europe to farm in the Canadian west were influenced by their experiences in a society that spawned such groups. Those who came from the United States had been influenced by similar movements. American farmers were familiar with the activities of the Farmers' Alliance, the Patrons of Husbandry and Patrons of Industry, the Populists, and the Progressives. These groups were also part of the wave that had started in Britain and Europe. The American groups which developed also emphasized the importance of getting together to share ideas about how to improve their lives.

The wave continued as eastern Canadian, British, American, and European people moved to the Canadian north west. When farmers sought to cope with the new frontier, they emulated previous generations in other areas by creating organizations which could be used as stepping stones to bring about change. Coming together to search for

ways to improve their lives, residents of the Canadian west reached a new level of confidence. There was a sense of empowerment that resulted from belonging to an organization which they had created and which could be used to further their own ends.

CHAPTER 3

Formation of the United Farmers of Alberta

Before the beginning of the 20th century, the agricultural community in the North-West Territories was forced to deal with some difficult situations. The weather did not always co-operate; it was difficult to transport western produce to the east, and the marketing system did not always benefit the western farmer. The population was still small, but settlers were arriving steadily from eastern Canada, Britain, the United States, and Europe. The people who came west brought their own experiences and traditions with them.

Early Organizations

When they were confronted with the problems associated with earning a living on the farm, they simply did what people were doing in their respective home countries; farmers turned to each other for support. They formed co-operatives and joined together in groups to study their problems and learn what they could do to improve their situation. These farmers believed that through co-operation, study, and knowledge, they could solve the problems in the agricultural community. Many groups were

formed in the early years on the prairies to provide a forum for farmers to come together to discuss their problems.

Some of these groups eventually amalgamated to form the very powerful United Farmers of Alberta.

Agricultural Societies

Several groups which were based on the belief that people could co-operate to improve their lives sprang up in the Edmonton area. The first such organization to leave any written records was the Edmonton Agricultural Society which was established in 1879.¹ This is early in the recorded history of agriculture in the area. The efforts of the members of this Society were mentioned regularly in The Edmonton Bulletin which published its first edition on December 6, 1880. The Bulletin of Saturday, September 30, 1882 presented a summary of the re-organizational meeting of the Edmonton Agricultural Society. There had been tentative efforts to keep the original organization alive after it was founded in 1879, but the farmers had not been completely successful. The members of the reorganized Edmonton Agricultural Society decided to hold an Exhibition in Edmonton less than three weeks later to prove to the world and to themselves that they could produce successful crops even at such a northerly latitude.² The exhibition was a success according to The Bulletin which noted that

¹ David Embree, "The Rise of the United Farmers of Alberta" (M.A. Diss., Univ. of Alberta, 1956), p. 2.

² The Edmonton Bulletin, 30 Sept. 1882: 3.

the weather on Thursday last was all that could be expected for exhibition purposes. . . . Work was suspended in town all or nearly all day, and between 200 and 300 people came in from the surrounding country to see the show. Entries began to be made early in the morning, but owing to the distance that some of the exhibits had to be brought all were not in until noon. Altogether there were 180 entries. . . . the whole affair had a free and easy air refreshingly different from the usual appearance of such affairs in other places where iron clad rule and pugnacious authority hold sway.³

Agricultural Societies were common in agricultural communities. The history of Agricultural Societies can be traced back to the Highland Agricultural Society of Scotland which was formed in the 1700's. It was considered to be the "greatest educational factor in agriculture in Scotland for more than a hundred years."⁴ Agricultural Societies were formed in Nova Scotia and then in Upper and Lower Canada in the early part of the 19th century. Their main purpose was to hold annual fairs to exhibit and celebrate the best agricultural products to be produced on the local farms that

³ Bulletin, 21 Oct. 1882: 2.

⁴ Padraig J. Blenkinsop, "A History of Adult Education on the Prairies: Learning to Live in Agrarian Saskatchewan, 1870 - 1944" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Toronto, 1979), p. 80.

year.⁵ Societies were originally organized by farmers. As they matured and expanded, governments provided financial assistance and passed legislation to provide a framework for their operations.

The formation of Agricultural Societies in the North-West Territories was encouraged and funded by the federal and territorial governments because it was important to have knowledgeable farmers if the west was to fulfil its promise to feed the people of eastern Canada. Another type of organization, The Farmers' Institute, was encouraged through government legislation and grants to serve a more educational purpose than the Agricultural Societies.⁶ The North-West Territories Assembly passed legislation in 1890 to establish Farmers' Institutes to "enable farmers to increase their knowledge of farming methods in a new land through group discussion and study."⁷ An Institute was more structured and focused than the more familiar Agricultural Societies because the government wanted to encourage farmers to learn new methods of farming. Six Institutes were formed in the areas around Moose Jaw and Regina in the District of Assiniboia, the most advanced

⁵ Blenkinsop, 88

⁶ Blenkinsop, 84.

⁷ F.H. Auld, "Farmers' Institutes in the North-West Territories," Saskatchewan History Vol X No. 2. (Spring 1957): 41-54.

agricultural area in the Territories.⁸ The Federal Departments of Agriculture provided speakers and educational materials for the participants who attended the Farmers' Institutes. Unfortunately, they were too expensive to maintain, so they were eventually absorbed by the Agricultural Societies.⁹ This effort on the part of the Territorial Government to increase the level of knowledge of the farmers in the area is a good illustration of the importance placed on education by the officials in the Territorial Agriculture Department.

The area around Edmonton was rather remote from the organizational efforts of the Territorial Government, so Farmers' Institutes were never organized there. However, as the farming population around Edmonton increased, other Agricultural Societies soon formed in Strathcona (South Edmonton), St. Albert, and Ft. Saskatchewan as a result of the example set by the Edmonton Society.¹⁰ The announcements of the meetings in the Edmonton Bulletin were brief and the minutes of the early meetings apparently were not preserved, so there is no information about the activities which went on in the Societies. However, since the goal of the Agricultural Societies was to raise the level of knowledge of the farmer in order to produce better

⁸ Auld.

⁹ Blenkinsop, 86.

¹⁰ Embree, 2.

crops, farmers would have come to the meetings expecting to learn something. The actual planning of the exhibitions was a learning experience, and in addition, farmers would be involved in discussing the criteria for awarding the prizes. The meetings of the Agricultural Societies provided a forum for learning more about successful farming techniques. They also became a focal point for the discussion of news from other areas.

The Edmonton Bulletin printed news about agricultural conditions in the west, including news about the problems which Manitoba farmers were having with the marketing system. Manitoba was an older and more populous area, so some of the problems had become more obvious and entrenched. The farmers there organized to demand changes. The December 15, 1883 edition of The Edmonton Bulletin reported that farmers in Manitoba were on the warpath with "indignation meetings, meetings to protest, meetings to assert, meetings to organize and various other kinds of meetings" because of the low price paid for wheat.¹¹ The editor of The Edmonton Bulletin, Frank Oliver, lectured his readers in the North-West Territories. He wanted them to organize as the Manitoba farmers were doing and petition the federal government for fairer agricultural policy. Oliver managed to influence events in the area. Eventually other more strident organizations evolved from the Agricultural

¹¹ Bulletin, 15 Dec. 1883, 2.

Societies because the societies were not really equipped to become protest organizations. In the first place, the societies were government-funded which made it difficult for them to criticize government action - or inaction. Secondly, members of the Agricultural Societies were kept busy fulfilling their original mandate to stage annual exhibitions.

Local Protest Organizations

As life in Alberta became more complicated with the increase in population, vagaries of the weather, and the coming of the Calgary-Edmonton railroad in 1891, other organizations sprang up to protest the conditions that were developing. The railroad was completed in August.¹² By November, farmers were bitterly disappointed because the railroad monopoly was charging high rates to transport grain east and west to markets. Many of the people who had been involved in the Agricultural Societies realized that something more had to be done, so they formed new organizations.¹³ These new organizations were formed specifically to study farming conditions and put pressure on the federal government to treat western Canadian farmers more fairly. On November 7, 1891 there was a notice in The Edmonton Bulletin that a meeting would be held on November 19, 1891 in Edmonton to discuss a "means of securing a

¹² James G. MacGregor, A History of Alberta (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1972), 149.

¹³ Embree, 1.

reduction in the export railway rates on grain and other produce of this district."¹⁴ The former first president of the reorganized Edmonton Agricultural Society, Mr. Daniel Maloney, and an executive member and president, Mr. George Long, were involved. This November 19 meeting resulted in a letter being sent asking the Canadian Pacific Railway to reduce freight rates. On February 6, 1892, The Edmonton Bulletin reported a slight reduction in rates.

The meeting of November 1891 illustrates two important features. In the first place, some of the same people moved from one organization to another, showing that they believed that farmers' organizations could accomplish something for farmers. In the second place, these farmers' organizations sprang up in response to a particular problem or need. The Agricultural Societies organized exhibitions, but when farmers needed to campaign against freight rates, they formed other more militant organizations such as the one which resulted in lower freight rates.

A militant farmers' organization was founded in the Edmonton area soon after the meeting of November 19 which resulted in lowered freight rates. At a meeting in the Sturgeon School on December 1, 1891, George Long, who had also been involved with the Edmonton Agricultural Society and the November 19 meeting on freight rates, took the chair. At that meeting, another Mr. Long, J.H. Long, argued

¹⁴ Bulletin, 7 Nov. 1891: 1.

that an organization of farmers would provide a forum for the exchange of information on the best farming methods and would be a means to open up communication with distant markets and ensure that western farmers received the best price for their crops.¹⁵ Mr. J.H. Long's comment is important because it provides evidence that the farmers were getting together to exchange information and learn from one another. Other farmers may have made similar comments about how important it was to exchange information about problems which concerned them, but these ordinary statements were rarely written down. It was far more exciting to report that the farmers were demanding that the federal government reduce freight rates for transporting grain. Farmers organized meetings in other locations near Edmonton at about the same time - Belmont School on December 12, 1891 and Poplar Lake on December 19, 1891¹⁶ - which had similar aims as the December 1 meeting at Sturgeon School.

The Patrons of Industry

By the spring of 1892, these groups were being organized under the banner of the Order of the Patrons of Industry, an organization which had blossomed in the United States and was attracting members there and in eastern Canada in the 1890's. On April 13, 1892, the Sturgeon farmers called another meeting to consider information which

¹⁵ Bulletin, 5 Dec. 1891, 2

¹⁶ Bulletin, 12 Dec. 1891 and 26 Dec. 1891.

they had received about the Patrons of Industry, and at that meeting they organized themselves as a branch or lodge of the order.¹⁷ The names of the people who were elected to serve on the executive are familiar because they are mentioned in other news articles discussing farmers' groups.¹⁸ Other Edmonton area groups were organized as branches or lodges of the Patrons of Industry at Poplar Lake,¹⁹ and Belmont.²⁰ The Patrons of Industry group which formed at Little Mountain called itself Little Mountain Lodge.²¹ The announcement of the formation of the St. Albert Patrons of Industry in February, 1894 states that

a meeting to organize a lodge of the patrons of industry at St. Albert was held on Saturday afternoon in the school house. D. Maloney, chairman.²² There was a good attendance of

¹⁷ Bulletin, 16 Apr. 1892, 1.

¹⁸ George Long was elected Vice President and J.H. Long became Secretary. These men had organized the Dec. 1, 1891 meeting at Sturgeon Lake School. George Long had been President of the Edmonton Agricultural Society and would become an organizer for the Canadian Society of Equity.(Embree,3). Mr. D. Craig, who was elected Treasurer of the Patrons, had also attended the Dec. 1 meeting.

¹⁹ Bulletin, 19 Mar. and 26 Mar. 1892, 5.

²⁰ Bulletin, 2 Apr. 1892.

²¹ Bulletin, 19 Dec. 1892, 8.

²² Mr. D. Maloney, first president of the reorganized Edmonton Agricultural Society, had also been involved in the Nov. 19, 1891 meeting in Edmonton which demanded and got reduced freight rates for western grain. He became an organizer for the Patrons of Industry and on Feb. 11, 1907 became first president of the newly organized St. Albert.

farmers of St. Albert and surrounding districts. The chairman gave a short introductory address and read the articles of the constitution. M. McKinlay of Sturgeon River addressed the meeting on the necessity of organization by the farmers. A. Prince, M.L.A., followed in an address expressing sympathy with the efforts of the farmers towards the increase of the influence and the betterment of their position. Rev. Father Leduc gave an address in which he discussed the objects of the society and expressed his approval. As a result of the meeting the lodge at St. Albert was organized, with fourteen members.²³

This newspaper article, written in 1894, provides evidence that the Patrons of Industry were active for a brief time in the North-West Territories, The St. Albert lodge was formed nearly two years after the first lodges were formed in the Edmonton area, so the St. Albert organizers were able to draw on the experience of the members of other lodges. They were also able to attract credible speakers to their inaugural meeting who encouraged them in their efforts to increase their influence and better their position. However, most of the articles in The Edmonton Bulletin at this time regarding the Patrons of

Branch of the AFA (Embree, 3).

²³ Bulletin, 5 Feb. 1894.

Industry were terse, practical announcements of meetings and summaries of activities of the Patrons. Except for the specific reference at the December, 1891 Sturgeon meeting that an organization of farmers would provide a forum for an exchange of information about farming techniques,²⁴ contemporary newspapers did not discuss how important it was for the farmers to get together to exchange information. It may have been such an obvious purpose of the meetings that it was not included in any of the newspaper articles.

Agricultural Organizations in Ontario

In order to understand the background of the Patrons of Industry in the Edmonton area in 1892-94, it is helpful to look at the history of agricultural groups in Ontario. Ontario's recorded agricultural history reaches back farther than the history of western Canadian agriculture. In Ontario in the 1840's, "farmers' clubs, associations, or leagues . . . started to arise. . . . which were quite distinct both in form and purpose from the Agricultural Societies already in existence."²⁵ These "farmers' clubs, associations, or leagues"²⁶ offered more than the Agricultural Societies which were popular in the Maritimes and Ontario and concentrated on putting on fairs and exhibitions.

²⁴ See page 55.

²⁵ Louis A. Wood, A History of Farmers' Movements in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1924), 17.

²⁶ See above

There are no records of when or where these farmers' associations began, but they must have served a purpose because they were established in one district after another. There are no records of how the word spread and there were no models for the associations, but they all seemed to have similar constitutions and procedures. A club would be formed when ten to twenty farmers came together and elected officers. A sample constitution was usually drawn up and a nominal fee assessed. Meetings were held in a school house or a farm house. The meetings would consist of discussions and debates on agricultural issues and the reading of essays on current topics by club members. A pot luck lunch would be available when the meeting was held in a farmer's home. There was no consistent name for the groups that formed, and there was no overall organization.

The purpose of the farmers' organizations which developed in Ontario in the mid nineteenth century was to "aim to cultivate among their membership a more extended knowledge of the farming industry."²⁷ In addition, the "social functions of the clubs carried them into new channels of endeavour."²⁸ The social functions referred to in the previous quotation probably included box socials and community dances, but they may also have included an educational component. The groups would have debated

²⁷ Wood, 19.

²⁸ Wood.

agricultural issues, read essays, listened to speakers, and exchanged ideas and knowledge among themselves. With this new knowledge and the confidence that results from learning, farmers went on to new endeavours. They studied economics and eventually established co-operatives to protect themselves when they bought and sold agricultural products. They discussed politics and, as a result of those discussions, got involved in the political process themselves.²⁹

The Patrons of Husbandry in Ontario

Just when Ontario farmers were discovering that knowledge gave them a sense of excitement and a sense of power, an American farmers' group began organizing in Canada. The Order of the Patrons of Husbandry (Grange) moved into fertile soil in Ontario when it organized its own farmers' groups there in the 1870's.³⁰ While the farmers' groups previously discussed were essentially unfederated and unnamed, the new American group had an organized structure with a head office and subordinate and division groups. Members of the existing Ontario farmers' clubs must have liked the thought of being organized in groups with a structure because they joined this new organization, the Patrons of Husbandry, in great numbers.

²⁹ Wood.

³⁰ This organization predated the Patrons of Industry, a different group, which developed 20 years later and spread to the Edmonton area in 1892.

The Order of the Patrons of Husbandry was an American farmers' organization, also known as the Grange, which had its origins in the British Rochdale System. The Rochdale Equitable Pioneers had founded a co-operative shop in Rochdale, England in 1844 which spawned other co-operative shops and then a widespread co-operative movement. The co-operative movement is based on the principle that if groups pool their resources, they can order goods in bulk at prices lower than if they purchased them individually. A co-operative shop would buy groceries or binder twine in bulk, and members could then purchase what they needed at reasonable prices set by the co-op. Or, farmers could sell their produce co-operatively and save money on the marketing and transportation costs. There was also strength in a group which could hold out for higher prices. While this is the basic idea behind a co-op, the details varied from one co-operative to another. Some of the co-operative business ventures embarked on by the Canadian Grange included the purchase of farm implements, binder twine, groceries, and insurance.

Even though the Patrons of Husbandry (Grange) was established to run co-operative economic activities to benefit farmers, there was another side to the organization which was set forth in the declaration of principles.³¹ The preamble to the declaration of principles states that

³¹ Wood, 44

one of the most important purposes of the Grange was to receive instruction in the art and science of husbandry.³²

The preamble goes on to state that

the products of the earth are subject to the influence of natural laws, invariable and indisputable; the amount produced will consequently be in proportion to the intelligence of the producer, and success will depend upon his knowledge of the action of these laws and the proper application of their principles. Hence knowledge is the foundation of happiness.³³

It is obvious that Grangers were very aware that it was essential that farmers be knowledgeable about the business of farming. Another section of the declaration of principles states that "we shall advance the cause of education among ourselves and for our children by all just means within our power."³⁴

The Patrons of Husbandry (Grange) flourished in the United States in the 1870's and 1880's and became popular in Ontario and Quebec at the same time. Canadian membership in the Grange peaked in 1879 at 31,000.³⁵ The Grange was never organized in the far west because it was popular

³² Wood, 45.

³³ Wood.

³⁴ Wood, 46.

³⁵ Wood, 60.

before agriculture was well established in the North-West Territories. However, many of the farmers who later migrated west to the North-West Territories had been supporters of the Grange movement, so they were interested in organizing farmers' clubs or supporting the ones which had been established.

After its apex in 1879, the Grange disintegrated because of organizational problems, and membership declined dramatically. But the seed had been planted. The organization may have disintegrated, but many farmers had absorbed the ideas behind the principles of the Patrons of Husbandry. They were fully aware that it was important to be knowledgeable about "the art and science of husbandry."³⁶ Eventually, another organization was formed which brought farmers together again, this time under the auspices of the Patrons of Industry.

The Patrons of Industry in Ontario

The Order of the Patrons of Industry entered Ontario from Michigan in the 1890's and attracted farmers as well as the labouring classes.³⁷ While the Patrons of Husbandry (Grange) had not encouraged direct political action, the Patrons of Industry was willing to get involved politically.³⁸ It was more a politico-economical

³⁶ See #32 above.

³⁷ Wood, 109.

³⁸ Wood.

association.³⁹ The Patrons of Industry also lacked the "intellectual stimulus and bonhomie so characteristic of all sessions of the Dominion Grange."⁴⁰ It may not have provided the intellectual stimulation of the Grange, but many of the former Patrons of Husbandry supporters joined the Patrons of Industry. The latter embarked energetically on co-operative business ventures and also ran candidates in the Federal election of 1891 and again in 1896 until they disintegrated amid accusations of mismanagement of funds.

Agricultural Organizations in Alberta

It was the Patrons of Industry which had a direct influence on the history of the Edmonton area when lodges were formed at Poplar Lake, Belmont, Little Mountain, and St. Albert in 1892-94.⁴¹ The Patrons around Edmonton may have lost their organization and their enthusiasm after 1896 when the Patrons of Industry disintegrated in Ontario, but the idea of farmers organizing to protect their interests did not completely disappear.

Lacombe Co-operative Society

The Order of the Patrons of Industry had an effect in the Lacombe area some years later when several farmers who had been involved in co-operative movements in Ontario and Britain organized a co-operative society. A public meeting

³⁹ Wood, 110.

⁴⁰ Wood, 115.

⁴¹ See pages 55-58 above.

held on May 28, 1898 brought together several recent arrivals from Britain who proposed setting up a co-operative society modelled on the Rochdale System.⁴² A former Ontario resident, Colonel Gregory, who had been influenced by Patron activities before he left for Lacombe in 1893, also attended the meeting.⁴³ The Lacombe Co-operative Society was established in July 1898, but it had collapsed by the end of 1899 because of insufficient finances, credit difficulties, lack of support, and hostility from the local banks and merchants.⁴⁴ The formation of the Lacombe Co-operative Society is one of the examples of how past experiences of the early settlers to the west influenced their activities when conditions called for action.

In spite of the failure of the Lacombe Co-operative Society, Colonel Gregory was convinced that the only way for farmers to protect their interests was with some kind of farm union. He was joined in this belief by his son-in-law, Finley B. Watson, who also came from an old Ontario Patron family. Both men used their executive positions in the local Agricultural Society to organize the Farmers' Association of Lacombe, later known as the Farmers' Association of Alberta (F.A.A.).⁴⁵

⁴² Bulletin, 4 Aug. 1898, 3.

⁴³ Embree, 88.

⁴⁴ Embree, 87.

⁴⁵ Embree, 88.

Farmers' Association of Alberta

Colonel Gregory and Finley B. Watson were instrumental in the development of the Farmers' Association of Alberta in 1903. Both men had been acquainted with the work of the Patron movement in Ontario, both held executive positions in the Lacombe Agricultural Society, and Colonel Gregory had been a member of the Lacombe Co-operative Society. The F.A.A. was an active organization which stated in a news release to the Lacombe Advertiser that "we might say the aim of the organization is for mutual instruction and protection and to forward the interests of the farmers in every honourable and legitimate way."⁴⁶ This newspaper article states very clearly that one of the basic purposes of farmers' organizations was mutual instruction. Mutual instruction was the most important activity which farmers could undertake to "forward their interests."⁴⁷ The F.A.A. was also prepared to get involved politically.

During the 1904 federal election, the F.A.A. went on an organizational campaign to elect Colonel Gregory as an independent. Unfortunately, there are few records of Colonel Gregory's speeches because The Edmonton Bulletin ignored his campaign.⁴⁸ Colonel Gregory was soundly

⁴⁶ Bulletin, 20 July 1903, 3-4.

⁴⁷ see above.

⁴⁸ Embree, 94.

defeated in the election.⁴⁹ and the F.A.A. disintegrated. After the Lacombe F.A.A. collapsed in 1904, conditions developed around Edmonton during 1905 which encouraged the growth of two rival farmers' organizations there. One of these was the American Society of Equity and the other was the Alberta Farmers' Association which had its roots deep in the Territorial Grain Growers' Association.

The Society of Equity

The American Society of Equity (A.S. of E.) was organized in the Edmonton area in 1904-5 as a result of discussions held after meetings of the local school boards. A resident of Poplar Lake, eight miles N.E. of the Edmonton Post Office, later stated that

the low prices and, therefore, meagre returns for labour on the farm were constantly discussed at trustee meetings after school business had been disposed of, and as harvest and threshing came on, these men decided to try to do something along the lines of organizing for the purpose of improving conditions, so each undertook to find out all that he could along this line.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Liberals - 3,863; Conservatives - 1,878; Gregory - 130. The Edmonton Bulletin, 5 Nov. 1904, 2

⁵⁰ Eileen Birch, Collector, "The Early History of the Canadian Society of Equity." Papers and Pamphlets of the United Farmers of Alberta, 1904-1935, Glenbow Museum and Archives.

In order to find out all that they could, farmers studied the literature they received from the Manitoba Grain Growers as well as from several Fruit Growers' Associations in British Columbia. Mr. Keen, a farmer from Turnip Lake, near Edmonton, had subscribed to "Up To Date Farming", the paper of the American Society of Equity, founded recently in Indianapolis by Mr. J.A. Everitt. "Up To Date Farming" discussed the main objectives of the Society of Equity: a minimum price for all farm products, and the education of the farmers to set and maintain that price.⁵¹

After considering all the literature, area farmers decided to "form a branch of the A. S. of E. (American Society of Equity) somewhat in the form of a district organization, with local unions."⁵² Locals were established in the Edmonton area at Poplar Lake, Belmont, Turnip Lake, Namao, Spruce Grove, and Stony Plain in 1905.⁵³ The A.S.of E spread west and north to Morinville, Independence and Bon Accord. The Bon Accord local of the American Society of Equity produced one of the stalwarts of the farmers' movement in Alberta, Anders Rafn. Rafn had immigrated from Denmark to the United States and then to western Canada. His daughter wrote in a family history that

⁵¹ Birch.

⁵² Birch.

⁵³ Wood, 199.

Father had become interested in organizations and unions which had begun to improve conditions for the working people in Denmark, so it was a natural follow-up for him to join the farmers' association, "The Society of Equity" when he came to Alberta.⁵⁴

His daughter's comment is another illustration that western farmers' organizations did not spring up in isolation. Mr. Rafn was familiar with similar organizations in Denmark and was comfortable with the American Society of Equity because of the time he had spent south of the border.

However, not everybody was comfortable with the foreign origins of the American Society of Equity. According to the minutes of the Spruce Grove local of the American Society of Equity, the American affiliation bothered the members because on Dec. 2, 1905, it was decided to rename the group the Canadian Society of Equity.

The Canadian Society of Equity was an important organization from its inception in 1905 until it amalgamated with the Alberta Farmers' Association in 1909. A constitution and by-laws were published which outlined the purposes and objects of the Society. The first object was to "obtain profitable prices for all products of the farm and orchard" and the second was to "have built and maintain granaries, elevators, warehouses and cold storage

⁵⁴ Martha Rafn, Letter, Bon Accord District Collection, Alberta Provincial Archives, Edmonton, Alberta.

warehouses...."⁵⁵ The third, fourth and fifth objects called for equitable rates of transportation, legislation in the interests of the farmer, and the opening up of markets.⁵⁶ The sixth object was "to educate the young men of the nation on their rights, duties and responsibilities, so that they may understand the evil effects of vicious legislation upon their calling, to watch legislation on public questions and discuss the effect on the wealth producer."⁵⁷ Members were encouraged to "regard the meetings as schools of progress and advancement."⁵⁸

These statements in the constitution provide some insight into the purpose of the Society of Equity. The people who wrote the constitution and by-laws had their own ideas about the nature of politics. The constitution referred to the "evils of vicious legislation." The words make it obvious that the members of the Canadian Society of Equity felt that the legislators did not consider the interests of the farming class. The constitution also calls upon farmers to be knowledgeable about how the legislation would affect the "wealth producer". This language is similar to the language in the Fabian, socialist, and Marxist literature that was being published in Europe in the

⁵⁵ Constitution and By-Laws of the Canadian Society of Equity. Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

⁵⁶ Constitution, C.S. of E

⁵⁷ Constitution, C.S. of E.

⁵⁸ Constitution, C.S. of E.

late 19th and early 20th centuries. Western Canada may have been thousands of miles away, but it was not isolated from the philosophical and ideological debates of the time.

The by-laws of the Society of Equity carefully laid out instructions for carrying on business so the meetings could run more efficiently. The Bon Accord local would have benefited from some of this advice at one of its early meetings. The minutes of the Bon Accord local of September 23, 1906 recorded that after the "president explained to some prospective members the purpose of the meeting, discussion became general and members began to talk to one another instead of addressing the chair. All began to talk at once."⁵⁹

In a letter of January 30, 1908, W.A. Norman, Secretary-Treasurer of the Canadian Society of Equity, reminded all Presidents, Secretaries and members of Local Unions of the "referendum of business which should be carried out at your local meetings."⁶⁰ The eighteenth item on this list was "Discussion of special topics for the good of the farmers and the society."⁶¹ Mr Norman elaborated on this in his letter by saying that

⁵⁹ Minutes of the Bon Accord Local, 23 Sept. 1906. United Farmers of Alberta, Business and Political Papers, 1905-1965. Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

⁶⁰ W.A. Norman, Letter to all Presidents, Secretaries and Members of Local Unions, 30 Jan. 1908. United Farmers of Alberta, Business and Political Papers, 1905-1965. Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

⁶¹ W.A. Norman, Letter.

it was perhaps one of the most important of them all, and if carried out goes a long way towards creating much interest in the meetings, for instance take certain subjects of interest to farmers and give notice that at the next meeting such subjects will be debated on, and in this way there is much that will be learnt.⁶²

The members of the Bon Accord local of the Canadian Society of Equity were already aware that these ideas were important. At one of their early meetings a motion had been passed that "in the interests of the society and its members, it would be advisable to have an information office established in Edmonton."⁶³ At a later meeting of the Bon Accord local, it was decided to start the meetings earlier in the winter so they would end by 8:30 p.m. and allow three quarters of an hour for a program.⁶⁴ A committee was set up to arrange programs and issue an Equity newspaper to be read at meetings. Subsequent meetings included readings, recitations, songs, and the reading of the Equity Paper. Even though the intention of the committee was to involve everybody in the program, the same people - and their children - were called upon to read and recite.⁶⁵ In

⁶² W.A. Norman, Letter.

⁶³ Bon Accord Minutes, 9 Sept. 1905.

⁶⁴ Bon Accord Minutes, 23 Dec. 1905.

⁶⁵ Bon Accord Minutes, 6 Jan., 20 Jan., 3 Feb., 17 Feb., 3 Mar., 1906 etc.

addition, the man appointed editor of the Equity Paper did not always fulfil his responsibility. On Jan. 20, 1906, "The Equity Paper was not read as the Editor for some unknown reason did not appear."⁶⁶ The Editor, Mr. Martin, tendered his resignation at the next meeting and Mr. Hall was appointed Editor.⁶⁷

In spite of some obvious frustrations, the enthusiasm of the members of the Bon Accord local shines through the minutes. The minutes indicate that the same people gave the talks and the recitations and sang the songs. There was more enthusiasm and a solidifying effect when members were preparing for one of the quarterly conventions. This illustrates that for a group to be successful in the long run, there has to be more to it than a talent show. In 1905, the Bon Accord local had called for an information office in Edmonton to provide guidance, research and the occasional lecturer. A 1908 letter from Headquarters addressed this problem by stating that

to enthuse more interest in the locals, the secretary will shortly send a constitutional program of business to be carried out at local meeting also from time to time (sic) will send articles of interest for reading at local meetings

⁶⁶ Bon Accord Minutes, 20 Jan. 1906.

⁶⁷ Bon Accord Minutes, 3 Feb., 1906.

the same to be discussed etc, and in this way more interest will be maintained.⁶⁸

In the same letter, secretaries were asked to report how things were going. If interest waned, then arrangements would be made to send out a speaker and suggestions for making meetings more interesting.

In spite of the enthusiasm of many farmers and the valiant attempts to create an organizational structure to further its aims, the Canadian Society of Equity was experiencing problems. The first problem revolved around its foreign origins, in spite of the name change from the American Society of Equity to the Canadian Society of Equity. Because of this American affiliation, the Society of Equity ran into opposition in South Edmonton from farmers who were busy organizing branches of the Territorial Grain Growers' Association (T.G.G.A.), later called the Alberta Farmers' Association (A.F.A.).⁶⁹ The Spruce Grove local of the Society of Equity set the tone when on June 10, 1908 there was a motion "that this local step over to the Alberta Farmers' Association."⁷⁰ Since the June 10 meeting was not a duly called meeting, that motion was cancelled and a

⁶⁸ W.A. Norman, Letter, 20 December 1908, United Farmers of Alberta, Business and Political Papers, 1905-1965, Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

⁶⁹ Not to be confused with the F.A.A., Farmers' Association of Alberta, established near Lacombe in 1903 by people such as Colonel Gregory and Finley B. Watson.

⁷⁰ Minutes of the Spruce Grove Local of the American Society of Equity, 10 June 1908. Edmonton Provincial Archives.

proper motion on December 19, 1908 created the Spruce Grove local of the Alberta Farmers' Association.⁷¹

The second problem stemmed from a failed business venture. The Society of Equity had always had a particular orientation toward business and the principles of controlled marketing. As a result of a Special Extra Delegates Convention held on Jan 28, 1907, a Limited Company, called the Canadian Society of Equity, Limited was established to "Do Business - Build Elevators, Warehouses, Packing Houses, Etc, Etc."⁷² This business failed within the year, causing financial hardship for those involved and problems for the parent organization. An official of the Society of Equity states in a letter that

the failure of The Equity Co. Ltd. has been a great blow to the Society as numbers of people consider or think it is the Society that has gone under and in most of the newspapers they have had big headlines to the effect that The Canadian Society of Equity has gone out of business.⁷³

The Canadian Society of Equity was never able to establish itself completely in Alberta because of its

⁷¹ Spruce Grove Minutes, 19 Dec. 1908.

⁷² Will J. Keen, Provisional Secretary of the Canadian Society of Equity, Limited, Letter, 7 Jan. 1907, United Farmers of Alberta, Business and Political Papers, 1905-1965, Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

⁷³ W.A. Norman. Letter. 30 Jan. 1908. United Farmers of Alberta, Business and Political Papers, 1905-1965, Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

American origins, but the fiasco experienced by the spinoff company spelled the death knell for a society which believed in the power of co-operation and education to improve the lot of farmers. The Society of Equity had always had to compete for members and attention with another previously mentioned group, the Alberta Farmers' Association. This Association had been organized originally as a branch of the Territorial Grain Growers' Association (T.G.G.A.) but had changed its name to the Alberta Farmers' Association (A.F.A.) when Alberta was granted provincial status in 1905. The Territorial Grain Growers' Association

The Territorial Grain Growers' Association, the parent organization of the A.F.A., was organized after a series of protest meetings in 1901 and 1902 in Indian Head, forty miles east of Regina. The protest meetings were held because the railroad was not supplying enough rail cars to transport the bumper crop of 1901, and farmers stood to lose a great deal of money because they were not able to get their crop to market. The organizers of the meetings were respected farmers who were also members of the Indian Head Agricultural Society.

By 1901-02, Agricultural Societies in the Regina - Moose Jaw area had matured to the point where they had become involved in educational activities.⁷⁴ Territorial Government officials such as the Commissioner of Agriculture

⁷⁴ Blenkinsop, 102.

and, later, the Superintendent of Fairs and Institutes, provided an incentive for Agricultural Societies to offer instruction in agricultural techniques. In 1900 the Government required Societies to hold two educational meetings a year in order to qualify for the government grant that was allocated to each Society.⁷⁵ The Government clearly expected the Agricultural Societies to function as agents of the government to bring agricultural education to farmers. That the reaction was less than enthusiastic can be seen in the dearth of announcements of educational meetings even though records show that Societies continued to meet to sponsor Agricultural Exhibitions. While the Department of Agriculture tried to organize the Agricultural Societies to provide instruction, farmers were forming another more activist organization, the Territorial Grain Growers' Association.⁷⁶

Farmers were searching for something, but it was not an educational program laid on by the government, however well intentioned. After mastering the techniques of farming in a new and difficult country, farmers turned to the problem of marketing their produce. No one seemed able to help them get the bumper crop of 1901 to market or explain to them the

⁷⁵ Blenkinsop.

⁷⁶ There is a suggestion that government was prodded into action because the T.G.G.A. was being organized during these years. The T.G.G.A. may have represented a threat to the government which then stepped in to strengthen the Agricultural Societies as a bulwark against the Association. Blenkinsop, 96.

marketing system which left their grain in the fields. When the government and the Agricultural Societies could not provide answers, farmers organized in December, 1901 to find those answers themselves in an association of their own. There was so much pent-up demand for an organization such as this that by the time a convention was called only two months later, 38 local organizations were represented.⁷⁷ The locals sprang up because they gave people the opportunity to become involved in seeking their own solutions to problems that affected them. Through the T.G.G.A., action was taken against railway agents and railroad companies to force them to get the grain to market. Action was also taken against the Grain Exchange in Winnipeg to force it to allow the new farmers' company to sell grain on the Exchange. Eventually the Grain Growers' Grain Company, the business section of the Grain Growers' Association which had been incorporated in 1906, made some headway with the railroads and the Grain Exchange.⁷⁸

Word of the Territorial Grain Growers' Grain Association spread through the eastern North-West Territories and had an impact on the Manitoba farm movement as a result of a T.G.G.A. organizational meeting in Virden, Manitoba in January, 1902.⁷⁹ However, there is apparently

⁷⁷ "History of the Grain Growers," Grain Growers' Guide Tenth Anniversary Number. 26 June, 1918, 6.

⁷⁸ "History of the Grain Growers."

⁷⁹ Wood, 100-101

no surviving record of any T.G.G.A. activity further west until an organizational meeting at Strathcona nearly four years later in 1905 under the leadership of Rice Sheppard.⁸⁰ Rice Sheppard was instrumental in organizing farmers in the Edmonton area. He has left an unpublished autobiography which tells of his involvement with men such as William R. Ball to bring about the formation of a branch of the Territorial Grain Growers' Association.⁸¹ At a meeting on February 22, 1905 called to discuss possible solutions to problems in the farming community, Rice Sheppard supported the establishment of a branch of the T.G.G.A. He called upon his friends and neighbours to support a home-grown organization and ignore one of foreign origin, a reference to the American Society of Equity which was actively organizing in the area. There must have been considerable support for the idea of a home-grown organization because on March 22, 1905, a branch of the T.G.G.A. was established in Strathcona.⁸² Rice Sheppard states that

it was a fine afternoon and a real good turn-out
of farmers - nearly 100 - were present. . . .

⁸⁰ Embree, 86.

⁸¹ William R. Ball was active in farmer and labour organizations in the Edmonton area and was involved in both the A.F.A. and the Society of Equity. He had also been present at meetings addressed by Colonel Gregory before the election of 1904.

⁸² Embree, 115.

After some really progressive speeches had been made, a call for membership resulted in forty-six becoming charter members. . . . ⁸³

A few months later, some members of the Clover Bar local of the American Society of Equity withdrew from that organization and formed their own local organization. They joined Rice Sheppard and his friends in Strathcona to become the second branch of the Alberta Farmers' Association, renamed because Alberta had gained provincial status on September 1, 1905.⁸⁴ Soon after the establishment of the Strathcona and Clover Bar branches, others were formed nearby in Ray, Ft. Saskatchewan, and in the Baker School District.⁸⁵ A constitution was drawn up to govern the activities of the Alberta Farmers' Association. The constitution states clearly that the A.F.A. was not a political organization, nor did it support the policies of any particular political organization. The object of the A.F.A. was to

1. forward the interests of the producers of grain and livestock in every honourable and legitimate way.

⁸³ Rice Sheppard, "Twenty-Five Years in the Great North-West", Personal Papers 1909-1921. Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

⁸⁴ Hopkins Moorehouse, Deep Furrows (Toronto: George M. McLeod, 1918), 144.

⁸⁵ Embree, 146.

2. hold meetings for the discussion of subjects pertaining to the production of grain and livestock and the best means of marketing same.
3. encourage the production of superior varieties of grain, and the breeding and rearing of improved stock.⁸⁶

The constitution also clearly sets out the organizational structure of the A.F.A. There was to be a central association and one or more subordinate associations.⁸⁷ These subordinate associations were also referred to as branches or locals. Plans were made to print the A.F.A. constitution and by-laws in English, French, and German, so information would be more widely available.⁸⁸

According to one of its ardent supporters, Mr. Rice Sheppard, the A.F.A. was very careful in the work it undertook, concentrating mostly on educational and social events. Mr. D.W. Warner, President of the A.F.A., stated at a Directors' Meeting in 1907 that the educative value of the association was important and there was a danger of embarking on business enterprises, a direct reference to the business ventures of the Canadian Society of Equity Ltd.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Constitution of the Alberta Farmers' Association. (A.F.A.) Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

⁸⁷ Constitution of the A.F.A. 2

⁸⁸ Constitution of the A.F.A.

⁸⁹ Minutes of a Directors' Meeting, 3 July, 1907, at the Fire Hall in Strathcona. Alberta Farmers' Association. Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

The A.F.A. was always cognizant of events in the farming communities and stepped in to influence affairs when it felt that it was necessary.⁹⁰ Members of the A.F.A. supported the philosophy of the T.G.G.A. which emphasized the importance of learning and education as a means for farmers to improve their conditions.

In an effort to increase membership and establish new locals, all farmers' groups had organizational drives, and the A.F.A. was no exception. An organizer would mail some advertising bills or posters announcing an organizational meeting for the A.F.A. to a postmaster in a specific district. The postmaster was instructed to get some farmer to post them around the district. The organizer would then make his way to the district in time for the advertised meeting. Members of the Strathcona local of the Alberta Farmers' Association would take their own teams and drive twenty or thirty miles to another settlement to organize a local and then drive home in the night.⁹¹ It was not easy work, but dedicated people were prepared to make the commitment because they believed so strongly in the cause. In his unpublished autobiography, Rice Sheppard relates a story of one of his organizing trips when he writes:

I started out with a team and cutter with plenty of snow until the plains north of Beaver Lake was

⁹⁰ Rice Sheppard, "Twenty-five Years in the Great North-West" 63.

⁹¹ Sheppard.

struck, then there was some hard going for very little snow had fallen and the sand trail made it very heavy going. I made the old village of Star on the Beaver Creek after dark. I had advertised a meeting at the school house. After putting away my team I went to the hotel for supper and inquired if they had heard anything of a farmers' meeting. They said, yes, there was to be a meeting at the school house about three quarters of a mile east. After supper I left for the school house . . . at last I came to a building all in darkness. It was the school, not a soul to be seen about. A light in the distance suggested a farm. The school was locked. I waited for awhile but no one came. I then started to walk for the light in the distance, it must have been about half a mile. I could find no trail so went straight for the light. Just before I reached the farm yard I fell headlong down through a snow drift into a small creek among some willows. The cracking of sticks as I fell through brought forth a couple of dogs from the farm. I thought before I could get out they would limb me. . . . I called them nice dogs and all the pretty names I could think of, all the time wishing I could kill them . . . at last . . . I reached the door and was lucky to find it was the boarding place of the

teacher of the school . . . the school key was found. It was now about 8:30 p.m. but (I was told) I will not get anyone there till after nine, although the meeting was called for 8:00. . . . About 9:30 the farmers began to arrive and about 10:00 we had got a chairman elected and I proceeded to address them on the need of organization and cooperation among farmers. All were very attentive I got them organized with a local about 12:30 and then left for my hotel.⁹²

Organizers like Rice Sheppard travelled extensively around the province because they believed in what they were doing. Once a group was organized, it was up to the members of the local to keep it active and relevant. Most locals were successful and the Alberta Farmers' Association grew stronger and larger.

The first convention of the A.F.A. was held in the Fire Hall, Strathcona, on January 31, 1906. Delegates to this convention represented locals from the Edmonton-Strathcona-Clover Bar area, but there were also delegates from Provost, in eastern Alberta, and Pincher Creek, in southern Alberta. The presence of these delegates so soon after the formation of the Association indicates that conditions were ripe for the formation of groups such as this and that the organizers were spreading the word. When the delegate from Pincher

⁹² Sheppard, 71-73.

Creek, Mr. Dobbie, arrived at the convention and announced that he had been elected as a delegate by eighty members of his branch, he was "greeted with cheers and welcomed by all."⁹³ Mr. Dobbie was promptly made a director of the Association so he could sit on the Central Association Executive⁹⁴ which consisted primarily of members of the Strathcona Executive. Another convention of the Alberta Farmers' Association was called for May 9, 1906 in Calgary to accommodate and welcome the newly formed branches in southern Alberta.⁹⁵ At that convention, President D.W. Warner drew attention to the fact that "the Association was but five months old, that it began with a membership of about 140 and that it now has over 1200 members."⁹⁶

Momentum was building for the A.F.A. and its parent organization, the Grain Growers' Movement. A farmers' newspaper, The Grain Growers' Guide first appeared in June, 1908 stating that

the purpose of the Guide's publication is to aid
in the discussion of the economic and social
problems which confront us, to assist in unifying

⁹³ Minutes of the First Convention of the Alberta Farmers' Association. 31 Jan, 1906. Firehall, Strathcona. Glenbow Museum and Archives.

⁹⁴ Minutes, First Convention, A.F.A.

⁹⁵ Minutes of the Second Convention of the Alberta Farmers' Association, 9 May, 1906, Calgary. Glenbow Museum and Archives.

⁹⁶ Minutes, Second Convention, A.F.A.

opinion among our farmers and other workers as to what it is necessary to do in order that they and we may come to enjoy to the full the fruits of our labors, and, having thus unified us in opinion, to serve as a trumpet in marshalling our forces for the accomplishing of whatever has been decided is best to be done.⁹⁷

The motto of the Grain Growers' Movement was "Organization - Education - Co-operation".⁹⁸ By 1908, there were two strong provincial organizations in western Canada, The Manitoba Grain Growers' Association and The Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association. Efforts in Alberta were diluted because there were two organizations vying for the loyalty of Alberta farmers. This was resolved in January of 1909 with the amalgamation of the Canadian Society of Equity and the Alberta Farmers' Association to form an organization which called itself the "United Farmers of Alberta, Our Motto, Equity."

Summary

The Alberta farmers' movement got off to a shaky start when the Edmonton Agricultural Society floundered after 1879 and had to be reorganized in 1882. After 1882 other Agricultural Societies were formed. These Societies were supported and funded by the government to put on exhibitions

⁹⁷ George Chipman, "Ten Years at the Front", Grain Growers' Guide Tenth Anniversary Number, June 26, 1916.

⁹⁸ "History of the Grain Growers." 6

and fairs as a way of spreading information about new products and farming techniques. Farmers continued to belong to these societies, but at the same time they formed other more radical organizations to deal with more serious and complicated problems related to marketing their produce.

This phase of the Alberta farmers' movement resulted in a variety of farmers' organizations. Independent organizations which formed in the early 1890's gave way to the ones formed under the auspices of the Patrons of Industry. The Lacombe Co-operative Society and the Farmers' Association of Alberta which grew up in the Lacombe area were founded by people who were familiar with the Patrons of Husbandry in Ontario and with the Rochdale Co-operative movement in Britain. The farmers' movement was stronger by 1905 because more people were involved and communication was more developed. Two organizations competed for farmers' loyalty between 1905 and 1908. The American (re-named Canadian) Society of Equity and the Alberta Farmers' Association were large, powerful organizations when they amalgamated to form the United Farmers of Alberta in 1909.

The activity in the Alberta farming community that culminated in the formation of the U.F.A. was part of a larger movement that was occurring in eastern Canada, Britain, Europe, and the United States. On the larger stage, reform movements such as Owenism, Chartism, Fabianism, socialism, and trade unionism were changing the structure of society in Britain. Similar reform movements

were occurring in Europe. The United States produced many of the movements which influenced Canadian activities. The Patrons of Husbandry (Grange), the Patrons of Industry, and the Populist and Progressive movements all entered Canada and contributed to the farmers' movement which culminated in the formation of the United Farmers of Alberta.

CHAPTER 4

The United Farmers of Alberta

The Canadian Society of Equity and the Alberta Farmers' Association amalgamated on January 14, 1909 to form the United Farmers of Alberta. Finally, Alberta had one organization to speak for the farmers of the Province. The union was the result of the efforts of key members in each of the groups.¹ The leaders in each group were strong independent individuals who believed in the cause of their own organization. The Society of Equity was a vibrant organization with wide support across the province, but in spite of its obvious strength it did not overwhelm the other farmers' group in the province. The Alberta Farmers' Association held on and developed a strong home-grown organization itself based on its ties with the Grain Growers' Associations in the other provinces. There were attempts over the years, particularly in 1905 and 1906,² to bring about a union, but these efforts failed because of differences between the key organizers in each association.

¹ The details of the struggle to amalgamate are covered in David Embree's 1956 thesis.

² Embree, Chapters VI and VII.

When the business arm of the Society of Equity ran into financial difficulty in 1907, the way was cleared for an amalgamation. This is not to suggest that the A.F.A. took over the Society of Equity. It was a true amalgamation of powerful groups, one of which happened to be experiencing economic problems. The name of the new organization became The United Farmers of Alberta, "Our Motto Equity." The original Territorial Grain Growers' Association branch in Strathcona which had become the premier local of the Alberta Farmers' Association was christened Union No. 1 of the United Farmers of Alberta when the A.F.A. and the Society of Equity amalgamated. Anders Rafn's active Bon Accord local of the Canadian Society of Equity became U.F.A. Union No. 2 upon amalgamation.

The amalgamation brought together two strong organizations which considered that the education of members was important. There is a "Letter to the Editor" in the last edition of The Great West, the official organ of the Canadian Society of Equity, entitled, "Farmers must Study." The letter writer explains that it is important for farmers to discuss the following subjects at their local association meetings: Direct Taxation, Indirect Taxation, Customs Taxes, Excise Taxes, Single Tax, Inheritance and Income Taxes.³ This letter provides insight into what some members expected

³ Letter to the Editor from Box A, Plumas, Manitoba. The Great West, the Farmers' Paper: official organ of the Canadian Society of Equity, Edmonton. 20 Jan. 1909. Vol. 2 No. 19. 2.

to get out of the individual local organizations of the Society of Equity. In addition to business goals, the locals provided a forum for the discussion and debate that enabled farmers to learn or to be educated in the matters that concerned them. In the Tenth Anniversary Edition of the Grain Growers' Guide,⁴ a reference is made to the educational programs of the Grain Growers' Associations, including the A.F.A., which had "broadened to include practically all subjects which make for better rural life. Their influence has profoundly affected for good the entire national fabric."⁵

Reference to the importance of what the farmers referred to as "education" increased as the farmers' groups became better organized. As membership increased and the number of local organizations grew, the groups themselves became more sophisticated and more knowledgeable about what held them together. Even though the locals may have been formed for the economic benefits which might have resulted from business transactions, members realized that the process of working together was a powerful experience which overshadowed the financial results. The formation of the U.F.A. created a determined organization which had the

⁴ The Grain Growers' Guide, a publication of the Saskatchewan and Manitoba farmer owned Grain Growers' Grain Company, was first published in June, 1908 in Winnipeg. It was adopted as the official organ of the U.F.A. in 1909

⁵ "History of the Grain Growers", Reprinted from The Grain Growers' Guide Tenth Anniversary Number, June 26, 1918. Glenbow Museum and Archives.

potential for harnessing the excitement, confidence, and sense of power which was building up in farmers' groups across Alberta.

The United Farmers of Alberta

The new organization, the United Farmers' of Alberta, "Our Motto Equity," celebrated its union by accepting an invitation from Premier Rutherford to attend the opening of the 1909 Alberta Provincial Legislative Session. The Edmonton Bulletin states that

to the thinking mind there has not been seen in Edmonton for many moons such an impressive group of humanity as the long procession of more than 100 prosperous farmers of this province wending its way to the legislative hall to witness the opening of the final session of the first legislature of Alberta.

A striking assemblage these men made, as they marched down the snowy Sixth street hill. They proceeded in line, four abreast, this hint of organization in their prosperous ranks indicating strongly the new position which the farmers of the continent are making for themselves in the human family. They represented the United Farmers of Alberta, an organization with over 5000 members of this class of the community which is a most powerful factor in the upbuilding of the province.

Prosperous, intelligent, alert westerners, they all seemed. Their marching was made only the brisker by an atmosphere somewhere about 30 degrees below, for the day was one of still western cold which the true westerner "does not feel." Arriving at the hall, the United Farmers were ushered into the visitors' galleries. Coming as they did from every portion of the province, they made a fittingly representative and probably the most interesting assemblage yet in attendance at the legislature.⁶

This positive description of the aura surrounding the original members of the U. F.A. reflected the mood of the times. The U.F.A. was to become a powerful influence in the province of Alberta. W.L. Morton, in The Progressive Party in Canada, states that "the primary purpose of the new organization was to educate members in collective action, a knowledge of their legal and political rights and an appreciation of the dignity of their calling."⁷

The United Farmers of Alberta operated under a constitution which was adopted at the organizing convention of January, 1909. The constitution refers to the U.F.A. as an Association and incorporates most of the points of the

⁶ Bulletin, Jan 15, 1909, 1

⁷ W.L. Morton, The Progressive Party in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950), 11.

constitutions of both of the founding groups.⁸ The Association was to consist of a provincial association and what was referred to as "local unions" or "unions."⁹ These local unions were to hold meetings twice a month if possible. The term "local" to describe the local union, used in newspapers and in U.F.A minutes, was recognized in the Constitution of 1917.¹⁰ The U.F.A. was organized on three levels: the executive, the annual convention, and the local unions.

The Executive

The executive, chosen by the annual convention, was composed of the President, Vice Presidents,¹¹ Directors,¹² and a Secretary Treasurer who was responsible for the finances as well as communication with the locals through official circulars and the Guide.¹³ The executive seemed to dominate U.F.A. affairs even though the annual convention

⁸ Constitution, United Farmers of Alberta, Business and Political Papers 1905-1965. Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

⁹ Constitution, U.F.A.

¹⁰ Constitution, U.F.A., 1917. Section 2, No. 6 reads "'Local' shall mean a Local Union as provided for under Section 12" p. 3.

¹¹ The number of Vice Presidents increased from one in 1910 to four in 1912.

¹² The 1909 Constitution provided for three Directors at Large and seven Directors for Constituencies. The U.F.A. used federal constituency boundaries as their district boundaries.

¹³ Grain Growers' Guide

was considered the supreme governing body.¹⁴ The role of the executive was to direct affairs between annual conventions, keep locals informed, and consult with them if major policy decisions were needed.¹⁵ The president and vice presidents met once a month to discuss policy and plan for the annual convention.¹⁶ Members of the executive held their positions for many years, so they became skilled debaters and organizers.¹⁷

The executive was aware of the importance of getting and keeping members, so they conducted frequent membership drives and then made an effort to maintain interest by providing the new locals with educational material to keep them informed and interested in U.F.A. policies.¹⁸ Mr. James Speakman, U.F.A. President in 1915, expressed his opinion on one of the roles of the executive when he stated that

in regard to organization in general, I feel as I have suggested several times, that our chief work at present should be to help our existing unions to be as interesting and efficient as possible.

¹⁴ William McIntosh, "The United Farmers of Alberta, 1909-1920" (M.A. diss., University of Calgary, 1971), p. 37.

¹⁵ Constitution, United Farmers of Alberta 1909, p. 8-9. United Farmers of Alberta, Business and Political Papers, 1905-1965. Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

¹⁶ McIntosh, 39.

¹⁷ McIntosh, 43.

¹⁸ McIntosh, 41.

Many unions find it difficult to initiate interesting business and topics for discussion when they meet. I suggest that the Central Office should send out a circular to all the unions, mapping out a program for the winter meetings, suggesting useful items of business and interesting topics for discussion, and offering to send when requested, short papers to help in the discussion. I think we could help to attract members to the monthly meetings by making the meetings more interesting.¹⁹

The executive and secretary treasurer worked very hard during their membership drives to attract dedicated, enthusiastic farmers who would work diligently on behalf of the U.F.A. The Secretary Treasurer, Mr. E. Fream,²⁰ stated that the U.F.A. should attract people who "are interested enough to become missionaries."²¹ The dedication of these "missionaries" meant that failure to enlist more converts

¹⁹ James Speakman, "Organization Report" United Farmers of Alberta, Official Minutes of the Executive and Board, 28-29 Sept. 1915. p. 50

²⁰ Mr. Fream was Secretary Treasurer from 1909-1912 when he resigned to accept a position with the Grain Growers Grain Company. "Who's Who in the U.F.A.," Annual Report, 1916. U.F.A. Business and Political Papers, 1905-1965. Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

²¹ United Farmers of Alberta, Annual Reports for the Year 1911, p. 19. Official Minutes and Reports of the Annual Conventions. Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

did not result in discouragement but demonstrated the need for a more determined effort.²²

The Annual Convention

The annual convention, held in Edmonton and Calgary and once, in 1914, in Lethbridge, was a highlight of the U.F.A. year. Each local was entitled to send one delegate for every ten members of the local union.²³ These delegates met every January to elect officers, formulate policy, listen to reports, and discuss resolutions. Even though most of the major resolutions were initiated by the executive,²⁴ the local unions also presented their own resolutions which were either adopted by the convention or encouraged the executive to pay attention to the issues and the feelings of the rank and file.

The Local Union

The basic unit of the U.F.A. was the local union which was formed with a minimum of ten members.²⁵ The constitution required the local to elect an executive consisting of a president, vice-president, and secretary treasurer. At the time of amalgamation in 1909, there were

²² McIntosh, 42.

²³ Constitution of the United Farmers of Alberta, 1909, p.11.

²⁴ McIntosh, 37.

²⁵ Constitution of the United Farmers of Alberta, 1909, p. 4.

122 unions; in 1921 there were 1000 local unions throughout the province.²⁶

Activities in the Local Unions

The local was the heart of the organization. It was to the local meeting that the farmer brought the ideas and the enthusiasm which were to make the U.F.A. a powerful force in the history of Alberta and the west. The people who gathered together in a school house, community hall, or farm house learned together and taught each other what they needed to know to survive in the west.

Education

At first they learned how to farm by sharing their experiences, comparing ideas, and sometimes by inviting speakers to talk to them about subjects which concerned them. Farmers were aware of what they needed to know and took steps to fill the gaps in their own knowledge through study, group discussion, or by inviting an outside expert to give a lecture at a regular meeting.

Lecturers were available from many sources. The University of Alberta, established in Strathcona in 1908, soon developed an active Extension Department which provided valuable services to Alberta farmers. U.F.A. unions often invited extension lecturers to present information at local meetings. The U of A Extension Department also sponsored a

²⁶ United Farmers of Alberta, Annual Reports for the Year 1909, p.3, and 1921, p.14. Official Minutes and Reports of the Annual Conventions, Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

travelling library service and, by the 1920's, lectures aided by Pathescope Films. Agriculture Colleges were established in Alberta by 1913 to provide programs for the sons and daughters of farmers as well as short courses or travelling lecturers for farmers. The Federal and Provincial Departments of Agriculture were also prepared to supply lecturers and information when requested. They continued to support the Agricultural Societies which remained active in the role they had established for themselves - to sponsor exhibitions and fairs where farmers could see displays and exhibit their own produce. Alberta farmers benefitted from the extension lecturers, short courses, and exhibitions provided by the established institutions which worked hard to make farmers aware of what they needed to know to farm in the drier, more northerly climate of the Canadian north-west. But more was needed.

Once farmers had learned what they could about the techniques of farming, they set about learning how to market their crops. This was more complicated because they had to study economics and politics and banking and co-operation. They also had to communicate their ideas to the powerful wheat buyers in Winnipeg and the politicians in Ottawa if they were going to effect changes. They learned to do this and eventually established a more favourable equilibrium between themselves and the Railroad Companies, the Grain Exchange, and the Federal Government. On the practical side, U.F.A. unions called for public grain terminals,

government hail insurance, public financing for grain elevators and pork packing plants, government loans for farmers, and legislation to provide for the establishment of credit unions and co-operative societies.²⁷

Business Enterprises

U.F.A. members engaged in business enterprises through the Alberta Farmers' Co-operative Elevator Company, and later through the United Grain Growers.²⁸ They were warned by their leaders not to become "business machines" but to remain true to the basic ideals of the organization.²⁹ As the local unions became more involved with co-operative business ventures, the provincial executive struggled with how these businesses could be incorporated to give the business more power and more protection while at the same time keeping them under the auspices of the U.F.A.³⁰ Mr. Speakman recognized that "there is a tendency of our members to lose interest in other U.F.A. work when they organize as separate co-

²⁷ McIntosh, 47.

²⁸ The Alberta Farmers' Co-operative Elevator Company (A.F.C.E.C.) was formed in 1913; in 1917, the A.F.C.E.C. amalgamated with the Grain Growers' Grain Company to become the United Grain Growers (U.G.G.).

²⁹ Mrs. Irene Parlby, Reports of the Annual Secretaries' Convention, 1918, pp 23-4. United Farmers of Alberta. Business and Political Papers, 1905-1965. Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

³⁰ James Speakman, "Incorporation", Official Minutes of the Executive and Board, United Farmers of Alberta, 28-29 Sept. 1915, p. 53-4. U.F.A. Business and Political Papers, 1905-1965. Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

operative organizations. We want to find a way by which the business end helps to bind together and enlarge the U.F.A."³¹

He discovered that the Saskatchewan association was able to solve the problem by incorporating amendments to the constitution which specified that local associations could only exercise business powers through the annual convention and through the executive.³² He recommended that the U.F.A. adopt a similar plan which would give them the power to do business in addition to the educative and organizing power.³³ This was accomplished when the U.F.A. established an Incorporation Procedure for locals which wished to pursue co-operative business activities. Under this Incorporation Procedure, applicants for membership in co-operative associations were required to be members in good standing of the U.F.A. This By-law was "designed for purposes of protecting the interests of our association."³⁴

Evidence of Education in the Locals

The basic interests of the association, to co-operate to improve conditions in the farming community, were at the heart of all the activities which the farmers undertook to

³¹ Speakman, 53

³² Speakman.

³³ Speakman, 54.

³⁴ "Incorporation Procedure." Preface, United Farmers of Alberta. Business and Political Papers, 1905-1965. Glenbow Museum and Archives. Calgary.

accomplish their mission. They had to "learn" to do this. The evidence for the learning that took place can be found in the reports from the provincial executive to the annual conventions, in the reports from the secretaries of the locals to the conventions as well as in their reports to the Grain Growers' Guide and, later, the U.F.A. newspaper.³⁵

The Provincial Executive

The reports of the provincial executive to the delegates at the annual conventions contain references which make it clear that education, as defined by the participants, was considered an important feature of the activities in the local. The Vice-President, Mr. Tregillus, reports in 1911 that

our members have multiplied, our experience has grown, our influence has spread, our education has developed, our power has tremendously increased, and, best of all, our faith is stronger than ever. Today the organized farmers of the Prairie Provinces are the most potent force in the way of reform, and the strongest agency working for true democracy in the whole Dominion, and are exerting a powerful influence throughout the civilized world. Our central office has done inestimable

³⁵ The Grain Growers' Guide fell out of favour with the U.F.A. because it was slanted to news from Saskatchewan and Manitoba. (Official Minutes of the Executive and Board of Directors, United Farmers of Alberta, 10 June, 1914. and other references.) The first issue of the U.F.A. newspaper was published March 1, 1922.

work, which has been very far reaching in its character of helpfulness and education.³⁶

Tregillus's speech to the delegates of the 1912 U.F.A. Convention emphasized the importance of education in a true democracy.

Eduard Lindeman, the American adult educator, expressed similar ideas when he wrote in 1937 that "the complete objective of adult education is to synchronize the democratic and the learning processes."³⁷ Lindeman's writings spanned nearly three decades and covered a multitude of topics within the field of Adult Education. A thread that is woven through his writing is his belief in the importance of the democratic system. Lindeman believed that "democracy was not restricted to the political sphere of governmental agencies and the actions of representative bodies. Democracy, by its very nature, was participatory and therefore social."³⁸ Lindeman would have rejoiced to hear Tregillus's comments which illustrated such a high degree of confidence in the progress of the farmers'

³⁶ W.J. Tregillus, Vice President's Report, United Farmers of Alberta, Official Reports for the year 1911, p.8, Official Minutes and Reports of the Annual Conventions, Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

³⁷ Eduard C. Lindeman, "Adult Education for Social Change," Learning Democracy: Eduard Lindeman on Adult Education and Social Change ed. Stephen Brookfield (London: Croom Helm, 1987), p. 77.

³⁸ Stephen Brookfield, Learning Democracy: Eduard Lindeman on Adult Education and Social Change (London: Croom Helm, 1987) Preface.

movement. Tregillus ends his 1912 presentation by stating that

with the co-operation and education as the watchword before us we should be able to make great strides, but as the strength of a chain is gauged by its weakest link so will the strength of our association be estimated by the unity and interest of the members.³⁹

The Second Vice President, Mr. S.S. Dunham, in his Annual Report for 1915 stresses that the U.F.A. was essentially an educational order, an order which will be able to wield almost unlimited influence in affairs of State and business, if we develop to our full possibilities, but it is doubtful in my mind, if we are adapted to doing a general mercantile business.⁴⁰

Mr. Dunham was referring to the Alberta Farmers' Co-operative Elevator Company as well as to other local co-operative ventures under the umbrella of the U.F.A. Even though Mr. Dunham did not believe that the farmers' association should be involved in business ventures, he was prepared to admit that "temporarily, something may have to be done in this line by the organization."⁴¹ He goes

³⁹ Tregillus, 15.

⁴⁰ S.S. Dunham, Annual Report of the Second Vice President, United Farmers of Alberta, Official Reports for the Year 1915, p. 151, Official Minutes and Reports of the Annual Conventions, Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

⁴¹ Dunham.

further to state that if farmers are going to be involved in business, they must be professional about it and make sure the businesses are "built on a proper business foundation." His main point was that since the real mission of the U.F.A. was education and organization, a certain percentage of the profits from business ventures should be turned over to the Central Office to be used for education and organization.⁴²

Henry Wise Wood⁴³ was also concerned about the relationship between the co-operative societies and what he refers to as the "mother organization" of the United Farmers of Alberta. Henry Wise Wood states that he has been

much pained to find that in some places where co-operative activities are carried on in commercial affairs, there is a tendency to be indifferent to the U.F.A. . . . The idea that our local co-operative organizations are all-sufficient, and that the U.F.A. is no longer important is a short sighted one and entirely wrong. The farmers can never hope to accomplish their purpose until they fully mobilize their strength as a class. This can only be done through the mother organization.

⁴² Dunham.

⁴³ Henry Wise Wood moved to Alberta in 1905 from Missouri. Mr. Wood belonged to the Farmers' and Labourers' Union of Missouri. He joined the Society of Equity in Alberta and then the U.F.A. when it was formed in 1909. He was elected director of the U.F.A. for the Calgary District in 1914, First Vice President in 1915 and President in 1916. "Who's Who in the U.F.A." Annual Report for 1915, p. 6.

Every co-operative institution we have is the product of the U.F.A. and every one of them needs her protection.⁴⁴

Henry Wise Wood touches on one of the strengths and, ironically, one of the weaknesses, of the U.F.A. The mother organization, as he called it, provided the setting for discussion and the exchange of ideas. This is the strength of the movement. It drew people together to hone their intellectual and communication skills and gave them the confidence to ask questions and spread their ideas throughout the rest of the community. Farmers who got together to discuss their plight learned what they needed to know about economics and marketing. However, there came a time when they had to put their knowledge to use, so they formed their own businesses to provide insurance, buy farming supplies, and ship produce. This could be seen as a weakness because support was siphoned off as members gravitated to the business organizations. Henry Wise Wood saw it as a threat to the mother organization even though Mr. Dunham saw that success in business would make money available for the Central Office to continue educational and organization work.

In his 1916 annual address to the locals, Mr. P.P. Woodbridge told the members that after studying farmers'

⁴⁴ Henry Wise Wood, "Annual Report from the President," United Farmers of Alberta. Ninth Annual Convention. 1916. Official Minutes and Reports of the Annual Conventions. Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

groups in Canada and other countries, he would be inclined to say that there were two types of farmers' organizations. He considered that the first type was the "great voluntary organization which would be purely educational and legislative in character" and the second type was the organization which concentrated on the "development of the commercial and the farmers' business under their control."⁴⁵ The first kind of organization was the most important because it was needed to develop what Woodbridge called "the moral strength" to get the job done.⁴⁶ This "moral strength" encompassed the belief that farmers had the right to pursue the means for achieving better conditions for the farming class as well as the courage to achieve it. People like Wise Wood and Woodbridge realized that it would take determination and strength to accomplish the necessary tasks which would improve conditions for farmers.

When Woodbridge describes the first type of farmers' organization as the "great voluntary organization which would be purely educational and legislative in character," he described what happened in the U.F.A.. The first step, education, led to the second, which was to change the legislation for the benefit of farmers. The education which he mentions provided the foundation for the "moral strength"

⁴⁵ P.P. Woodbridge, "Secretary's Address to the Locals," United Farmers of Alberta, Ninth Annual Convention. 1916. p.179, Official Minutes and Reports of the Annual Conventions, Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

⁴⁶ Woodbridge.

which he felt was necessary. The education and the moral strength developed at the grassroots level where farmers gained confidence and a sense of empowerment as they exchanged ideas and learned together in their local U.F.A. study groups.

The second type of farmers' group, the business and commercial organization, would "develop the financial strength which would offset the influence of the privately controlled financial interests, at the same time giving a stability to the educational part of the work."⁴⁷ The two groups were completely different, but Woodbridge considered that the development of the moral or educational organization was the most essential and must "at all times be kept in advance of the development of the commercial work."⁴⁸ In spite of all the activity which surrounded the establishment of the commercial side of the U.F.A., people such as Woodbridge realized that the mother organization which fostered the social development of farmers through group education was the most important aspect of the farmers' movement.

The Secretaries

As the U.F.A. developed, the executive became increasingly aware of the importance of the organizational and educational work done by the local unions. An

⁴⁷ Woodbridge.

⁴⁸ Woodbridge.

enthusiastic secretary was the key to a successful local. Mrs. Irene Parlby,⁴⁹ President of the United Farm Women of Alberta (U.F.W.A.) makes this clear when she says "I think we are pretty generally agreed that the success of our locals depends more on the character of our secretaries than upon any other one thing."⁵⁰ The provincial executive provided what assistance they could to the secretaries of the local unions. There was information in the Grain Growers' Guide and through circulars from Central Office.

By 1917, the U.F.A. was well enough established to initiate an annual Secretaries Convention where the secretaries could meet to exchange information on the best means to attract and keep members. The secretaries were very aware of the importance of their position. If they did not take some initial steps to make the local meetings interesting and meaningful, there was the danger that the commercial associations could engulf the educational and social organization. One suggestion for maintaining

⁴⁹ Mrs. Irene Parlby was born in London, England, educated in private schools, and lived in India. On a trip to visit friends in the Lacombe area in the mid 1890's, she met and married Walter Parlby. The Parlby's engaged in the business of mixed farming and ranching. Mrs. Parlby joined the U.F.A. in 1913 and was prominent in the organization of the Alix U.F.W.A., one of the first units of the Women's organization. She was elected President of the U.F.W.A. in 1916; by virtue of that position, she was a member of the Executive of the U.F.A. She became a minister without portfolio in the U.F.A. Government.

⁵⁰ Mrs. Irene Parlby, "Report of the U.F.A. Secretaries Conventions", 1918. p. 18. United Farmers of Alberta, Official Minutes of the Executive and Board, Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

interest in the local meetings was to encourage new people to take local executive positions. Mrs. Irene Parlby suggested that the locals should "not go on year after year with the same officers, because the local is a training ground for leaders, and we want to get a large number of men and women training for leadership in the work of this organization."⁵¹ Mrs. Parlby also made it clear that it was important for the secretary and local executive to have a good program for the meetings.⁵² She mentioned that it would be a good idea to form a program committee which would plan a program for a year and then print up the schedule and distribute it to all members so they would be aware of the topic which was to be discussed each month.⁵³ She suggested that while it was important to get outside speakers occasionally, it was more important to develop local talent.⁵⁴

Mrs. Parlby firmly believed that there was plenty of talent in the rural districts just waiting to be discovered. She wanted to "let those who have certain knowledge give the benefit of it to other men and women in their locals; and by doing that you can make your work really educational; you can help each other because one can give what another person

⁵¹ Parlby, 20.

⁵² Parlby, 21.

⁵³ Parlby, 21.

⁵⁴ Parlby, 22.

is lacking."⁵⁵ Mrs. Parlby's ideas are endorsed by adult educators who also believe that adult members of a group have as much to offer as the teacher, leader, or facilitator. The U.F.A. could depend on an outside speaker/leader to cover a particular subject, or they could find someone in the area who had some expertise. Eduard Lindeman, in describing a more formal situation, says that "in an adult class the student's experience counts for as much as the teacher's knowledge."⁵⁶ Lindeman would have been excited by the experiences of members of these farmers' study groups which operated on a more informal level than the ones to which he referred.

The secretary from the U.F.A. local in Eye Hill was one of many who believed that membership would increase if the meetings were challenging and worth attending. Through organizational efforts in 1919, the Eye Hill local grew from 70 to 227 members.⁵⁷ The Eye Hill local executive drew up a program for six months and planned something special for each meeting. Programs were printed and sent to each member. Visitors also came from the nearest town, Provost,

⁵⁵ Parlby.

⁵⁶ Eduard Lindeman, "The Sociology of Adult Education" (1945), Learning Democracy: Eduard Lindeman on Adult Education and Social Change, ed. Stephen Brookfield, (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 118.

⁵⁷ Mrs. Kate Farquharson, Secretary of Eye Hill Local, Report of U.F.A. Secretaries Conventions, 1919, p. 37. United Farmers of Alberta, Official Minutes of the Executive and Board, Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

because the meetings had attracted so much interest.⁵⁸

Activities of the Eye Hill local included readings from contemporary authors read by local people who took their turn reading and then asking questions of the audience. Some of these people had never read or spoken in front of a crowd before. Other activities at the Eye Hill Local included debates and the "Question Drawer."⁵⁹

Reports such as this one illustrate the success of the U.F.A., which continued to grow steadily as the following chart demonstrates:

GROWTH OF U.F.A. MEMBERSHIP

1909	2,147
1910	4,052
1911	5,872
1912	7,190
1913	9,408
1914	11,252
1915 (First year of war)	11,902
1916	13,301
1917	16,493
1918	18,335
1919	28,784

⁵⁸ Farquharson.

⁵⁹ The "Question Drawer" was a feature of The Grain Growers' Guide. Readers sent in questions which were answered in the Guide for the benefit of all readers. The Eye Hill local may have depended on these questions or they may have had their own "Question Drawer." Members of the local were called upon to read a question. By the time they had finished reading the question, even the shy ones had gained enough confidence to make comments on the question and the answer.

1920 (incomplete)

30,000⁶⁰

The fact that membership increased so steadily indicates that the U.F.A. must have been offering something to people in the rural communities. More and more people joined the local unions because the unions served a need which was not being satisfied elsewhere. If farmers were only interested in acquiring more knowledge and technical skill so they could improve production, they could have asked for more information from the University of Alberta Department of Extension or they could have attended short courses offered by the Schools of Agriculture which were established throughout the province. There was also a great deal of information available through the functions sponsored by the Agricultural Societies and the Federal and Provincial Departments of Agriculture. Farmers probably took advantage of many of these services, but they still joined the U.F.A., pushing the membership totals over 30,000. As they socialized and learned together in the U.F.A. locals, Alberta farmers developed theories and ideas about how to solve some of the economic problems which they faced. They also developed the confidence to present their ideas and expect that someone would listen to them.

Local Members

⁶⁰ United Farmers of Alberta, 13th Annual Convention. 1920. p. 25. Official Minutes and Reports of the Annual Conventions. Glenbow Museum and Archives. Calgary.

The Grain Growers' Guide reserved one page in every edition for each of the provincial associations. The "Alberta Section" was filled with reports from locals across the province as well as from Central Office. This was where the ordinary members were able to have their say. It was one thing for Henry Wise Wood, Irene Parlby, and S.S. Dunham to express their views about what the executive thought should be happening in the locals. These leaders were well educated in the traditional sense and may have felt that it would be in the best interests of other members of the farming class to become more knowledgeable about agriculture, economics, politics, and marketing. However, there may have been differences between what leaders thought was good for members and what the members believed was good for themselves. This is a common problem and there are examples in other fields. The "leaders" in a society, an institution, or an educational program are often unaware of what ordinary members require. One of the reasons for the success of the U.F.A. was the fact that the leaders in other agricultural institutions were not satisfying the demands of the participants no matter how earnestly they tried. The leaders in the U.F.A. movement spoke passionately and at length about the importance of education for the farmer. The ordinary farmers showed by their actions how they felt about this when they joined the U.F.A. in growing numbers.

Articles submitted by readers to the Guide provide some insight into what motivated the ordinary members to join and

renew their membership in the U.F.A. Local unions usually reported when they organized. Then there would be periodic reports when new elections were held, a picnic or dance was planned, or when they had had a particularly interesting speaker. Mr. Jesse Bourne, Secretary of Penhold Local No. 13 reported to the Grain Growers' Guide that

it is so long since I reported, you must wonder what has become of that enthusiastic secretary of the early spring. Well, as most machinery makes the most noise when starting up, we are none the less active because we are quiet.⁶¹

The reports were short because there was always the pressure of space on the Alberta page.⁶² Also, it is not easy to express emotion and excitement in a newspaper report. In spite of the brevity of some of the articles and the difficulty in capturing feelings and emotions, it is possible to pick up the excitement that developed when people came together to discuss common goals. The report from the Summerview Local Union No. 147 states that

this local meets monthly and we have had all thru the year a fairly good attendance, with the exception of one meeting during the harvest time.

⁶¹ Jesse Bourne, "Penhold Very Alive," Grain Growers' Guide, 11 Oct. 1916: 10.

⁶² Unions numbered in the hundreds. In 1912, 438 unions registered; in 1913, there were 570; 1919 - 756; 1920 - 892. United Farmers of Alberta, Official Minutes and Reports of the Annual Conventions, Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

Last winter we arranged a program for each meeting, a certain subject being chosen for debate, and in which the ladies of the district were invited to take part. Debaters were also chosen, so as to leave nothing to chance. This proved a great success, both in an educational way and in the way of securing good attendance. Some social events, concerts, recitationals, and dances were also arranged, under the auspices of the local U.F.A.⁶³

The educational and social aspects of the U.F.A. were intertwined. Reports from U.F.A. members and secretaries confirm that it was important to have a carefully planned educational program for most meetings if the local wished to remain strong. It was also important to have opportunities for social interaction. The Secretary of Fawn Lake Local No. 703 mentions the social aspect of U.F.A. activities by stating that they "find it helpful to pay attention to the social side, particularly during the summer months, as it assures a good attendance for business."⁶⁴ Peerless Local Union No. 340 reports that

the form of meeting we find most popular and successful is: Supper 6:30 pm (Cake, Coffee etc) which gives a social opportunity. Business is

⁶³ "Summerview's Work Reviewed," Grain Growers Guide, 21 Jan. 1914. p. 14.

⁶⁴ Grain Growers' Guide, July 21, 1915: 12.

taken next and includes discussion of one or more subjects of interest to the community. The chief subjects this season have been the reports of the delegates to the convention, and cheap money for farmers. Then follows a short musical program.⁶⁵

The President of Del Norte Union asked that his rather long letter be printed because he felt that it would help them and would be of interest to other organizations. It also helps to understand the participants as well as the ideas and events of the time. President Wm. H. Blatchford writes that

the Del Norte Local No. 678 Innisfree, Alberta, is one of those locals that has always appeared too timid to submit a report for publication. Perhaps the reason of this timidity is because it has on two occasions given up the struggle for existence and has hardly recovered confidence enough in this third attempt to venture any declaration of itself. It is nearly two years since the present organization was formed by a certain Geo B. McKean, who, at the present time, we are proud to say, is doing his "bit" somewhere in France. The success that this local now enjoys I think is worthy of mention, and the methods adopted to bring about this success, if related here, might

⁶⁵ M.J. Muskett, Secretary, Peerless Local Union No. 340. Grain Growers Guide, 19 Apr. 1916. p. 11.

help another local to gain ground. Altho our membership is not large it consists of the most successful and wide-awake farmers of this district. We have in the past year done considerable co-operative buying and selling. We hold regular monthly meetings and social evenings. We have a travelling library from the University of Alberta, which is being largely used by our members. Thru our efforts, Innisfree is to have a Co-operative Elevator this fall. . . .

We recently decided on holding a series of meetings for the purpose of discussing those questions of greatest importance to farmers. The first of these was held on Saturday, April 8, in the Oddfellows' Hall, and was addressed on the subject of "Legislation Directly Affecting Agriculture," by Joseph Adair, of Edmonton. The president of the local presided and there was a first class attendance of members and district farmers, demonstrating a keen interest in the educational propaganda of the local. . . .

After the meeting there were several new members enrolled. The enthusiasm exhibited has surely warranted the continuation of these

meetings, . . .⁶⁶

A report from the Swan River local, organized in the Lesser Slave Lake district, mentions that while it had trouble getting organized there were now nearly 50 members and

it was decided to meet every two weeks for a while, but the time seems so well occupied that we don't know when we will be able to change to the monthly meeting. Practically every subject of interest to the community welfare is being dealt with in its turn.⁶⁷

The above quotations provide a sampling of the educational and social aspects of the U.F.A. locals, considered by leaders such as Henry Wise Wood to be the most important feature of the mother organization⁶⁸. However, the majority of the contributions to the Alberta page gave very brief summaries of the activities of local unions and emphasized the importance of co-operative buying to the

⁶⁶ Wm. H. Blatchford, "Del Norte's Educational Program," Grain Growers' Guide, 24 May 1916: 12.

⁶⁷ "News from Peace River", Grain Growers' Guide, 20 Sept 1916: 10.

⁶⁸ U.F.A. locals also provided support in times of need. An example of this is found on page 10 of the Grain Growers' Guide of 20 Sept. 1916. An article titled "Local to the Rescue" reads: "The following report is to hand from V.E. Skertchley of Tring: Sorry this has turned up late. Things got upset somewhat when my house blew away in a terrible storm. However, the local came to the rescue in fine style and erected a new building. The local is always there when help is needed and I am proud to be one of its members".

members. The reports of Mr. S.L. Hooper, Secretary of the Mere local union, are fairly typical of many submissions to the Guide. In 1914, Mr. Hooper reported that

Mere Union No. 513 is still going strong. Their membership is now 67 and much enthusiasm is being shown. At a recent meeting orders were taken for a carload of posts and it only requires a few hundred more to make up a second carload. A carload of coal was also guaranteed to be purchased from a local merchant who is also a farmer and a member. Enough shares have been subscribed for a co-operative elevator at Sibbald.⁶⁹

In 1916, Mr. Hooper reported that "altho their membership is rather low, a healthy interest is being taken in U.F.A. matters, and in co-operative purchasing."⁷⁰

Many submissions from local secretaries mention only the co-operative business aspect of the U.F.A. Leaders such as Henry Wise Wood and Irene Parlby had warned members to beware of laying too much stress on the commercial side to the exclusion of the educational and social side. Many of

⁶⁹ S.L. Hooper, "Co-operation at Mere," Grain Growers' Guide, 13 May 1914: 12.

⁷⁰ S.L. Hooper, Letter, Grain Growers' Guide, 19 April 1916. Mr. Hooper reports that they hoped their membership would be around 50 members. Intervening reports from Mr. Hooper indicate that as new locals were formed nearby, Mere Local No. 513 lost members to the new locals. He indicates in his reports that, while they were happy for the new locals, it was frustrating to lose members from their own.

the leaders considered that the business aspect was dangerous because it had the potential for overshadowing the educational and social aspect which they considered to be important for the U.F.A. However, many members considered that co-operative buying and selling was a learning experience. A submission to the Alberta page of the Guide mentions that the secretary of one of the co-operative societies was

rather inclined to think that our co-operative association would make members look on the material side of things to the detriment of the U.F.A., but on thinking the matter over I have been struck by the fact that the business morality of our district has been raised since we started. . . .

This bears out what we have been emphasizing for some time, namely, that the co-operative purchasing by unions under proper rules and regulations, and with a proper business system, is an education in itself and is a necessary part of the work of organizing the farmer so that he will occupy his proper position in the general conduct of affairs.⁷¹

⁷¹ "Co-operation and Reliability," Grain Growers' Guide, 17 May 1916: 11.

A.B. Hall, in his third prize article in the Guide's writing competition mentions that

our men have been educated to better business methods by their experience in co-operative buying and when we can study the questions of the day, as we hope to ere long, we shall feel that we are becoming educated along the right lines.⁷²

Hall's reference to being "educated to better business methods by their experience in co-operative buying" indicated that some members were aware of the importance of activity, of actually doing things and trying out ideas in order to become educated in better business methods. This ties in with adult education theory which recognizes the importance of experience in the process of learning.

The adult educator, Eduard Lindeman, states that experience "is, first of all, doing something; second, doing something that makes a difference; third, knowing what difference it makes."⁷³ The members of the U.F.A. knew that they were doing something that made a difference. They saw the results of their efforts in their homes and communities when they participated in co-operative buying and selling in their locals. This provides evidence for another of Lindeman's statements that

⁷² A.B.Hall, "Helping the Community," Third Prize Article in the Guide's Association Competition, Grain Growers' Guide, 7 July 1915.

⁷³ Eduard Lindeman, The Meaning of Adult Education, (New York: New Republic, 1926), 87.

experience, the stuff out of which education is grown, is after all a homely matter. The affairs of home, neighbourhood and local community are vastly more important educationally than those more distant events which seem so enchanting.⁷⁴

The secretaries who sent in the reports to the Guide may not always have been aware of the importance of what they were doing, so they would not have listed the educational activities which occurred at each meeting. Mr. Hooper's report that "a healthy interest is being taken in U.F.A. matters"⁷⁵ probably encompasses all the activities mentioned in other longer submissions: educational programs such as lectures, readings, discussions and debates; readings from the Guide and the Official Circulars sent out regularly by U.F.A. Central Office; study of the reports and addresses from the Annual Conventions.⁷⁶

Many of the reports mention the excitement and the enthusiasm which went with membership in a U.F.A. local. Naturally it would be exciting to save money through co-operative buying and selling, and everybody would be enthusiastic if their co-ops were actually making money, but there was more to it than that. The basic ingredient, the

⁷⁴ Lindeman.

⁷⁵ See page 120 above

⁷⁶ Mr. Hooper was a Delegate to the Annual Conventions in 1914 and 1916. United Farmers of Alberta, List of Delegates, Official Minutes and Reports of the Annual Conventions. Glenbow Museum and Archives. Calgary.

glue that held everything together, was the camaraderie, enthusiasm, and confidence which resulted when people learned by doing and discovering things together. With this confidence and enthusiasm buoying them up, farmers developed a sense of collective power which led them to pursue political power in order to transform society.

Paulo Freire, the Brazilian adult educator, has studied and encouraged this phenomenon in Latin America. He sees adult education as a vehicle for transforming society and making changes which would benefit those involved. Freire's theory of adult education, based on the realities of living in a third world country, can be used to illuminate the experience of the people involved in the western Canadian farmers' movement. Freire believes that the participants are the only ones who can decide what content is worth studying. This is what occurred in the farmers' movement as rural residents set out to examine how to improve conditions on the farm. First, they studied farming techniques to improve production and then they studied economics and marketing and politics so they could reap the greatest advantages when they came to sell their produce.

By 1920, there were nearly 1000 local unions in the province and over 30,000 members. The U.F.A. had been a significant factor in the agricultural life of the province for over ten years. Farmers had learned a great deal about the techniques of farming. They had studied economics and politics in order to understand the people and institutions

which bought their produce. Through their co-operative efforts they had also learned about the business of marketing. However, their lives had not substantially improved. Through the years, there had been pressure to enter the political arena. Part of the educational program for the locals had been geared to increasing the knowledge and confidence of the farmers so they could become political representatives. D.W. Warner, one of the Directors of the U.F.A. stated in a speech in the Provost district that because of the U.F.A. educational program,

farmers thus have an opportunity to get their men into parliament. The educational work of the U.F.A. and their debates trained the farmers in public speaking, and better qualified them to take their place in the legislature.⁷⁷

The debate over whether the U.F.A. should enter politics as a political party is woven like a thread through the discussions and the conventions from 1909 until 1919.⁷⁸ The proponents of political action were overwhelmed by Henry Wise Wood who was adamantly opposed to entering the political arena. Wise Wood had lived in the United States and had supported the movement known as the Farmers'

⁷⁷ D.W. Warner, "Taking Up Organization Work," Grain Growers' Guide, 23 Nov. 1910: 24.

⁷⁸ For more details of the development of the U.F.A. political organization, see Wm. A McIntosh, "The United Farmers of Alberta, 1909 - 1920," (M.A. diss., Univ of Calgary, July, 1971).

Alliance. He had watched as the farmers' movement in the United States was destroyed when it entered the political arena as part of the Populist Party in the 1890's. The supporters of political action in Alberta had had some success outside the U.F.A. In 1917, the Non Partisan League elected two members to the Alberta Legislature.⁷⁹ This and other events overtook Henry Wise Wood, and at the 1919 Convention, the members voted to establish a political wing of the United Farmers of Alberta. Wise Wood managed to maintain control over the political organization just as he had controlled the development of the co-operative associations by insisting that they be incorporated through the mother organization. The same arrangements governed the formation of the U.F.A. political organization.⁸⁰ The local unions continued to exist, but in each local area, a U.F.A. political wing could be incorporated.

In the election in July, 1921, the U.F.A. won thirty-eight of the sixty-one seats in the provincial legislature and formed a government which was to last until it was overtaken by another prairie phenomenon, the Social Credit Movement under William Aberhart.

⁷⁹ One was Louise McKinney, M.L.A. for Claresholm, recognized as one of the first women elected to a Canadian legislature.

⁸⁰ Technically the U.F.A. political wing was not a political party, but an organized political group. Voting at the 1920 U.F.A. Convention placed the political association under the control of the U.F.A. President and Executive.

The mother organization of the U.F.A. now controlled co-operative associations and local political organizations. Over 30,000 members of more than 1,000 local unions had been profoundly influenced by the belief in the importance of the activities in the local U.F.A. unions. The members had originally come together to learn how to farm in a new country. The focus of their meetings soon evolved into a study of the economic and political reality that existed in western Canada. When conditions remained unchanged, the U.F.A. entered politics, won an election, and set out to govern for the benefit of farmers.

Summary

With the election of a U.F.A. government in 1921, Alberta embarked on an experiment which was to last until 1935. Alberta was not the only province to elect a farmers' government. Manitoba and Ontario were governed by the United Farmers of Manitoba and the United Farmers of Ontario, respectively. The national manifestation of the farmers' movement was the Progressive Party which elected sixty-five members to the Federal Parliament in 1921.

Henry Wise Wood's "mother organization" of the U.F.A. still operated as an umbrella group for U.F.A. Co-operative Associations and the U.F.A. Political Association. The core U.F.A. organization continued to function with a central office, an executive, local unions, and annual conventions. The U.F.A. newspaper was first published on March 1, 1922.

An Editorial by Henry Wise Wood in its first edition states that the

editorial ideal (of The U.F.A.) will be the development of higher citizenship through investigation and education. A fuller knowledge of the truth and its bearing on all social problems is the only real road to progress.⁸¹

Henry Wise Wood saw education as an essential ingredient in the social movement which culminated in the political success of the United Farmers of Alberta and brought a new group of people into prominence. Farmers who had studied agricultural techniques, economics, marketing, and politics in their local unions were now closely involved with the political system of Alberta. They were well trained. They had acquired knowledge, public speaking skills, confidence, and a sense of power in the local study groups which they had joined because they had wanted to improve conditions in the rural community.

⁸¹ Henry Wise Wood, The U.F.A., 1:1, 1 Mar. 1922.

CHAPTER 5

Looking Backward¹

The men and women who stood on the threshold of power in 1921 with the election of the U.F.A. Government believed that everyone had the potential to learn and to contribute something to each other and to society. The contributions of each individual added up to more than the sum of each individual contribution.

The people developed a sense of confidence as a result of the group interaction that occurred in the study groups of the United Farmers of Alberta. They had originally come together to learn the skills and information they needed to farm on marginal agricultural land. They stayed together to learn how to influence the marketing, economic, and political system. The bonds they developed in these activities kept them together while they branched out into

¹ The title of this chapter is taken from Edward Bellamy's 1888 novel, Looking Backward, which advocates a new social and economic order based on the principles of equality and co-operation. This novel was very popular at the time and contributed to the social milieu which was moving to the left with the establishment of the Labour Movement and the Co-operative Movement.

co-operative business ventures and then into the political arena. They were kept together by camaraderie and the confidence that they had some control over their lives.

The U.F.A. as a Social Movement

The formation of the United Farmers of Alberta was the culmination of a farmers' movement that began in Alberta with the first shaky formation of an Agricultural Society in Edmonton in 1879. The farmers' movement that grew from this first organization contains many of the elements of a social movement.

Eduard Lindeman

Eduard Lindeman described a social movement in an article entitled "New Needs for Adult Education."² Lindeman's description of a social movement includes the following elements: a) an idea which is striving for acceptance and demonstration, b) a human need for which the idea stands as a symbol, c) proponents with a constant urge to form an organization and to exert pressure on behalf of the idea, d) the emergence of new leadership, e) an opposition, and f) a growing tension within the cultural system.

In the western farmers' movement the "idea which is striving for acceptance and demonstration" was the belief in the power of co-operation and study to bring about better conditions for members of the rural community. This need to

² Eduard Lindeman, "New Needs for Adult Education," Stephen Brookfield, ed., Learning Democracy: Eduard Lindeman on Adult Education and Social Change, (London: Croom Helm, 1987) p. 105.

bring about better rural conditions is the "human need for which the idea stands as a symbol" in Lindeman's description. Farmers had been attracted to the Canadian west by promises of prosperity in a clean, new land. The reality did not measure up to these promises because of the difficulties presented by the climate and the distance from markets. The idea that farmers could co-operate and study ways to satisfy the needs of people in the rural community acted like a beacon for all those who had come west with high hopes for living happy, prosperous lives. They started by getting together in groups to learn how to farm and to join forces to demand that changes be made. One of their successes was a reduction in freight rates after a meeting in November, 1891.

The third element in Lindeman's description of a social movement is the "presence of proponents with a constant urge to form an organization and to exert pressure on behalf of the idea." The Alberta farmers' movement had no shortage of proponents who believed in the power of co-operation and study. One proponent was the first editor of The Edmonton Bulletin, Frank Oliver, who urged area farmers to organize and fight what he considered unfair conditions. Some other names which appear in early documents include Daniel Maloney, George Long, Colonel Gregory, Will Keen, William Ball, Anders Rafn, and Rice Sheppard. Many of these people were original members of more than one organization who believed strongly in the idea of co-operation and study.

The fourth element of Lindeman's description of a social movement, d) the emergence of new leadership, occurred after the United Farmers of Alberta was formed. The U.F.A. produced new leaders when James Bower, William Tregillus, James Speakman, Henry Wise Wood, and Irene Parlby emerged from the local unions to serve on the provincial executive. Under these leaders, the U.F.A. transformed the business climate of rural Alberta by founding co-operative ventures which benefitted farmers. Also under these leaders, and over Wise Wood's objections, the U.F.A. became a political association as well.

Lindeman's fifth point in his description of a social movement is: e) the presence of an opposition. The U.F.A. aroused a great deal of suspicion and opposition because the business and banking community felt threatened when the farmers sought to gain control over the economic system. The sixth and last phase of Lindeman's definition of a social movement is f) a growing tension in the cultural system. The U.F.A. represented rural Alberta. Under Wise Wood's leadership, membership in the U.F.A. was confined to members of the farming class.³ The cultural system was changing from a rural system to one dominated by people in the towns and cities. The tension and conflict arose when the rural dominated U.F.A. gained the power it needed to protect rural residents from some of the changes which were

³ McIntosh, 114.

occurring in Alberta as a result of increased immigration, industrialization, and urbanization.

Lawrence Goodwyn

Another analysis which can also be used to gain a deeper understanding of what happened in the Canadian north-west in the early years of the 20th century is Lawrence Goodwyn's study of the Populist experience in the American north-west in the late 19th century.⁴ According to Goodwyn there has been a tendency to study Populism to simply find out where the Populists went wrong and why their movement collapsed with their electoral defeat in the 1890's.⁵

Goodwyn contends that the Populist movement was a powerful and successful phenomenon which did a great deal to change American society even though the political manifestation of the movement did not make an impact in the political arena. In his study of the Populist experience, Lawrence Goodwyn analyzes the process of what he calls a mass democratic movement. The U.F.A. could be analyzed in the same way.

According to Goodwyn, a mass democratic movement happens in four stages.⁶ The first stage is "the movement forming." At this stage, an independent and self-directed organization develops. It questions established ideas and

⁴ Lawrence Goodwyn, The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978)

⁵ Goodwyn, xiv.

⁶ Goodwyn, xviii.

old ways of doing things and is confident enough to suggest other ideas which may be unpopular with mainstream society. At this stage relatively few people are involved.

If this theory is applied to the United Farmers of Alberta, the "movement forming" occurred when farmers with a vision formed a variety of farmers' organizations. This stage culminated in the formation of the United Farmers of Alberta by people who had a clear concept that if their ideas of co-operation supplanted the evils of competition, life would be fairer and more bearable.

The second stage in a mass democratic movement, according to Goodwyn, is "the movement recruiting." At this stage, there is a structure and a focal point which attracts people. The Alberta farmers' movement reached this stage when it fine-tuned its organizations to include an executive, a central office, local unions, and organizers who travelled from district to district to help set up local associations. The focal point which attracted people was the opportunity to come together in the local meetings to visit, learn, and conduct business with friends and neighbours.

The third stage is "the movement educating." This is the most important phase. Masses of people are educated⁷ to a new level of cultural awareness. People become

⁷ Goodwyn uses the general definition of education to mean learning inside and outside formal educational institutions.

cognizant of their place in society and their responsibility for changing the conditions which are detrimental to their way of life. They are prepared to stand up and ask for changes, even if their demands run counter to what is accepted by the rest of society. Those who join the movement develop confidence and a sense that they are in control of their lives because of the education which occurs in the local groups.

Within the U.F.A., this education took the form, in some cases, of indoctrination in the benefits of co-operation. Literature and lecturers sent from central office, as well as articles in The Grain Growers Guide,⁸ extolled the benefits of co-operation. U.F.A. members were educated along these lines, contributing to their confidence and belief in themselves which went a long way to giving them a sense of control over their own lives.

The last stage described by Goodwyn is "the movement politicizing." In this phase, the movement reaches a new level of institutional structure where an increasing number of the rank and file can express their viewpoints. The U.F.A. reached this new level of institutional structure as it matured and was able to incorporate many new members and more ideas. As the U.F.A. strengthened after 1914, it campaigned actively on behalf of prohibition and women's suffrage in addition to its widespread campaign to educate

⁸ See, for example, The Grain Growers Guide of 13 Oct. 1909, p. 1; 20 Aug. 1913, p. 7; and 24 Sept. 1913, p. 7.

farmers in the advantages of co-operation. Of course, the U.F.A. movement culminated in the formation of a political organization in 1919 which then fought and won the election in 1921.

The U.F.A. had developed a new way of looking at things as they progressed from individual self-respect to collective self-confidence. Members had the self-confidence and the collective will to work toward a change in their lives. In this they were following in the footsteps of the American Farmers' Alliance of the late 19th century who believed that "the Alliance is the people and the people are together."⁹ Goodwyn says of this Populist movement that "at bottom, Populism was, quite simply, an expression of self-respect."¹⁰ This individual self-respect helped to create the collective self-confidence which influenced American society in the 1890's and, in a similar fashion, Alberta society in the early 20th century.

Paulo Freire

Goodwyn's analysis can be compared with the ideas of Paulo Freire, the Latin American adult educator who observed a similar phenomenon among the peasants of Brazil and Chile. For Freire, true education for the ordinary people of Latin America would result in a greater awareness of their condition of oppression, or what Freire calls the theme, or

⁹ Goodwyn, 34.

¹⁰ Goodwyn, 35.

culture, of silence.¹¹ As long as the structure of education continues to support a teacher who lectures and students who listen meekly, there will be no changes in the social order. Freire labels this the "banking" concept of education, which describes the situation in which the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits of knowledge which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat.¹² Freire is critical of the Brazilian or Chilean extension lecturers in agronomy who treat the program participants as "blank pages" for their propaganda.¹³ Freire admits that agronomists have valuable information to pass on, but very little is gained if all that happens is that extension lecturers "extend" this information. This "banking" or extension system of education preserves the status quo and ensures that ordinary Brazilians or Chileans continue to be disadvantaged because they do not understand that there is an alternative.

The "banking" approach to education for farmers in the Canadian north-west existed to a certain extent in the Farmers' Institutes, the Agricultural Societies, and University Extension Courses. On behalf of these institutions, a lecturer was sent to a farming community to

¹¹ Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970) p. 97.

¹² Freire, 58.

¹³ Paulo Freire, Education for Critical Consciousness, (New York: The Seabury Press. A Continuum Book, 1973), 97.

dispense some information which the farmers were to deposit in their memory banks for future use. The lectures usually consisted of information on new crops or new techniques for farming. There was nothing sinister about this. The agencies sponsoring the lecture tours had the interests of the farmer in mind. This was a new country with new conditions, and researchers were constantly developing new products and ideas to help farmers. The best way to present the new information was to send a lecturer out to bring the farmers up to date.

Freire describes lecturers such as this as the "bank clerk teachers who do not realize that they are serving only to dehumanize."¹⁴ He realizes that the lecturers are well intentioned and do not mean any harm. Brazilian - or Canadian - farmers will discover that this type of banking education will keep them in the same oppressive relationships with the people who control the marketing and political systems.

In the Canadian north-west, farmers soon realized that they had learned all they needed to know about the techniques for successful farming, but still their lives remained much the same. Farmers could have passively accepted the blame for not being able to make a living on the farm, but they refused to do so. They saw the contradiction between the new theories for successful

¹⁴ Freire, Education for Critical Consciousness, 61.

agriculture and the realities of the climate, the weather, the marketing system, and the political system. No matter how carefully they followed the instructions of the most qualified agricultural lecturer, farmers were still up against realities not of their own making. The next step was to attempt to control what they could.

Farmers discussed all of these conditions among themselves whenever they got together - at their school or church meetings, on the street corner in the local town, or in meetings of the Agricultural Societies or other farmers organizations. As they fine-tuned their ideas, Alberta farmers established the United Farmers of Alberta to bring some control to their lives. They sought to control the commercial aspects of the farming business by co-operating to buy supplies in bulk to reduce some of the costs of operation. To sell their produce, they co-operated to set up organizations which had the power to even out the fluctuations in the market and ensure that farmers had a more reliable income. One of these organizations was the United Grain Growers (U.G.G.) which marketed grain crops through a company operating under the principle of a co-operative. Grain was sold through the U.G.G. which had a seat on the Winnipeg Grain Exchange. The Alberta Wheat Pool, established in 1923 largely through the efforts of Henry Wise Wood, operated on a system of "pooling" farmers' crops and paying a stable price to all contributors. Alberta farmers could not control the climate or the

weather, but they could even out their chances of being destroyed because of hail, drought, or early frost by co-operating to provide themselves with crop and hail insurance.

The farmers who organized to help the agricultural community in this way were far beyond what Paulo Freire calls "banking" education. Alberta farmers had rejected being kept in their place by the railway companies¹⁵, the Grain Exchange, and the banking interests. These farmers were engaged in what Freire called "problem-posing"¹⁶ education which involves discussing the problems of people in their relations with the rest of the world. With problem-posing education, there are no communiques or transfers of information from a teacher/leader, but there is communication between participants. According to Freire, in problem-posing education, "men develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves."¹⁷ Problem-posing education implies action and a "working toward" something. It depends on dialogue to release the thinking processes of

¹⁵ The railway companies sponsored many educational programs for farmers including "Better Farming Associations", and travelling "Seed Train" displays. They also supported Experimental Farms and Demonstration Farms. See Padraig Blenkinsop, "A History of Adult Education on the Prairies: Learning to Live in Agrarian Saskatchewan, 1870-1944" (Ph.D. Diss., Univ. of Toronto, 1979), p. 70-76.

¹⁶ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 68.

¹⁷ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 70-71.

the participants so they can understand the reality of their lives. When people can understand that reality, they also understand that they can transform it through reflection and action, which Freire calls praxis.¹⁸

Freire's theory of revolution, based on Latin American experience, makes some assumptions about the relationship of society's leaders with the common people. He speaks of a revolution which unites the leaders in society with the people who want to act to bring about change. In this situation, the leaders no longer use "manipulation, sloganizing, 'depositing', regimentation, or prescription to control the common people."¹⁹ Instead, they become truly involved with the people.

In the western Canadian experience, the ordinary people were the driving force behind the movement. Even while they participated in the Agricultural Societies and the Extension Programs from the University, they set up alternative organizations where they were able to do their own reflection and study, and then take action which they considered to be in their best interests.

This change may be understood by reading some of the articles which were written years later by people who participated in the farmers' movement in Alberta. On March 20, 1929, R.O. German, Secretary of the Alberta Wheat Pool

¹⁸ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 120.

¹⁹ Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 121.

gave a radio broadcast, "Twenty Years After", in which he wanted to emphasize

to the limit of my ability the work which has been going on during the past twenty years in the development of citizenship through the length and breadth of the Province. The unseen intangible things that cannot be compiled into statistics, the results of educational work done by these same pioneers after a full days work had been done in the field of production; work prompted by a burning zeal to go further than pioneers had gone before, and not only to produce in abundance but to establish a system by which the producer would retain his fair portion of the wealth he produced. The romance and significance of the development in this direction will I fear, defy the pen of the future historian who attempts to record it. Only one who has been privileged to be closely associated with it for years can realize its significance and appreciate the thrill of its accomplishment.²⁰

Roy German's comment that it is difficult for historians to record the "romance and significance of the

²⁰ Roy O. German, "Twenty Years After", Alberta Wheat Pool Broadcast, Article 23. p. 1-2 20 Mar. 1929. Glenbow Museum and Archives, Calgary.

development"²¹ is extremely important to remember when studying an historical social movement such as the one which occurred on the Alberta prairies. Traditional histories have not attempted to record the personal involvement of ordinary participants. The romance and significance of historical events and social movements can not be discovered by studying the lives of the leaders, although that has been a common approach by historians.²² There has been a tendency to study the exciting, cataclysmic events which occur in a society. Historians have studied many aspects of the 1921 election of the U.F.A. government in Alberta because it was an unusual occurrence, but they have confined themselves to a study of the leadership and the economic and political "causes" of the event. They have neglected to look at the ordinary people who made it happen. In his radio broadcast, Mr. German informs his listeners that

it was just twenty years ago (in January, 1909) that the United Farmers of Alberta came into being. The conditions which existed then will be well remembered by those who were here at that time. It was a pretty hopeless outlook. In the Legislative Halls at Edmonton and Ottawa we were

²¹ See above.

²² Excellent Biographies have been written on some of the leaders of the Alberta farmers' movement. See: William Kirby Rolph, Henry Wise Wood of Alberta (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto, 1950); and Anthony Mardiros, William Irvine: Life of a Prairie Radical (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1979)

strangers and interlopers. Our representation in both places was more fancied than real. We were divided among ourselves in our political opinions. We were the victims of political expediency and exploitation. We had no organized method of expressing any opinions which we did hold. We were as a multitude of voices crying in the wilderness. Of commercial activities we knew very little. We knew there was something wrong in our industrial relationship but we did not know what the remedy was or how to apply it. Isolation practically prohibited social intercourse. I will not dwell on the details of the upward struggle, the searching for relief, the attempts that failed, the disappointments and heart burnings - the process by which we emancipated ourselves. Read the record of the first few Conventions held by the United Farmers of Alberta and compare it with the record of our last Convention, and you will appreciate the progress made in the unification of rural public opinion. The thing that matters is that we had developed a class consciousness that the work to be done was our job and that we were the only ones who could accomplish it, and that we have steadily.

persevered for twenty years and are beginning to reap the fruit of our efforts.²³

Roy German's comments on radio in 1929 confirm what Henry Wise Wood said in his President's Address to the 1917 Annual Convention when he concluded his speech by saying that

another year's work of the U.F.A. has passed into history. Nothing phenomenal has been done. No brilliant leadership has been developed from within. No strong guiding hand has been reached to us from without. We represent a rising of the people, the great common people, en masse, in an upward struggle. To my mind this is normal, this is healthy, this is growth and strength. Under great leadership the growth is not normal. The people become dependent on the strength of their leader, . . . Under a normal uprising each one realizes a responsibility, and his efforts to meet it develops strength in him. Each and all learn that real strength is in mobilization, in co-operation.²⁴

²³ Roy O. German, "Twenty Years After," p. 2.

²⁴ Henry Wise Wood, "President's Address" United Farmers of Alberta. Ninth Annual Convention. 1916. Official Minutes and Reports of the Annual Conventions. Glenbow Museum and Archives. Calgary.

Roy German sums up his feelings about the Alberta farmers' movement when he states in his 1929 radio broadcast that

my hat is off to the men and women of this Province who are not only cultivating our farms but cultivating and nurturing the spirit of co-operation in the districts in which they live; the greatest and most patriotic service which in my opinion it is possible to render. Before and after and during the Great War we heard much about the glory of dying for one's Country, and that is as it should be, but in my opinion if we would but live for our respective Countries it would not be necessary to die for them. Co-operation among neighbourhoods and Nations is the greatest instrument which the people have to promote International peace, because it will destroy the thing which makes war possible and inevitable.²⁵

The quotations from Roy German's radio broadcast and Henry Wise Wood's President's Address provide some insight into the thoughts and activities of the members of the U.F.A. The United Farmers of Alberta was the embodiment of a farmers' movement which was based on the efforts of ordinary, common people who achieved a sense of individual and collective self-worth and self-respect and then went on

²⁵ R.O German, "Twenty Years After," p. 3.

to influence the society in which they lived. The political manifestation of this phenomenon, the U.F.A. government, gave good solid leadership to Alberta until it was defeated in 1935 by another Alberta-based political party, the Social Credit Party of Alberta.

The mother organization of the U.F.A. continued after the defeat of the political wing. Norman F. Priestly, General Manager of the U.F.A. Co-operative from 1941-1951, states that

the political landslide of 1935 left the United Farmers of Alberta without a single representative of the association in either Legislature or Parliament. Though, as might be expected particularly in election years, much of the energy of the membership had been devoted to supporting the provincial government and the group at Ottawa, at both local and central office levels, that support was never allowed to become an end in itself. The welfare of agriculture as an industry, the well-being of the farmer and the farm family were kept constantly to the fore.

It had been stoutly maintained throughout the fifteen years of participation in politics that the U.F.A. was not a political party. It was a

farm organization which was taking political action.²⁶

At the 1939 Annual Convention, the U.F.A. withdrew from political involvement by passing Resolution No. 49 which had been moved by J.K. Sutherland of Hanna. The Resolution stated that

whereas, for many years the U.F.A. has functioned as an economic group taking direct political action as one of its many avenues towards its main object, that of better conditions for our farm people; and

whereas, for 14 years our representatives in the Legislature and in Parliament have made it one of their first responsibilities to strive continuously for a higher standard of farm life and have made note-worthy contributions to that objective. . . .²⁷

it was no longer possible or practical to continue direct political activity. The U.F.A. mother organization continued to exist and eventually amalgamated with the Alberta Farmers' Union to become the Farmers' Union of Alberta in 1949. The Co-operative wing of the movement remained as the U.F.A. There are U.F.A. Co-operative businesses in many towns in rural Alberta today which

²⁶ Norman F. Priestly and Edward B. Swindlehurst, Furrows, Faith and Fellowship (Edmonton: Co-op Press Ltd, 1967), 116.

²⁷ Priestly and Swindlehurst, 135.

proudly display the U.F.A. logo, as do many U.F.A. trucks which ply the highways of Alberta moving farm fuel and farm products and supplies between business locations.

The purpose of this thesis was to illustrate that through education, co-operation, and the achievement of self-respect and self-confidence, groups of ordinary people can create a movement which substantially changes their lives and the world in which they live. The development of the United Farmers of Alberta illustrates that through a process of learning together in groups, common people develop the knowledge, self-respect, and confidence they need to gain some control over their lives.

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