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“Pioneer of Civilization”:

The Image of the Canadian Cowboy in Canadian and British Literature, 1880-1925

by

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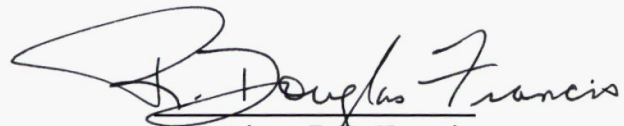
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## ABSTRACT.

The cowboy is a powerful archetype in American popular culture; his image can be found in popular fiction, theatre, corporate advertising, movies, and, even in political rhetoric. By contrast, despite the existence of a significant ranching industry in the Canadian West, the cowboy image did not enter the lexicon of Canadian popular images to any extent. Mounties, missionaries, fur traders, and grain farmers, are examples of historical/popular figures that Canadians associate with the opening of the West -- cowboys are overshadowed by them all.

In the late nineteenth century, Canadian and British image makers struggled to forge the Canadian West's identity as a region, not only under the careful observation of the Dominion government but, also, under the influence of British social, legal, political, and cultural values. The American cowboy image embodied values that were contrary to those of Anglo-Saxon image makers, thus, they rejected the cowboy image as they knew it from American culture, and insisted that no such figure existed in the Canadian West.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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My parents have made an inestimable contribution to my educational career and I remain, as always, in their debt. The Nielsons of Bawlf, Alberta have provided me with a surrogate family throughout the course of this thesis, and I thank them sincerely. Finally, I thank Carmen -- to whom this thesis is dedicated -- whose kind heart and erudition make me jealous, but very happy.

## DEDICATION

For Carmen

Will You Marry Me?

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## Introduction

In the last two decades of the nineteenth-century, the Canadian West, particularly southern Alberta, emerged as a locus of beef production. The area of Alberta bordered roughly by Calgary on the north, the Rocky Mountains on the west, and Medicine Hat on the east, earned a reputation as being one of the great cattle producing regions in the Dominion of Canada, indeed, in the entire British Empire. The ability of this reputedly verdant area to sustain the livestock industry was promulgated by ranchers themselves, local boosters, and eastern capitalists alike. Although the precise nature of the ranching industry in Canada, -- its political strengths, its social composition, and its degree of success -- is the subject of considerable debate, it can be agreed that Alberta was a major producer of beef for domestic and foreign consumption.

The precise nature of the ranching industry is only a marginal concern in this thesis. This work is not about ranches, ranchers, or cowboys *per se*. The reader will learn very little, if anything, about day-to-day life on a cattle ranch. For the reader who wishes a mental flight back to the “good old days” of the ranching frontier, there will be very little of interest in the following pages. Such a study still needs, and deserves, to be done, -- one that marries intellectual and social history -- but it is necessarily beyond the scope of this study. I am not able to deal with the question as to whether or not images of cowboys reflected their actual life experience beyond suggesting that the Canadian image of the cowboy came closer to reflecting the reality of the cowboy than the American, decidedly romantic, image did.

This thesis is about ideas and perceptions. More succinctly, it is about how British and Canadian image makers portrayed the Canadian manifestation of an icon --the cowboy-- whose image pervades American popular culture. In the United States, the cowboy is eulogized to such an extent as to render his popular image almost indistinguishable from any actual historical figure. In a way, the mythic cowboy is more important than the historical cowboy; it is he (the mythic cowboy) who defines what is meant by cowboy culture, especially in the United States. However disturbing this fact might be to historians who lament the obfuscation of the so-called 'real cowboy,' one should study popular imagery and attempt to determine what that imagery reveals about the culture from which it emerged. That is the purpose of this study.

The historical cowboy is one who worked on a ranch caring for livestock -- usually cattle. A considerable part of the cowboy's time was spent on horseback, riding the open range, and tending to various seasonal needs of livestock. The main duties associated with the occupation were rounding up cattle, roping calves for branding purposes, and driving herds to prospective markets. The historical cowboy is often known as the 'actual' or 'real' cowboy, as distinct from the mythic cowboy.

The mythic, or romantic cowboy image which flourished in America has a broader and more inclusive meaning; in its mythic usage the term is representational and symbolic. In America the cowboy image has come to represent a host of characteristics, some positive and some negative. On the positive side, the cowboy of American popular imagery symbolizes freedom from urban industrial society; he also symbolizes personal dignity, loyalty to friends, and manual dexterity. In dress, he was very distinctive in his Stetson



Stetson cowboy hat, leather vest, bandana, chaps, revolver, and perhaps most importantly, his cowboy boots. As for mannerisms, the cowboy could easily be identified by his laconic speech, exaggerated slouch, and his characteristic bow-legged saunter. All this was wrapped up in one individual and coated with a veneer of undeniable toughness. The cowboy is not only the most apt symbol of the free, unconstrained West in America: he is the “most enduring symbol of American masculinity”<sup>1</sup> in general.

On the negative side, the cowboy image in America, indeed the very word “cowboy” itself, “has become synonymous with recklessness.”<sup>2</sup> The cowboy of American western novels and film productions is renowned for his ‘whooping up’ tendencies, whether out on the open range or in a populated town. He is often portrayed as a whiskey drinking renegade who, once under the influence of alcohol especially, was likely to brandish his revolver and carelessly take shots at innocent citizens -- all this he found time to do between train robberies, gun fights, high stakes poker games, and horse stealing! This individual occupied half his time in these pursuits, and the other half avoiding tenacious lawmen bent on making him pay for such transgressions which, owing to the cowboy’s resourcefulness, they were seldom able to accomplish.<sup>3</sup> In essence, the mythic cowboy of American popular culture was the perfect embodiment of liberal individualism; he was oblivious to constituted law because he observed the more fundamental law of the frontier which called for “survival of the fittest.”

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<sup>1</sup> Robert H. MacDonald, Sons of the Empire: The Frontier and the Boy Scout Movement, 1890-1918 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> William W. Savage Jr. The Cowboy Hero: His Image in American History and Culture (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> The list of legendary American outlaws is endless, however, names like Jesse James, Butch Cassidy, and the Sundance Kid, particularly come to mind.

In the United States, the cowboy image, including both positive and negative traits, was, and still is, tremendously popular. The idea of freedom is an especially critical component of the cowboy's persona seized upon by consumers of popular literature and imagery. Being free and unfettered, the cowboy of fiction was a pre-industrial character who presented readers with a mental escape from the quickening pace of urban life.<sup>4</sup> Even in his outlaw manifestation, however, the cowboy was beloved by his audience. By taking the law into his own hands, the cowboy exemplified the idea of principled dissent; he showed that since the law was made by and for the people, it was people, too, who could reinterpret the law. American law, particularly that of the West, was not decreed by distant policy makers who ruled by divine right; it was determined by people -- in this case cowboys -- who believed in republican principles. In the minds of American consumers of fiction, even when the cowboy was being "bad," so to speak, he was considered "good," because he exemplified and upheld American political philosophy as it had been enshrined in the American Constitution.

In Canada, this cowboy image never flourished. In fact, the utter absence, and indeed resistance, of the American cowboy phenomenon in Canada is as much a concern of this thesis as how the Canadian cowboy was actually portrayed. What is truly surprising is the paucity of literature from the late nineteenth century which placed a cowboy, of any ilk, in the Canadian West. Generally speaking, British and Canadian image makers seemed only tangentially aware that there were cowboys in Canada. To be sure, Canada never did

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<sup>4</sup> See Daryl Jones, The Dime Novel Western (Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1978).

support a stream of literature on the scale of the 'dime novel western', much less an entire performing arts industry dedicated to the west as in the famed wild west shows of Vaudeville and, eventually, in Hollywood films.

This is not to suggest that British and Canadian image makers did not have any interest in cowboys. Indeed, British fiction writers, such as Gilbert Parker, were quite enamoured of the cowboy icon, but their stories about cowboys were almost uniformly set in the United States, especially Texas. That British and Canadian writers sometimes wrote about cowboys in the United States serves to highlight the practical question of why popular imagery of the Canadian West and western heroes did not include a cowboy figure to any great extent; the cowboy's absence in Canada is even more conspicuous when this is considered. Image makers in general were quite willing to recognize the American cowboy image, but they rejected that image for the Canadian West. The image they rejected for Canada reveals as much about Canadian identity as the image they proposed to take its place.

But absence of the American cowboy image does not tell the whole story of the Canadian West. In the relatively few cases where a version of a Canadian cowboy was portrayed, his image was often the complete opposite of, or at least quite different from, the American cowboy image. Canadian and American cowboy images were almost always mutually exclusive, due to the different cultural and literary trends from which they emerged. The Canadian cowboy was imbued with British traits and characteristics which obviously made him unique and, importantly, different from his American counterpart. So while the absence of an American style cowboy image in Canada may

reveal much about Canadian cultural history, the image that took its place in Canada explains and supports that absence. In other words, the absence of a wild American cowboy image and the presence of a British-style cowboy together make the same comment about Canadian cultural history -- they simply do it from different directions.

In the search for a Canadian cowboy, one can not simply look for traits which typify the more popular American cowboy. Historians seeking to graft a romantic cowboy icon onto Canadian cultural history often do not avoid this pitfall. The problem is that historians tend to seek desperately for evidence of a romantic -- American style -- cowboy and, upon finding some, they give a sense that Canada has a rich cowboy heritage, which may be true historically but is not the case culturally.<sup>5</sup> So we cannot just look for American qualities to represent Canadian cowboys, and, even when we do find American qualities, we cannot suggest that they were ever part of the Canadian cowboy's popular image. Identifying romantic traits of Canadian cowboys hidden in the occasional historical record does not prove that American-style cowboys ever played a major role in the popular imagination of Canadians. To say that it did play a major role assumes a certain homogeneity of Canadian and American cultural and literary traditions as one

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<sup>5</sup> To name a couple; E.J. Cotton and Ethel Mitchell Buffalo Bud (Vancouver: Hancock House Publishers Ltd., 1981).and Hugh Dempsey's recent work, The Golden Age of the Canadian Cowboy: An Illustrated History (Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers, 1995). These works resurrect cowboy characters from the historical record and imply that the cowboy of romance is part of our cultural heritage which, eventually he will be, if they write enough books about him, but unfortunately, it will be a forced image years after the fact; the cowboy of romance did not develop naturally as part of Canada's cultural history the way he did in the United States.

literary critic did when he stated: "the Canadian Huckleberry Finn is - Huckleberry Finn! And who needs another."<sup>6</sup>

Neither can one assume that an absence of American cowboy characteristics in Canadian popular imagery means an absence of a Canadian cowboy. Because he was configured according to British values, the Canadian cowboy was unique and any search for cowboys in Canada must identify different characteristics -- different from American traits, that is -- to represent the Canadian cowboy. The purpose here is not to turn over every rock, so to speak, looking for remnants of wild cowboys and conclude that we actually did, or did not, have a cowboy history in Canada. We must admit that American cowboy culture has not become a major part of Canadian culture or iconography, and then, get on with analyzing what that says about our national heritage and identity.

Conversely, there is very little benefit in seeking out a Canadian figure and announcing his suitability as a Canadian parallel to the American cowboy. Without a doubt, the North West Mounted Policeman has achieved supremacy in the struggle for a representative Canadian figure; however it has been a pyrrhic victory for Canadians. The unfortunate result is that little effort has been made to seek out other figures, real or imagined, who might add to Canada's mosaic identity, but have been obscured by the 'Mounite' on one hand, and American figures on the other. The Canadian cowboy might be such a figure. While the mounted policeman is a pervasive western image in Canada, and his image does inspire a sense of western adventure the way the American cowboy

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<sup>6</sup> Leslie Fielder, "Canada and the Invention of the Western: A Mediation on the Other Side of the Border," in Crossing Frontiers: Papers in American and Canadian Literature, ed. Dick Harrison (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1979), p. 97.

does, he is not a cowboy, and he should not be used simply in place of the cowboy. Indeed, the Mountie is the antithesis of the cowboy, in the American sense, as I will show. So somewhere between the American cowboy on one hand, and the Mountie on the other, is a Canadian cowboy. The Mountie's popularity in literature helps explain the paucity of cowboys, but it does not explain them away. The Canadian cowboy, then, should never again be simply displaced by an American image, or replaced by another Canadian one.

Very little scholarly attention has been paid to the cowboy in a Canadian context. In the preface of his seminal work on ranching, The Canadian Prairie West and the Ranching Frontier, 1874-1924, David Breen laments that the Canadian ranching frontier "has not been accorded a separate niche in the nation's historiography."<sup>7</sup> Breen's concern regarding a lack of critical attention given to the ranching industry is well founded, and his exhortations for further study have been well received by many scholars since. While the ranching frontier in general could be seen as suffering from a lack of scholarly attention, some specific aspects of the industry have been eschewed. The most important of these is the cowboy.

Since Breen's efforts to study the ranching industry began, much work has been done, and a new interest in the field generally has led to a revival and republication of dated materials referring to Canada's ranching history. Unfortunately, many, if not most, new and old materials have focused on business, social, and political aspects of the ranching

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<sup>7</sup> David Breen, The Canadian Prairie West and the Ranching Frontier, 1874-1924 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), preface.

frontier. The cowboy, when he is noted at all, appears only in the margins of most ranching histories except for those written by popular historians intended for a more general reading audience. In such cases the cowboy is eulogized as a major and integral historical figure in southern Alberta.

As an aspect of Canadian intellectual and cultural history however, the cowboy has not been mentioned even obliquely for his role in the development of public memory and collective consciousness in Canada. While business and social histories of the ranching industry assist immeasurably in filling historical gaps and telling the story of the ranching period, a new intellectual approach must be applied to determine the cultural results and consequences of the ranching industry in Canada. To do this, the study of cowboys from a cultural point of view needs to be removed from the geographical locus of the ranching frontier and placed in the larger context of intellectual and cultural history. How Canadians either accepted or resisted images and heroes is a significant part of conceptualizing the Canadian cultural morass. In other words, had the cowboy image been readily received during the early period of ranching, it is not implausible to assume that cattle ranching and cowboys would have had a major impact on the cultural makeup of Canada. Since cowboys did not occupy a major place in Canadian culture however, one must explore why the image was ever resisted and what that resistance says about Canadian cultural development. So if the legitimate claim could be made, as it was by Breen, that the ranching industry's representation in Canadian historiography was about due, it could certainly be said that a study of the cowboy and his role in the development of a western and Canadian intellectual ethos is long past due.

The first scholarly recognition of a ranching industry in Canada came with the publication of Leroy Victor Kelly's The Range Men in 1913. Kelly's approximately four hundred page tome was an ambitious exercise in both description and explanation of Alberta's ranching industry. He appeals convincingly to records of the NWMP, government reports, and local newspapers to present a holistic view of the heyday of ranching and its eventual demise with the profusion of settlement to western Canada. Less convincing, however, is Kelly's extraction of facts from "authentic sources" such as "old-time stockmen of high standing."<sup>8</sup> It is from these sources that Kelly undoubtedly acquired his slightly elegiac tone when referring to the passing of the ranching frontier in the Canadian West.<sup>9</sup> His narrative history weaves an almost literary tapestry of western rural life and western characters beginning with a section entitled "Generally Descriptive," in which Kelly gives an overall impression of the topography first, and then the human face of the west. Kelly then includes a short section on Indian presence in the area, the thesis of which seems to be that the Indians were always hopelessly combative and ill-suited to anything except war and horse theft.

Elegy notwithstanding, Kelly makes an important contribution to the study of ranching as a facet of the western Canadian economy up to the turn of the twentieth-century and slightly beyond. When he writes about cowboys, however, Kelly has an unusually romantic perspective. At one point he indicates that "cowboys and ranchers were honest,

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<sup>8</sup> L.V. Kelly, The Range Men: The Story of The Ranchers and Indians of Alberta (Toronto: William Briggs, 1913), preface.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., preface.



clean and straight in all their money dealings.”<sup>10</sup> Kelly continues with a graphic description of the cowboy’s wild proclivities:

[t]hey might go on hilarious ‘busts’ when in town. They might ‘shoot up’ a bar-room and smash every light in the place, they might ride into stores on the backs of frantic horses, but they were good men, the kind who worked for their employers.<sup>11</sup>

This is an all-together quixotic view of cowboys in the Canadian Prairie West and is part of a trend that gained currency for a time, even among scholars. This trend was characterized by a desire on the part of certain historians to exaggerate the American nature of the ranching frontier in Canada. As the following one hundred pages will reveal, there was no legitimate grounds for this otherwise anxious desire to situate romantic figures in the Canadian context. In fact, as contemporary images suggest, there was a strong consensus of popular opinion in favour of a more socially responsible, law-abiding Canadian cowboy.

Although academe was slow at first to build on The Rangemen, there has been a profusion of academic books and articles about Alberta’s ranching industry since Kelly’s work. Again, many of these have focused primarily on either business aspects of the ranching frontier or its social complexion. More than fifteen years elapsed before any major book-length studies about the ranching frontier were published. In 1930, C.M. MacInnes’s In the Shadow of the Rockies<sup>12</sup> was published followed soon after by John

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> C.M. MacInnes, In the Shadow of the Rockies (London: Rivingtons, 1930).

Higginbotham's When the West Was Young,<sup>13</sup> in 1933. Both of these sources memorialized the ranching period in Canada as a vestige of a bygone era. C.M. MacInnes especially, like Kelly, paid close attention to aspects of the Canadian ranching experience which most closely approximated the popularized American experience -- the Canadian cowboy was taken for granted as being akin to his American counterpart, although popular images of such figures <sup>we in</sup> was never discussed. The cowboy's role in these early histories was that of romantic facilitator. He was admired for his aptitude in ranch work and his general carefree approach to life, owing to a sense of personal freedom afforded by the open range. He is not considered for his place in the Canadian popular imagination outside the auspices of daily ranch work. Significantly, these books, while produced originally as serious scholarship, have become part of history themselves and do more to reveal emerging images of the cowboy in the period than they do to teach about the ranching industry.

Kelly, MacInnes, and Higginbotham had produced the only secondary sources about ranching in Canada when L.G. Thomas began his long and distinguished career in western history. Thomas's Master of Arts thesis entitled "The Ranching Period in Alberta," produced in 1935, is an impressive piece of original scholarship about the ranching area and its social composition, and it marked a historiographical shift towards viewing the Canadian ranching industry as socially and culturally distinct from that of the United States. Thomas was the first major scholar to question the exaggeration of

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<sup>13</sup> John Higginbotham, When the West Was Young: Historical Reminiscences of the Canadian West (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1930).

American qualities in the ranching district and place more emphasis on the British and eastern Canadian flavour of the region's social make-up, noting that, "[i]n breeding, education, ability and spirit, Southern Alberta's pioneers excelled those of almost any other community."<sup>14</sup> In a sense, Thomas has come the closest of any scholar in identifying an image of Canadian ranchers and cowboys; he recognized that ranchers in the southern districts of Alberta promoted an image of gentility for themselves.

After Thomas's original work in the thirties and early forties, the next major book-length study of the Canadian ranching frontier came from Paul Sharp in his book, Whoop-Up Country.<sup>15</sup> Sharp's book, a cross border study of Canadian and American western life, is replete with all the fabled characters of the old west. Despite its slight pretense of romance, however, Sharp's book follows in the tradition of Thomas's work in its recognition of Alberta's distinctive social order. Sharp pays considerable attention to the presence of constituted legal authority in the Canadian West and how that presence shaped and altered the direction of the area.

David Breen and Patrick Dunae have also produced significant studies of the Canadian Ranching frontier and the West's uniquely British society respectively. Breen's doctoral dissertation, which developed into his book on the Canadian Prairie West and the Ranching Frontier, helped shape the discipline of Canadian ranching history. With special emphasis on the political strengths of Canada's early cattlemen, Breen argues engagingly for a ranching industry that not only flourished, but played a major role in the federal

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<sup>14</sup> L.G. Thomas, "The Ranching Tradition and the Life of the Ranchers," in Ranchers' Legacy: Alberta Essays by Lewis G. Thomas, ed. Patrick Dunae (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1986), p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Sharp, Whoop-Up Country: The Canadian-American West, 1865-1885 (Helena: Montana Historical Society, 1960).

government's western development plans. Breen also argues that ranchers and cattlemen should be recognized for their respective roles in the development of a western Canadian ethos; that western culture is not simply the culture of farmers and homesteaders. It is my contention that Breen is not wrong in his assertions about ranchers' political strengths and certainly not about ranchers' distinctive social makeup, but he overstates the former and does not recognize the effects the latter had on Canadian culture. That is to say, he correctly ascribes considerable political strength and solidarity to early ranchers, but he fails to recognize that despite that strength, ranchers and cowboys did not enter the canon of Canadian popular imagery in any significant way. Conversely, Breen's recognition of a distinctive social make-up on Canada's ranching frontier must be more fully developed to include a discussion of how that distinctiveness dictated the nature of popular figures emerging from the ranching industry. Such distinctiveness was critical for Canadian culture, especially in the absence of an American-style cowboy image.

Patrick Dunae's book Gentlemen Emigrants,<sup>16</sup> as its title suggests, also notes the 'Britishness' of settlers in the Canadian West generally, and specifically in the ranching districts of Alberta. Dunae reveals how British settlers, as an immigrant population, were successful in stamping their heritage on the region. This thesis, although it deals with images and perceptions more than technical details of ranching and settlement, fits into the historiographical mould set by Thomas, Sharp, Breen, and Dunae.

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<sup>16</sup> Patrick Dunae Gentlemen Emigrants: From the British Public Schools to the Canadian Frontier (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 1981).

Other major contributions to the body of historical material relating specifically to the ranching frontier have come from Simon Evans and, more recently, Warren Elofson. Simon Evans has written extensively on the Canadian ranching industry. Evans argues that the Canadian cattle industry was neither a northward extension of the American cattle kingdom nor a direct transplant of eastern Canadian and British cultural and social conditions. Evans does, however, place considerable emphasis on the influence the American cattle industry had on the Canadian scene. In an article titled "American Cattlemen on the Canadian Range, 1874-1914," Evans suggests that the grassland area east of the Rocky Mountains hosted a second ranching industry that developed as distinct from its better known counterpart in the foothills area. A major reason for this area's distinctiveness was the presence of American cattle producers who contributed not only to the development of ranching techniques but also to the social and cultural complexion of the area. Ultimately, Evans successfully shows an American presence on the Canadian grasslands, but he does not defend the notion that American ranchers and cowboys had anything beyond a technical influence on the Canadian scene. To be sure, Evans does not provide evidence that Americans had a significant cultural influence on the Canadian ranching frontier. With respect to cowboys in particular, it is clear from much of the primary evidence that an American presence on the Canadian frontier did nothing to influence popular Canadian perceptions about cowboys.

Another important approach taken by Evans concerns the time span of the Canadian ranching industry. In brief, Evans argues as a contrast to Breen, that the Canadian ranching experience was relatively short and ranchers were ineffectual in staving off

outside forces which threatened to erode their monopoly of the West. Evans notes that the conclusion of the open range era was brought about by global market forces and economic expedience and, as a corollary, government commitment to the settlement of the area.<sup>17</sup>

Some technical aspects of ranch and farm operations have been the focus of articles written by Warren Elofson. Elofson places academic debate about major influences on the ranching and farming districts squarely within the districts themselves. He pares down the time honoured debate between frontier theorists and adherents of the metropolitan thesis by demanding specific examples from ranches and farms. For instance, Elofson writes in an article titled "Adapting to the Environment" that "historians have tended to go too far"<sup>18</sup> when painting pictures of a rural Canadian West characterized primarily by British and eastern Canadian cultural and social trademarks. Elofson finds evidence of a close relationship between environmental exigencies and adaptive methods of settlers, suggesting that the Canadian ranching industry was "very much a product of the frontier in general and the American frontier in particular."<sup>19</sup>

More relevant for the sake of this thesis is Elofson's article titled "Not Just a Cowboy," in which he finds fault with conventional wisdom about ranching in Canada. More specifically, Elofson makes the argument that, owing to unique conditions of the Canadian environment, there was very little "pure ranching" ever accomplished in the

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<sup>17</sup> Simon Evans, "The End of the Open Range Era in Western Canada," *Prairie Forum*, 8 (1983)

<sup>18</sup> Warren Elofson, "Adapting to the Frontier Environment: The Ranching Industry in Western Canada, 1881-1914," in *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, Vol. VIII, ed. Donald H. Akenson (Gananoque: Langdale Press, 1992), p. 307.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 307.

Canadian West. Stock raisers were forced to grow winter feed and even expand their operations to ancillary food production in order to survive tough economic times of the late nineteenth-century. Historically and technically speaking then, very few ranchers were successful at raising cattle as an exclusive source of income and livelihood.<sup>20</sup> Elofson's thesis assists greatly in contextualizing the cowboy icon in Canada; any attempt to understand an image and its popular appeal should be firmly grounded in the historical development of the ethos from which the image emerged.

The existence of ranching and cattle raising in western Canada is widely recognized in general texts of Canadian history. But as widely recognized as ranching may be in general texts, it is, however, noted only as a constituent part of Alberta's economy for a relatively short period of time, while its role in the development of popular images and national sentiment is never truly considered. To name only a few, such works as the nine volumes of the "Canadian Frontiers of Settlement" series edited by W.A. Mackintosh and W.L.G. Joerg,<sup>21</sup> Gerald Friesen's The Canadian Prairies<sup>22</sup> and, The Canadians, 1867-1967<sup>23</sup> edited by J.M.S. Careless and Craig Brown, all discuss western ranching in a general manner. Finally, although relating very specifically to a certain community, Paul Voisey's book about Vulcan, Alberta includes a general discussion of ranching. Not unlike other general ranching discussions, Voisey regards the industry as a precursor of

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<sup>20</sup> Warren Elofson, "Not Just a Cowboy: The Practice of Ranching in Southern Alberta, 1881-1914," in Canadian Papers in Rural History Volume X, ed. Donald Akenson (Gananoque: Langdale Press, 1996), p.205.

<sup>21</sup> W.A. Mackintosh and W.L.G. Joerg, Canadian Frontiers of Settlement, 9 Vols. (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Ltd.), 1936-1940.

<sup>22</sup> Gerald Friesen, The Canadian Prairies: A History (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1987).

<sup>23</sup> J.M.S. Careless and Craig Brown, Part One of: The Canadians, 1867-1967 (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1968).

large scale settlement and wheat farming, and sometimes as a major impediment to community development.<sup>24</sup> Such sources can hardly dedicate sufficient time to the study of ranching as a harbinger of popular figures and icons.

Local and popular histories offer a much more nuanced approach to ranching and ranching personalities in southern Alberta. Primarily set on the ranches themselves, and with very little appeal to theoretical issues beyond the ranching district, local histories about ranching and cowboys, however uncritical, provide engaging reading for a general audience. Titles of local and popular histories are often suggestive of their broad appeal: Buffalo Bud,<sup>25</sup> by E.J. Cotton and Ethel Mitchell; John Ware's Cow Country<sup>26</sup> by Grant MacEwan; and Ranches Cowboys and Characters<sup>27</sup> by Sheilagh Jameson, are all examples of how Alberta's heritage is portrayed in popular historical format. These titles and names represent only a scarce few of the innumerable popular sources that have grown out of Alberta's western heritage, a heritage that may be more part of an "imagined community" created by popular historians than part of any real historical development.

One other noteworthy popular author of ranching history is Hugh Dempsey. In particular, Dempsey's most recent book The Golden Age of the Canadian Cowboy<sup>28</sup> is a well rendered account of cowboy life and culture on Canada's ranching frontier.

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<sup>24</sup> For a brief discussion of this see Paul Voisey, Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), pp. 224-225.

<sup>25</sup> Cotton and Mitchell, Buffalo Bud

<sup>26</sup> Grant MacEwan, John Ware's Cow Country (Edmonton: Institute of Applied Art, Ltd., 1960).

<sup>27</sup> Sheilagh Jameson, Ranches, Cowboys, and Characters: Birth of Alberta's Western Heritage (Calgary: Glenbow Alberta Institute, 1987).

<sup>28</sup> Dempsey, The Golden Age of the Canadian Cowboy



Dempsey combines pictorial evidence and primary accounts to recreate the relatively short span of ranching's "golden age" in Alberta. But what it makes up for in enthusiasm for the cowboy, it lacks in its uncritical account of cowboy images in Canadian culture.

In a more theoretical and abstract vein, a handful of intellectual historians have studied images and ideas about western Canada. As R. Douglas Francis points out in his article "Changing Images of the West," there is a facet of western history that goes beyond the realm of economics and politics. Francis notes that "[t]he history of the West has often been governed as much by what people imagined the region to be as the 'reality' itself,"<sup>29</sup> In short, studying how the West has been perceived by outsiders, and how perceptions have influenced the West, is a legitimate way of understanding one aspect of western development. As a matter of historical fact, the West has variously suffered and benefited from perceptions held by people who are not in the West, but whose influence constrained greatly upon it. For example, Doug Owsram argues in Promise of Eden that eastern expansionists around the middle of the nineteenth-century, looking for an economic hinterland of their own, began to promote a far more positive image of the West than was previously the case.<sup>30</sup> Consequently the West, irrespective of its actual historical development, is largely defined by image makers who may not even have ever been in the region.

In a similar fashion, Francis's book, Images of The West, provides a general view of changing perceptions of the West over a broad expanse of time. Francis studies western

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<sup>29</sup> R. Douglas Francis, "Changing Images of the West," in The Prairie West: Historical Readings, ed. R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1992), p. 717.

<sup>30</sup> Doug Owsram, Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900 (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1992).

imagery from a variety of sources including travel accounts, explorers' diaries, scientists, authors and artists, and discovers that the history of the West is more about the history of how people viewed the West. Ultimately, outsiders saw whatever they wished, or were programmed, to see in the western environment which resulted in very paradoxical views being held over time. This dialectic was fueled by changing intellectual trends, economic factors, and artistic and literary developments.

These approaches to the West in Canadian history provide an excellent methodological framework for a study of the Canadian cowboy. In a way not unlike the land itself, the cowboy's image was first created by people external to the area who portrayed him as a beacon of British values. For a brief period, that image was actually upheld by people living in the area. This is perhaps a disturbing fact for westerners, but commercial, economic, and political interests outside the region were all struggling to portray the West in a manner that best suited their needs; and many insiders shared these interests. With the first Calgary Stampede in 1912, an image of the West as a locus of romantic cowboy culture began to emerge; but that image was only used once a year at Stampede time, and it was circumvented by a flood of progress-oriented imagery. It was not until much later -- after the Stampede became an annual event -- that insiders began to consistently control images of the cowboy, and when they did, the image shifted to a decidedly more romantic one that was, and still is, resurrected once a year during the Calgary Stampede.

Finally, literary critics and literary historians have produced a substantial body of scholarship relating to the West in popular literature. Literary theorists such as Northrop

Frye, Laurence Ricou, and Eli Mandel have all studied how Canada's unique environment, particularly in the Prairie West, did not fit with the literary and cultural traditions of many writers. From a more historical perspective, scholars like Dick Harrison, Robert Thacker, and Edward McCourt have all studied specific elements of western development through literary trends. Harrison, for example, in his book Unnamed Country,<sup>31</sup> argues that Europeans who settled in the Prairie West were never able to reconcile their cultural heritage with a new, foreign, land resulting in a literary tradition that never accepted or identified fully with the environment. In a word, then, European settlers, especially those from England, remained bound by literary trends in the old world as their writings reflected anxious desires to resist defining the terrifying new environment.

Harrison's thesis relates significantly to the image of Canadian cowboys. Popular literature about cowboys in Canada seems almost uniformly tied to larger literary trends. Authors of juvenile adventure literature, for instance, never fully developed an image of Canadian cowboys without appeal to British values. They were driven by a cultural and nationalist imperative to portray the cowboy as a well bred, well raised, Brit. Writers were compelled to resist the idea of a wild and lawless cowboy in the Canadian West. British and eastern Canadian writers were not favourably disposed to setting a wild cowboy in a Canadian context without at least providing a subtext of British legal sensibility and Anglo-Saxon social morality. For many authors, it was not even done as a

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<sup>31</sup> Dick Harrison, Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1977).

sub-text; many explicitly imposed these qualities on their subjects without any pretense of wild western adventure. The image of a sententious, well-educated cowboy pervades popular literature and overshadows any historical representation of such a figure.

Primary evidence for this topic is necessarily eclectic. While there is no shortage of material about cowboys and their daily lives, there is considerably less material that became popular and promulgated an image of the Canadian cowboy for a broad audience. Indeed, the material excluded from this thesis could in itself support a full historical study of cowboys. But the 'real cowboy' is not my concern; rather I am concerned with how the cowboy was perceived. Thus I have limited myself to sources that can be defended in some way as having been circulated for broad consumption. For this reason alone, material has been extracted from a variety of possible sources.

Since the evidence is so eclectic, it is difficult to give a clear and concise idea of how the cowboy was portrayed in Canadian culture. To begin with, his image varied slightly according to the particular medium; that is, newspapers, promotional posters, and government literature were typically concerned with advertising the West in some way or another, while authors of fiction were not as sensitive to promotional needs. The literary form is clearly different from advertising or promotional media. Moreover, images of Canadian cowboys changed over time, a factor that is very difficult to quantify since images and ideas never exist in sealed compartments. The confluence of old images and new ones is nearly impossible to locate and perhaps even more troubling to explain in historical terms. So varied media and fluctuation over time are two considerable factors that aggravate a search for cowboys in Canadian popular imagery.

A third factor complicating a search for cowboys in popular imagery is the simple fact that cowboys were generally not a favourite subject of image makers in Canada. By contrast, a similar search in American popular culture would undoubtedly yield an endless stream of primary evidence. Certain image makers did mention western Canada's ranching heritage, but usually only obliquely and often the ranching industry in Canada was discussed holistically, that is, without special reference to cowboys. This factor can be overcome, however, with a more creative approach to primary sources. The image presented need not refer explicitly to cowboys; indeed the image can make reference to western life in general which testifies as to the type of society being promoted by image makers -- the cowboy's intended place in that society becomes obvious. In other words, if popular image makers insist, as they often did, that the West is best suited for large scale settlement geared towards creating a progressive and ordered society, this image of the West, when taken in context, provides a sense of how cowboys were viewed. Wild, untamed, and obdurate cowboys were most certainly not welcomed in this type of western imagery before the turn of the century, and even for some years after. With a touch of caution and some creativity then, one can see consistent images of ranching, ranch society, and cowboys emerging during this period, even across a range of media.

Chapter one of this thesis provides a brief overview of the historical development of Canada's ranching industry. Particular attention is paid to the length, social distinctiveness, and technical nature of ranching in the Canadian West. The premise is that the image of the Canadian cowboy was partly shaped by historical determinants of

the ranching frontier; the particular image that emerged was a natural result of the material culture in which the Canadian cowboy worked and lived.

Images of cowboys in primary material begins in chapter two with immigration literature and travel accounts. Immigration literature, either from government agencies or private land companies, was expressly concerned with promoting the West as a site of order, civilization, constituted law, and well established British style institutions such as schools and churches. While immigration literature did not often deal explicitly with cowboy images, it offers clear evidence of the kind of western society that was overtly promoted. The overall theme of this material was progress; the idea of progress, which meant an established government based on British principles, schools, religious institutions, and well cultured citizens, was diametrically opposed to the cowboy icon as it existed in the United States.

Travellers' accounts reveal how societal trends can be upheld and reinforced by individuals. Visitors to the West during this period often echoed the sentiments promoted in immigration literature. They noted how the West was advanced technologically, and how people living in the West were not barbarous or uncivilized. Travellers did refer on occasion to cowboys and when they did so, they noticed how the cowboy of the Canadian West was a hard working and well behaved representative of the British Empire.

Chapter three features images of cowboys and the West from periodical literature. This includes newspapers, monthly and weekly magazines, and quarterly academic journals. In some cases, images from periodical literature merely portrayed the Canadian West as an area with great settlement potential. In other cases, however, especially from periodicals

within the West, images were clearly used for expressly promotional purposes. Local newspapers lauded the economic and commercial accomplishments of their respective towns; they also lauded the observance of social order in western towns. Wild cowboy culture was categorically repudiated in local periodical imagery. American cowboy tendencies -- in dress and in action -- were dismissed as frivolous and altogether uncommon in Canada.

The final major source type used herein is popular literature. Popular literature refers essentially to novels and short stories. Very few novels specifically about cowboys were set in the Canadian West. But some Canadian and British novelists and short story writers did write adventure stories which made reference to ranching and cowboys. In terms of literary quality, these range from mediocre to utterly unsophisticated. In this study however, these novels and short stories are looked at not in terms of their literary techniques, but rather for the images they portrayed. In fact, stylistic simplicity may well be indicative of their appeal to a general audience.

Another form of popular imagery used for the purposes of analysis is posters, pamphlets and handbills. Advertisements of the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede are useful sources of cowboy imagery because they represent the beginning of a minor shift in popular imagery towards a more romanticized portrayal of the cowboy beginning in the second decade of the twentieth century. For the period of this study, however, the idea of wild cowboys that the Stampede now promotes was limited and overshadowed by a mountain of progress-oriented imagery.

Decoding, or deconstructing, popular images can be a complex and sophisticated process. Images of cowboys, as artifacts of the culture from which they emerge, are admittedly open to various interpretations, or readings.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, assuming a familiarity with how various people might have interpreted these images is not a central part of this thesis. I am more concerned with the fact that images existed at all, and what their existence reveals about the motivation of image makers, irrespective of differential interpretations. In other words, my interest is not in the consumption of images, but in their production. Most of these images were generated by elites in some form or another, and it is how those elites were attempting to define the Canadian West that occupies a central position in this thesis. So if the images presented herein seem unified in their meaning, it is because the image makers were unified as elites, and although they were elite in markedly different ways, they were all inspired to promote the West either for economic, political, or cultural reasons.

Taken together, these primary sources reveal -- even in the absence of references to an American style cowboy -- a trend with respect to cowboy portrayals late in the nineteenth and early in the twentieth centuries. Evidence shows that despite having some semblance of a ranching industry in Canada, the cowboy did not become a major part of Canadian iconography to nearly the same extent as he did in America where cowboy sub-culture has grown to enormous proportions. The reason for this is twofold I would argue: first, the historical development of the ranching frontier was very limited in time and size, thus

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<sup>32</sup> See Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding" in *Culture, Media, and Language*, ed. S. Hall et. al. (London: Hutchison, 1980).



allowing relatively little opportunity for its icons to truly flourish. In addition to being short, for a considerable period of its existence the ranching industry was overshadowed in popular imagery by the government's commitment to agricultural settlement. Moreover, during this period, ranching techniques in Canada were dictated by the environment which necessitated an approach to cattle raising more closely approximating mixed farming. Consequently, beef producers often resembled farmers more than they resembled ranchers and cowboys.

Secondly, and more importantly, during such time as popular cowboy images might have emerged in Canada, British and Canadian image makers, unsympathetic to the image of the American West, expressly disavowed those aspects of the American cowboy image which they saw as being negative for the Canadian West, such as lawlessness and obstreperousness, and instead seized upon positive aspects, resulting in a cowboy image that was not easily identifiable in American terms. For Canadian image makers during the early period of ranching, especially those within the ranching area, the American cowboy image was resisted because it did not suit the British identity they were attempting to force on the West. The wild and lawless cowboy of American fiction represented an immediate threat to established Anglo-Saxon law and order; he was perceived in Canada as the offspring of some revolutionary conception. Alternatively, western Canadian figures, it was often noted, were wardens of a British Imperial -- ie. superior -- way of life.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the virtually empty Canadian West stood as a portent of British Imperial movement. If the popular pronouncement that "westward the

course of empire takes its way” could be taken seriously, then the West was clearly perceived as a major part, if not the leading edge, of imperial movement -- such was its primary identity. Image makers, both within, and, outside the region, upheld the idea that the West was in fact a future site for the British Empire. The reward for success in this promotion of the West as a natural site for imperial movement meant settlement -- especially British settlement -- which in turn meant that the stamp of British identity would be placed on the region. Failure, it was feared, meant cultural diffusion to the United States at best -- annexation, at the very worst. Thus, even in the seemingly innocuous business of cowboy imagery, the battle for cultural supremacy and national identity was being fought, and, as it turned out, the Canadian cowboy eventually bore the mark of British law and social order.

## Chapter One: A Brief Overview of Alberta's Ranching History

The real nature of the Alberta ranching industry has been hotly debated as to its duration, social and cultural composition, ethnic orientation, and technical qualities. Controversy about these and other factors is largely ordered along two opposed theoretical lines: within the context of the frontier school of thought, or the metropolitan-hinterland paradigm. Frontier theorists perceive the Canadian ranching industry as a regional, that is western, phenomenon owing its characteristics to geographical remoteness. According to this theory, as settlers arrived on the frontier, their social, cultural, and political characteristics are gradually diluted and reshaped by the democratizing effects of a new, uninhabited land.<sup>33</sup> Using this rationale, Alberta ranching society is often dissected in search of clues which suggest settlers' change and adaptation to the environment. Seen thus, the ranching district of Alberta is regarded as a northern adjunct of the large and powerful frontier ranching industry in the United States.<sup>34</sup>

Alternatively, ranching society in southern Alberta before the turn of the century can be seen as a transplanted segment of eastern Canadian and British society. Demographically speaking, this appears to be very true,<sup>35</sup> but questions remain about the

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<sup>33</sup> See Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" in The Early Writings of Frederick Jackson Turner, ed. Everett E. Edwards (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1938).

<sup>34</sup> See for example A.S. Morton History of Prairie Settlement, Vol. II of Canadian Frontiers of Settlement ed. W.A. Mackintosh and W.L.G. Joerg (Toronto: MacMillan and Co., 1938); and W.L. Morton, "A Century of Plain and Parkland" in Region of the Mind, ed. Richard Allen (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1973).

<sup>35</sup> See R.D. Francis, "Rural Ontario West": Ontarians in Alberta" in The Peoples of Alberta: Portraits of Cultural Diversity, ed. Howard and Tamara Palmer (Saskatoon: Western Prairie Producer Books, 1985).

extent to which old world political, social and cultural traditions are maintained in a frontier environment. In Alberta, imported traditions remained strong, and shaped the political culture of the ranching district.<sup>36</sup> External factors appear to have constrained upon new world development in a way far greater than frontier theorists are willing to admit. As historian G.F.G. Stanley has pointed out, frontier theorists tend to "isolate the frontier community from the general course of civilization" thereby excluding "many external factors essential to a complete understanding of our historical development."<sup>37</sup> Such factors might include, but are not limited to: contact with eastern and British commercial centres, cultural exchange made possible by frequent travel in and out of the region, and recurring waves of immigration that began in the mid 1890's.

Although no one theory can ever fully explain all aspects of ranching, this latter theoretical approach provides the most appropriate framework for a study of the Canadian cowboy and his image in historical context. With this approach in mind, the historical development of ranching in Alberta must be considered to determine why the Canadian cowboy has played only a marginal role in extending the Canadian national *ecumene* by comparison to policemen, engineers and cereal farmers.<sup>38</sup> Thus, it will be argued in part, the cowboy's limited representation in Canadian popular imagery is the result of specific historical developments of Canada's ranching frontier.

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<sup>36</sup> Accounts of the 'Britishness' of people on the ranching frontier are numerous. See especially Dunae ed. Ranchers' Legacy and Patrick Dunae Gentlemen Emigrants.

<sup>37</sup> Canadian Historical Association, Report of the Annual Meeting (Toronto, 1940).

<sup>38</sup> In his article, "American Cattlemen on the Canadian Range, 1874-1914", Prairie Forum, 4 (Spring 1979), Simon Evans claims that the cattleman played as great a role in western development as these other figures. I partially agree but only with respect to economic and spatial development. The cowboy did not have the same impact with respect to popular imagery.

In three very important ways, the ranching industry of Alberta did not host favourable enough conditions for the emergence and survival of a powerful American-style cowboy image. Primarily, cowboys are only nominally represented in Canadian imagery because the tradition from which they are supposed to have emerged -- open range ranching -- was ephemeral in Canada. Despite some contention over this point, it is clear that ranching, to the extent of being seen on a large scale free from governmental constraints, lasted no more than twenty years in southern Alberta. The year 1896 and the abrogation of 'closed leases' for major beef producers, signaled the beginning of the end for a style of large scale ranching that had begun only fourteen years earlier. Moreover, for a portion of this short period, the Canadian government was making attempts to settle the southern prairies and thus created an intellectual climate adverse to wild cowboy images.

Secondly, for the brief time that ranching did survive in Canada, its social, political, legal and cultural orientation remained distinctly eastern Canadian and British. The Canadian ranching frontier was influenced by outside forces more than it ever was by internal, environmental factors, especially with respect to its social and cultural dimensions. Developing under the aegis of outside authority as it did, the ranching frontier in Canada seemed unlikely to supporting an image that was, in large measure, native to the frontier. Eastern and British members of the ranching community were committed to old world pastimes, social customs, and cultural pursuits all of which mitigated against the development of a cowboy image in Canada.

Finally, from a technical point of view, there was very little “pure ranching”<sup>39</sup> in Alberta before or after the turn of the twentieth century. That is, while many ranchers were unquestionably involved in raising cattle, their livelihood depended on other farm activities, most of which are suggestive of a mixed farming lifestyle. The romanticized image of Texas cowboys who had only to ride the range caring for cattle, is not an appropriate image in Canadian ranching history. While this seems on the surface to be merely an academic issue, its resolution provides insight into the historical context of cowboy imagery in Canada. Owing to historical circumstances, the nineteenth century image of the Canadian cowboy was often that of a generic rural figure.

Alberta's ranching history officially began in 1873 when John McDougall, a Methodist missionary, brought the first herd of breeding cattle into the ranching country of southern Alberta.<sup>40</sup> The first herd, totaling eleven cattle in all, amounted to a very modest beginning for Alberta ranching. For nearly a decade after, ranch activity in southern Alberta can be seen as at least sparse, and at best limited. A contingent of North West Mounted Policemen arrived in 1874, bringing with them a herd of approximately two hundred cattle; they were followed soon after by John Shaw who drove nearly five hundred head into Alberta from the Kootenay district of British Columbia, and by a man - known only as Armstrong -- who drove a herd from Montana to the Macleod district. Together they constituted the most significant but limited ranching activity in Alberta during the 1870's.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Warren Elofson uses this term in his essay “Not Just a Cowboy,” to distinguish between ranchers involved exclusively in livestock raising and mixed farmers.

<sup>40</sup> Jameson, p. 7.

<sup>41</sup> Kelly, p. 113.

Alberta's ranching industry really "took off" in the 1880's, the "golden age" for ranching in Alberta. Recognizing the need for eastern and British capital to support Alberta's nascent cattle industry, the Canadian government devised a comprehensive, well regulated, land lease policy. Beginning in December 1881, prospective cattle barons could lease grazing lands amounting to 100,000 acres at a rate of one cent per acre per year.<sup>42</sup> Such a lease policy clearly favoured substantial ranch development in Alberta and, as the policy expressly intended, it attracted abundant capital to the area.

Four large cattle companies in particular dominated the landscape in southern Alberta during the 1880's. Senator Matthew Cochrane became the first cattle baron in western Canada in 1881 when he shipped about sixty head of cattle by rail to Fort Benton Montana, and driven thence to his ranch site on the Bow River, west of Calgary.<sup>43</sup> Soon after, Cochrane ordered an additional 6,700 head from Montana, driven north by a crew of some thirty Montana cowboys.<sup>44</sup> After Cochrane, three other large cattle companies were established in rapid succession: the North-West Cattle Company, the Oxley Rancho Company, and the Walrond Rancho Company.<sup>45</sup> These ranch companies spearheaded the era of the big ranches in Alberta and collectively defined the period known as the "golden age" of ranching.

Despite the financial strength of these and other large ranch companies, Alberta ranching began to decline as early as the 1890's, a decline that continued into the early

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<sup>42</sup> David Breen, "The Turner Thesis and the Canadian West: A Closer Look at the Ranching Frontier," in Essays on Western History in Honour of L.G. Thomas, ed. L.H. Thomas (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press), p. 151.

<sup>43</sup> Jameson, p. 22.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-27.

twentieth century. This is not to say that cattle raising was no longer done, only that beginning in the 1890's, changes in government policy irrevocably altered the nature of Alberta ranching. Livestock raising continued for years beyond the early period of ranching, but it was never again to be carried out on an open range unencumbered by settlement and agricultural growth. Alberta's open range had been increasingly cordoned by fences from the late 1880's and by the middle of the 1890's, there was a growing sense among ranchers that "the ranching scene had changed, the days of the open range when the cattlemen controlled the country were gone."<sup>46</sup> Cattlemen's concerns about the end of the open range era were punctuated in 1896 when the federal government canceled its generous lease policy and offered "no alternative policy with regard to extensive leases."<sup>47</sup>

What the federal government did instead was commit itself to large-scale settlement in the Prairie West. Under the leadership of Clifford Sifton, Minister of the Interior from 1896 to 1905, the federal government concentrated its efforts on opening the West to settlement. Sifton responded to pressures that he must "eliminate most of the ranchers' privileges and open the region to homesteaders" in an effort to end ranchers' ten year domination of the land.<sup>48</sup> His efforts to do so yielded minimal results initially, but the pace of settlement quickened towards the end of the 1890's. The population of Alberta nearly tripled from 25,277 to 65,876 between the years 1891 and 1901 with most of that

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>47</sup> Evans, "American Cattlemen on the Canadian Range", p. 130.

<sup>48</sup> D.J. Hall, "Clifford Sifton: Immigration and Settlement Policy, 1896-1905," in The Settlement of the West, ed. Howard Palmer (Calgary: University of Calgary Comprint Publishing Company, 1977), p. 65.



growth coming in the second half of that period.<sup>49</sup> The number of houses in Alberta also ballooned during this ten year period from a mere 3,553 to 13,791.<sup>50</sup> The success of the government's settlement policy is obvious from these numbers. More important than success however, is the implication that government officials, Sifton especially, were increasingly dedicated to filling the West with permanent settlers. Sifton's dedication was not mere political rhetoric; he believed that the dominion government had "both the right and the duty to take an aggressive position of leadership, [in settlement promotion] for no other issue seemed so crucial in the shaping of the country's future."<sup>51</sup>

A critical component of Sifton's western settlement scheme was agricultural success. He believed firmly in the value of a rural/agricultural lifestyle for reasons not limited to economic accrual. Sifton believed that: "agricultural life was the basis of a stable, progressive society. The most solid citizens had their roots firmly in the soil."<sup>52</sup> With this principle in mind, Sifton set out to prepare the West for farming. While farm operations in the Calgary and Macleod districts had shown "healthy growth"<sup>53</sup> as early as 1890, Sifton wanted to expedite the shift from open range to controlled agricultural settlement. He first negotiated with land holding companies like the Canadian Pacific Railway for use of large tracts of otherwise unused land. Sifton then served warning to speculators who tied up large blocks of land without encouraging settlement and, he supported removal of squatters from undeeded or unleased land.<sup>54</sup> This latter move not only

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<sup>49</sup> Canada, Census office, Census of Canada (Ottawa: 1891 Vol. I and 1901 Vol. IV).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Hall, "Clifford Sifton," p. 68.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>53</sup> Kelly, p. 252.

<sup>54</sup> Hall, "Clifford Sifton, pp. 63-63.

facilitated the opening of useful land, it demonstrated how tacitly obsessed the federal government was with maintaining administrative control over western development and settlement.

Secondly, he promoted irrigation. The southern prairies, especially the arid lands of the Palliser Triangle, needed a dependable source of moisture to be properly farmed. In 1896 approximately 65,000 acres had been brought under irrigation, but, as Sifton was made aware, a further 6,325,000 acres could be cultivated through irrigation.<sup>55</sup> By 1904, this goal was nearly achieved with as many as 4,100,000 acres either under irrigation or marked for future irrigation.<sup>56</sup>

Large scale ranching had run its course by the end of the 1890's, only eighteen years after it started. It was a course plotted not by ranchers, but by politicians who believed that organized settlement was best for the Prairie West. The epoch of great prairie settlement had begun, and with it came the pervasive notion that an ordered and progressive agricultural society was preferred to a wide open range inhabited by relatively few ranchers exclusively enjoying its benefits. So the cowboy's primary habitat -- the open range -- was gone. It had not lasted long, and, for a significant period of its short existence, it struggled against a political mind-set that obviously favoured and pushed for settlement in the West.

The ranching frontier in Canada was not only limited in time, but also in terms of institutional and social isolation from the outside world.<sup>57</sup> Significantly, the Canadian

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>57</sup> See Breen, "The Turner Thesis and the Canadian West."

West evolved and matured under the auspices of constituted legal authority in the form of the North West Mounted Police (NWMP) whose influence galvanized and upheld the legal heritage of most ranching constituents. Police presence ensured that the form of 'frontier justice' commonly associated with the American West did not prevail in Canada. Shooting incidents, for example, were a rare occurrence in the Canadian West and whenever possible, or necessary, officials were quick to point out that fact.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, the romantic account of one popular historian who pointed out that the law of the range required a cowboy to "fight to defend himself, his boss's property, and the honour of the ranch,"<sup>59</sup> does not accurately describe the legal ethos of the Alberta ranching district. Such an account describes only a mythic west that persists in the United States, and even there it exists chiefly in "paper pulps, on the silver screen, in Frontier Days celebrations, and in regional chauvinism."<sup>60</sup>

The NWMP's objectives were twofold; first, to pacify the native populations of the West and thus prepare the area for ordered settlement; and secondly, to protect private property. The police were immediately "successful in negotiating with the powerful and much feared blackfoot Confederacy"<sup>61</sup> thus ensuring the peaceful transfer of land in the ranching district to the Dominion of Canada. The initiatives of the police -- although they were clearly not solely responsible for treaties -- with respect to peaceful land transfers meant that cattlemen who pushed into the foothills region in the late 1870's and early 1880's did not have to fight native peoples for ownership of the land. Pacification and

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<sup>58</sup> See for example Fort Macleod Gazette 6 December 1895.

<sup>59</sup> Grant MacEwan, Between the Red and the Rockies (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1952), p. 150.

<sup>60</sup> Sharp, p. 107.

<sup>61</sup> Breen, "The Turner Thesis and the Canadian West," p. 149.

paternalism befit the overall model of western land administration beginning with the Hudson's Bay Company and continuing into the twentieth century. Consequently, while there may have been some episodic acrimony between cattlemen and natives, there is not a pervasive 'conquest of the West' theme prevalent in Canadian history, as David Breen point out.<sup>62</sup>

The second material concern for police in the West was the protection of private property. Cattlemen were justifiably concerned with protecting their livestock against theft, thus police were dispatched as a safeguard against theft on one hand, and vigilante justice on the other. Heeding warnings from the American experience, Canadian officials moved quickly to establish legitimate law enforcement and thus undermine any efforts to organize private associations bent on administering the law as they saw fit.<sup>63</sup>

A high police presence in the Canadian West was more important as a matter of principle than as a matter of degree. Acting as arbiters of Her Majesty's legal authority, the NWMP "symbolized the government's full commitment to the region and functioned as the cutting edge of a pervasive and unrelenting metropolitan domination."<sup>64</sup> The military bearing of the force, complete with scarlet tunics, bespoke an unmistakable connection to British law and order. But the role of the force was more than one of benign symbolism, even more than one of proactive policing; its true role was as a harbinger of Canadian institutional and social development in the West -- a West that was considered remote only in distance. The police established Canadian institutions in the West before

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 149. I do not pretend to judge the merits or injustices of paternalism in the Canadian setting. For the purposes of this thesis, however, it is sufficient to say that such a system was used, for better or worse.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

any others could take root. They were so successful in doing so that, as one historian correctly put it, “they became a part of the fabric of Western identity.”<sup>65</sup> The NWMP came to symbolize how eastern traditions of law and order could be, and were, re-created in the West. As historian Rod Macleod notes:

To the Mounted Police the West represented an opportunity to create a new and better version of Eastern Canadian society; a chance to prove that Canadian institutions were fundamentally better than those of the United States. The Society they envisaged was to be orderly and hierarchical; not a lawless frontier democracy...<sup>66</sup>

So during the ranching period, no western law and order distinct from Canadian legal authority ever existed; a local, vigilante-type law never got established. For this reason alone, a wild and lawless cowboy image could hardly emerge in a legal ethos that both symbolically and officially represented the interests of eastern Canada and, by extension, Britain.

While transplanted legal institutions were perhaps the mainstay of the West’s unique development, social and cultural characteristics of ranch district inhabitants are also responsible for the region’s uniqueness. Settlers of the ranching frontier in Canada, primarily from middle to upper middle class English and eastern Canadian backgrounds, moved directly to the region and immediately established living patterns that paralleled

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<sup>65</sup> R.C. Macleod, “The North-West Mounted Police as Agents of the National Policy, 1873-1905,” in The Prairie West: Historical Readings, ed. R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer (Edmonton: Pica Pica Press, 1992), p. 226.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.

ones they had left behind. Alberta ranchers were not products of some epic journey by successive generations of would-be ranchers taking years to make their way westward and, in the process, gradually being altered by the frontier setting. Instead they were “representatives of the metropolitan culture of the east, or of the stratified society of rural Britain”<sup>67</sup> who hastened to reproduce their old world lifestyles and recreate the “comforts of civilized society.”<sup>68</sup>

Outward manifestations of transplanted Victorian lifestyle included large frame houses built by ranchers who, in the “throes of the Battle of the Styles,”<sup>69</sup> hoped to reflect, or even exaggerate, their own social prestige. Other obvious signs of ranchers’ Anglo-Canadian and English heritage are sporting pursuits, which included fox hunts, cricket, polo, and horse racing, and a common predilection for “Chinese cooks; governesses; schools in the ‘Old Country’ and eastern Canada; and winters in Calgary, Victoria, or Great Britain.”<sup>70</sup> Private social clubs, fraternal organizations, and regular gatherings for cultural enrichment were also part of ranch society in Alberta during the late 1880’s and early 1890’s. It seems clear that “socially approved patterns of behaviour prevailing in the Canadian East were extended to the West, with the physical environment only slightly influencing the experience.”<sup>71</sup>

What this brief glimpse of ranch society reveals is that it by no means developed in social and cultural isolation from established societies of the East and England.

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<sup>67</sup> Breen, “The Turner Thesis and the Canadian West,” p. 153.

<sup>68</sup> Dunae, *Gentlemen Emigrants*, p. 87.

<sup>69</sup> L.G. Thomas, “The Ranching Tradition and the Life of the Ranchers,” p. 20.

<sup>70</sup> Breen, “The Turner Thesis and the Canadian West,” p. 153.

<sup>71</sup> Sharp, p. 99.

Inhabitants of ranching communities showed an almost indefatigable desire to maintain old world social mores and a voracious appetite for cultural trappings such as newspapers, books, literary reviews and musical and theatrical entertainment. Even ranch hands who, for the most part, “boasted public school and university educations,”<sup>72</sup> spent much of their spare time in rich cultural amusements. In almost every aspect, Alberta ranching society remained in the tight grip of old world tradition. Ranchers did not comprise a “community of innovators seeking a release from the restraints of traditional ways, but a society attempting, and with general success, to recreate the kind of community in which they had been nurtured and had found congenial.”<sup>73</sup>

A third and final historical determinant of the nature and limited extent of the Canadian cowboy image pertains to the actual nature of ranching and ranching techniques in Alberta. In simple terms, the form of agriculture that developed in the foothills of southern Alberta in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries can be described as predominantly mixed-farming. Mixed farming is an agricultural enterprise that incorporates many aspects of livestock and cash crop production. A mixed farmer might, in addition to raising cattle, cultivate fields and seed them for grain production, put up hay for winter feeding, keep dairy cattle, and raise domestic livestock such as pigs and chickens for supplementary food supply and additional income. Ranching on the other hand, is renowned as “an industry that grazed cattle, and to a lesser extent, horses.”<sup>74</sup> “Pure Ranching” required cowboys whose job descriptions did not include any tasks

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<sup>72</sup> Dunae, *Gentlemen Emigrants*, p. 98.

<sup>73</sup> Breen, “The Turner Thesis and the Canadian West,” p. 153.

<sup>74</sup> Elofson, “Not Just a Cowboy,” p. 205.

associated with mixed-farming; they worked primarily in the saddle checking herds, and in branding parties or round-up crews. The cowboy's schedule was far less structured than that of the mixed farmer. Cattle grazing on the open range required very little human intervention for survival and except for branding and rounding up, very little proactive management. Mixed farmers' lives were far more structured, bound as they were by growing cycles and diversified livestock management.

Except for in the very early years of the ranching period, from the late 1870's to the mid 1880's, "pure ranching" accounted for only a limited percentage of agricultural enterprise in Alberta. The first major move away from "pure ranching" occurred in the late 1880's when many ranchers discontinued the practice of year-round grazing and began growing hay and green feed for winter feeding. Celebrated Chinook winds, about which they had all been told, could not be trusted to appear at critical times.<sup>75</sup> The only recourse they had against long periods of bitter cold and drifting snow was to raise feed and keep stock fenced-in to facilitate winter feeding. By 1888, haying and winter feeding were common practices in southern Alberta.<sup>76</sup> As a result, the cowboy's otherwise itinerant lifestyle became structured, his duties extended to "putting up hay and greenfeed, harvesting, storing and hauling grain and working a good deal on foot caring for animals both within their barnyards and outside."<sup>77</sup>

Ranchers' involvement in mixed farming went beyond raising hay and greenfeed for the winter. For smaller stockmen especially, keeping domestic animals such as dairy

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>76</sup> Kelly, p. 107 and p. 252.

<sup>77</sup> Elofson, "Not Just a Cowboy," p. 208.



cattle was nearly a necessity to “pay the bills between seasonal marketings.”<sup>78</sup> These stockmen often became involved in raising hogs and chickens, both of which provided additional income when beef markets slowed.<sup>79</sup>

Without question, the Alberta ranching experience included aspects of mixed farming for nearly every rancher. This is not an indictment of Alberta ranching, nor a commentary on its success; it was a simple fact of life on the Canadian prairies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is true that many ranchers owned impressive ranch operations with large herds, but very few survived exclusively as pure ranchers. That is, very few could avoid becoming involved in supplementary agricultural production and, as early as 1890, very few could allow their cattle to graze freely year round on the open range without being carefully managed.<sup>80</sup> For the Canadian cowboy this meant a lifestyle markedly different from that of his counterparts in Texas, Colorado, or Montana. He could hardly expect to roam free on the open range or generally enjoy the free and unconventional mode of existence for which cowboys are famous.<sup>81</sup> His farm duties kept him more or less tied to a year round schedule that was far less romantic than is usually assumed.

The fact that in Canada there did not develop an immensely popular cowboy image is attributable in a significant way to details of Alberta’s ranching history. It is apparent that despite sharing an economic enterprise with ranching districts in the United States, the

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 210.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 211. See also, Warren Elofson, “Adapting to the Frontier Environment: Mixed and Dryland Farming near Pincher Creek, 1895-1905,” Prairie Forum, 19 (Spring, 1994).

<sup>80</sup> Kelly, p. 251.

Alberta ranch industry was unique, and it should be seen as such. The most important aspect of Alberta ranching was its limited duration. If the ranching district of southern Alberta was ever to provide Canadians with a popular icon in the form of a cowboy, it would have needed to do so in the short span of two decades. Moreover, ranch society developed under the strict legal and administrative authority of a central government that was determined to ensure that western life was as ordered and controlled as any other -- an effort that was much appreciated by members of the ranching communities of southern Alberta. The cowboy, whose image represents a wild, free, and sometimes lawless lifestyle, was caught up and lost in this push for ordered society. The character of people who ranched in Canada also helped to determine the nature of images emerging from ranching circles: they remained devoted to old world social and cultural conventions. Finally, in Alberta, ranching involved a range of agricultural techniques. Ranchers almost always became involved in farming procedures that broadened their image beyond that of mere cowboy. Their image was shaped by, and placed within, the context of an idealized western society that image makers -- particularly those responsible for promoting the West -- hoped would compel potential, but undecided, settlers to move to Western Canada.

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<sup>81</sup> For an especially romantic account of cowboys see C.A. Dawson and E.R. Young, The Social Side of the Settlement Process, Vol VIII of Canadian Frontiers of Settlement, ed. W.A. Mackintosh and W.L.G. Joerg (Toronto: Macmillan Co., 1940), pp. 21-23.

## Chapter Two: "The Idea of the West": Western Society in Immigration and Travel

### Literature

Immigration literature and travel accounts are both renowned for their unrestrained promotion of the West's potential. While the latter may have done so unwittingly, they both promoted settlement by regaling readers with accounts of an ideal western society. Together, they established a body of literature devoted to promoting an image, or "idea," of the Canadian West as being totally civilized.

The "idea" of the Canadian West, as predicated in government and travel accounts, was based on commercial success, survival of Anglo-Saxon cultural, social, and political values, and moral virtue of settlers. These issues, in varying degrees, fed the rallying cry for western enthusiasts who forced an image of advancement on the West. While images and perceptions of the West had changed over the course of centuries as outsiders sought to impose a mental presence on the region,<sup>82</sup> by late in the nineteenth century, the idea of progress was the primary leaven in popular images of the West, especially those emanating from immigration literature and travel accounts.

The Canadian Federal government, local municipal governments, and private land companies promoted the West as a region with endless commercial and settlement potential. In the West, Canadian government officials saw their opportunity to expand Canada's resource based economy and extend her political jurisdiction from sea to sea.

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<sup>82</sup> See R. Douglas Francis, Images of the West: Changing Perceptions of the Prairies, 1690-1960 (Saskatoon: Western Prairie Producer Books, 1989).

For this to be possible, significant settlement of the region was necessary, and, before that could happen, people outside the region had to be given a sense of what they might expect from life in the Canadian West. Responding to this need, various government departments sponsored literature which promoted the West and its potential. The pervading tone of such material was sanguine. Settlement propaganda championed the West as a region with all the amenities of the East, but without the unsavoury aspects of large urban development -- crime, moral degradation, and intemperance. Western society was commonly portrayed as civilized and progressive; people respected democratic principles and social convention. Significantly, however, settlers of the West were not shown to respect such principles because of what the West had created in them rather, they did so because of social sensibilities they brought with them and imparted to the otherwise uncivilized region. There was little, if any, environmental determinism in government sponsored literature about the West. Social and cultural institutions, political practice, and morality, were all promoted as being organized according to English precedent.

Personal travel accounts, often prefaced with declarations about their objectivity, were no less insistent about the potential of the West. While visitors to the region often pointed out uniquely Canadian variations of old world ways, they nevertheless recognized that Western society was generally a crystallized version of English society. People of the West appreciated finer household appointments, travelers noticed, and they had particular respect for trappings of high culture such as classical music and literature. In fact, many Britons were quite self-congratulatory as they travelled around the British Empire

checking on the progress of their national progeny. There is more than a hint of cultural chauvinism in accounts of travelers who hastened to point out that English institutions were transplanted to the British Empire at large.

In each of these source types, images of Western society were so thoroughly driven by English values that frontier legends are largely overlooked. The image of the West as an orderly society with old world sensibilities served to chase cowboys, and most other reckless characters, out of Canadian popular imagery.

Life in the West, as portrayed by government propaganda, was comfortable and orderly. People who were apprehensive about settling in the West were told: "Don't be afraid when coming to Alberta you are about to bury yourself in a wilderness...In our daily life we are in no way behind the old cities of the east."<sup>83</sup> Such assurances were clearly aimed at disarming people's fears about isolation from major urban centres and the amenities they offered. Booster literature advertised the very best aspects of various towns, with emphasis always on how successful the town was and how much it had to offer new settlers. Among the many themes used by civic boosters in promoting western settlement were well organized town administration, and, as the town of Okotoks declared, a population comprised of "an intelligent well educated and progressive class of people."<sup>84</sup> Okotoks also boasted an electric light company, "a first class local and long

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<sup>83</sup> Glenbow Alberta Archives (GAI). PAM 971.23 C1512a, "The Advantages of Alberta," a statement by the Calgary Board of trade, 1892.

<sup>84</sup> GAI. PAM 971.239 O41o 2c, Okotoks: The Eldorado of South Alberta, issued by the Okotoks Board of Trade, nd.

distance telephone connection,”<sup>85</sup> and a C.P.R. telegraph service, all of which served to bolster local assertions that western life was not without outward signs of progress.

Since urban growth was emblematic of progress and, more importantly, a comfortable lifestyle, image makers endeavoured to show that the western cities were up to eastern and British standards. A 1913 pamphlet issued by the Department of the Interior pointed out that “[t]he marvelous pace of western towns has carried them to a stage of civilization which deserves study even more than it compels wonder.”<sup>86</sup> Herein is a statement crafted specifically to impress on outsiders the magnanimity of western urban growth. The word “civilization” is used to invoke a sense of security and stability not often associated with frontier settlements. Moreover, it appeased potential settlers’ fears that they may have to give up all trappings of high culture they enjoyed in England or in eastern portions of Canada. To impress on readers how little they would actually miss the ‘civilized East,’ image makers claimed that the West’s “cosy cottages surrounded with tastefully arranged gardens” testify to the “thrift of its people, and to the aesthetic taste and decorative art that invariably attends commercial prosperity.”<sup>87</sup>

Even outside the precincts of the cities, in Alberta’s ranching district, one could be assured of meeting civilized people. It was observed in one government brochure that “there are educated Canadians and Englishmen who help fill the void”<sup>88</sup> in intellectual and cultural life -- a void believed to be created by frontier isolation. Other pamphlets

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> GAI. PAM 630 c212 can (13156), Canada: The Prairie Provinces in 1912, issued by the Dept. of the Interior, 1913.

<sup>87</sup> GAI. Okotoks: The Eldorado of South Alberta.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

made similar statements about the civilized nature of life on an Alberta ranch: "The life on such a ranch is delightful, and in the remotest recesses of the foothills you may find a home as comfortable and well furnished as the cultivated Englishman can desire."<sup>89</sup> Household furnishings were not the sole indicator of a civilized lifestyle. Many, whose household appointments were minimal, were nonetheless educated and remained vigilant about staying astride current world events. One pamphleteer for the Department of the Interior recounted a story about touring a man's house and, despite there being very few extraneous furnishings, found that "there were plenty of other indications (such as The Times sent out daily from London) of the ideal so often praised and so seldom realized -- high thinking and plain living."<sup>90</sup> Finally, the above noted pamphleteer cited "Taste" as a suitable criteria for appraising the accomplishments of western provinces. Under this sub-heading the author stated blatantly that "it [taste] is approximately closer now than it was, owing to the greater number and improved quality of the immigrants constantly arriving."<sup>91</sup> The cultural chauvinism and racism of this type of imagery is glaring; successful social order, and taste, are obviously regarded herein as a function of an Anglo-Saxon populace. Indeed, an orderly, highly cultured society was seen as so thoroughly dependent on English settlement that towns could actually boast about having few foreigners. One brochure claimed proudly that: "[w]e are entirely free from the foreign element, that herd in communities and adhere to the language and customs of their forefathers."<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> GAI. PAM 971 C212 co (13081) The Country Called Canada, issued by the Dept. of the Interior, 1911.

<sup>90</sup> GAI. Canada: The Prairie Provinces in 1912.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> GAI. Okotoks: The Eldorado of South Alberta.

The West was heralded for reasons beyond refinement of its inhabitants; it was celebrated for success in reproducing, and even sometimes improving, old world philosophies and institutions. Liberal democracy was chief among transplanted philosophies that received much attention by boosters of the West. With respect to liberal democratic principles, one pamphlet boldly commented: "Alberta is the most progressive colony under the British flag."<sup>93</sup> Another tract reported that as for a system of government, the Canadian federal scheme provides for the "protection of the citizen in his life, liberty and property, and in the free exercise of religious opinions,"<sup>94</sup> as well as any other in the world -- perhaps even better. In a Booklet titled Canada, Clifford Sifton revealed that "Canadians believe they have an ideal constitution. Some one has said that the British system is the most perfect that the mind could conceive. Canadians possess it..."<sup>95</sup> This latter statement showed outsiders, whether accurately or not, that Canadians believed firmly in their system's ability to protect their personal liberties, and it elucidated and clearly celebrated the national and legal heritage whence that system came.

On the other hand, while protecting the personal liberties of its citizenry was a major goal of the Canadian government, ensuring that personal freedom did not disrupt the lawful course of society in general was an even greater concern for administrators, and image makers were expeditious in their efforts to point out that fact. For example, they spoke often about Canada's Indian policy, which afforded them an opportunity both to

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<sup>93</sup> GAI. "The Advantages of Alberta."

<sup>94</sup> GAI. PAM 971.23 N867r, Ranching and Farming in Alberta: The Great NorthWest, issued by the North Alberta Land Co., nd.

<sup>95</sup> GAI. 971 C212c, Canada, booklet issued by Clifford Sifton, Minister of the Interior, 1903.



praise the Canadian system, and to assure potential settlers that native populations would not interrupt orderly settlement. In a speech delivered at Winnipeg in 1882, Canada's Governor General, the Marquis of Lorne, spoke proudly that the transplantation of British legal principles, and their application in Indian policy, resulted in an orderly western society. He noted that Hudson's Bay Company traders inaugurated a system of fairness and kindness which initially pacified the Indians, and, when that system was passed on to the Canadian government, it ensured continued pacification of the Indian population. The Governor General stated his case thus:

Theirs [traders'] is one of the cases in which a trader's association has upheld the maxim that 'honesty is the best policy' even when you are dealing with savages. The wisdom and righteousness of their dealing on enlightened principles...[G]ave cue to the Canadian Government.<sup>96</sup>

The Indian population would not pose a threat to civilized settlement because 'enlightened' principles which governed Canadian society provided protection from their 'savage' ways.

These political principles extended beyond protection from Indians, however. In Canada, it was noted, one could expect protection from the unwanted and illegal expression of any citizen's personal liberty. Clifford Sifton wrote that "[l]iberty is only circumscribed by the rights of one's neighbor,"<sup>97</sup> serving notice that social order would

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<sup>96</sup> GAI. PAM 971.2 A692c, "The Canadian North-West," a speech delivered at Winnipeg by the Marquis of Lorne, 1882.

<sup>97</sup> GAI. Canada.

not be held hostage by individual rights and freedoms. Ultimately, local and national image makers promoted the idea that personal freedom, although a cherished part of British legal heritage, was always subservient to societal prerogative in the West, as anywhere else. The spirit of western legal order is aptly summarized in the following statement:

We have no room for people that have not the interests of Alberta at heart, who are not willing to maintain Canadian Laws and Institutions...[T]o be loyal to the Crown under which Canada has prospered in the past, and under whose fostering care Alberta hopes to be the banner province in this fair Dominion.<sup>98</sup>

There is, in this imagery, an unmistakable sense that a force greater than the individual presides over every society in the British Empire. The common good of British people and British ideals is paramount to any needs expressed by individuals. In this distinctly British political culture, the cowboy -- or at least the wild, legally unfettered, and individualistic manifestation of the cowboy featured in American popular imagery -- would be vastly "out of his element," as it were. Thus, as was observed in one pamphlet about ranching in the West, no such cowboy existed in Canada:

A modern cow-boy's or cow-puncher's (as he is more generally known in his own land) existence, is not by any means the reckless kind of a one so many youths fondly imagine it to be...in actual practice he is found to be very much like his brother man, neither more daring nor reckless, and, as a

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<sup>98</sup> GAI. Okotoks: The Eldorado of South Alberta.

general rule, a sober hard-working member  
of his own community.<sup>99</sup>

Under no circumstances could a cowboy archetype, which represents an untamed life of mischief and recklessness, emerge and become popular in Canadian imagery. The political consciousness that prevailed in the West favoured social cohesion and shunned disruptive behaviour. Hence, the cowboy of the Canadian West is portrayed as an individual who adhered to accepted standards of behaviour and contributed to the development of the West as a hard-working representative of British values.

Western Canada's institutions, like its political philosophies, were portrayed as paragons of enlightened British values. All the benefits of English institutions, as they were administered in the old world, could be reaped by any settler of the West. Educational opportunities offered in Western schools, for instance, were reported to be great: a pamphlet issued in 1912 reported that great strides had been made in the educational system of the West since its early days. The pamphlet noted that high schools and elementary schools "are dotted all over the land wherever a mere handful of children can be gathered together."<sup>100</sup> Moreover, schools struggled to be progressive, as this pamphlet indicated by commenting that "[t]he authorities are honestly trying not merely to imitate the methods of older lands, but to avoid the errors and to profit by the ideas of the greatest educational reformers."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> GAI. PAM 971.2 R 185, Ranching in the Canadian North West, 1903.

<sup>100</sup> GAI. Canada: The Prairie Provinces in 1912.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

Churches were similarly well established in the West, assuring potential settlers they were not moving to a land outside the reach of Christian doctrine. "We have churches of all denominations,"<sup>102</sup> boasted one statement by the Calgary Board of Trade, while another booklet published by the North Alberta Land Company noted that "[t]here is no state church in Canada. All denominations are represented and the utmost religious liberty prevails."<sup>103</sup> These comments revealed explicitly to potential settlers of the West how they were guaranteed spiritual association in the West. They also implied that Canada favoured religious liberty as a bequest of her latitudinarian heritage. That is, representation by many denominations provided settlers with the same range of choices they had in more populated areas of the East, or England. Significantly, although there was choice as to denomination, there was, of course, very little choice outside the Christian faith.

Visitors to the West, through their written travel accounts, upheld the image of the Canadian West as a site of civilized, orderly, and law abiding settlement. The 'Britishness' of its settlers and settlements was duly noted by many. One traveler claimed that the prominence of "Saxon blood gives evidence of liberty, civilization and manhood."<sup>104</sup> Other, perhaps less lofty accounts, were quick to point out the generally civilized and orderly fashion of western life. One visitor to Calgary reported enthusiastically that "[m]any of the ranchers are young Englishmen who find time to enjoy the zest of life; and polo, golf, cricket, football, race meets, etc., are no unimportant

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<sup>102</sup> GAI. "The Advantages of Alberta."

<sup>103</sup> GAI. Ranching and Farming in Alberta.

<sup>104</sup> Silas Alward, Then and Now: or, Thirty Years After (Saint John: Saint John Globe Publishing Co., 1910), p. 18.

feature of the life of Calgary.”<sup>105</sup> In her book entitled An Englishwoman in the Canadian West, Elizabeth Keith Morris expressed her disbelief at the degree of civilization she encountered during a trip to Edmonton. Morris, in a chapter facetiously titled “That Wild and Woolly West,” announced that : “[m]ore up to date than England, in some respects, is that ‘wild and woolly’ Canadian West.” She continued by declaring her surprise at the number of automobiles, “as smart and up-to-date as any to be seen in England...conveying well-dressed ladies or members of the sterner sex hither and tither.”<sup>106</sup>

Signs of modernity were not the only indicators used by travelers to convey an image of progress in the West; the idea of orderliness was also used to give a positive impression of the West. Institutionally, the West was regarded as well integrated and fully developed by travelers. Educational facilities were given, as one writer noted: “a great deal of consideration, and a great deal of money is spent in the cultivation of the young whom, their parents seem bound shall not grow up in ignorance and therefore they are not stingy in such matters...”<sup>107</sup> William E. Curtis, a special correspondent to the Chicago Record Tribune, took the case even further by arguing that the Canadian West’s orderly settlement was due to the very early establishment of churches and schools, as opposed to saloons, which were the first institutions established in American frontier

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<sup>105</sup> W.G. MacFarlane, Alberta and its Ranching: Interesting Scenes Depicting Wild Life in Alberta (Toronto: Souvenir Books, 1903), preface.

<sup>106</sup> Elizabeth Keith Morris, An Englishwoman in the Canadian West (Bristol: J.W. Arrowsmith Ltd., 1913), p. 17.

<sup>107</sup> George Henry Ham, The New West (Winnipeg: Canadian Historical Publishing Co., 1888), p. 128.

towns. Curtis summarized his argument for the orderliness of the Canadian West by stating that:

The people of Canada take great satisfaction in the fact that they have never had a 'wild west'. Such scenes of disorder and depravity as were common along the frontier in the United States have never been witnessed in the northwest territories...[T]here have never been hold-ups or train robberies, and the custom of shooting-up the town never has been introduced in this part of the world.<sup>108</sup>

Orderliness, a noticeable feature of the West according to the accounts of many travelers, was attributed to Christian temperance. The author of an immigration pamphlet in 1883 wrote that there is one thing which "will be highly conducive to the prosperity of the North-West, and that is the prohibition by the Government of allowing intoxicating liquors into the provinces...[T]he best effects are already visible from it."<sup>109</sup> Prohibition was not merely a religious issue; observance of prohibition by young settlers of the West was deemed necessary for successful growth --economic and moral-- of the Canadian West. A Scottish farmer named Hugh Fraser who traveled to the Canadian West in 1883 recorded solemnly that "this country --the North-West--is a poor place for lounging, lazy fellows, who are constantly on the scent for drink, and who, though they may be great talkers, are no workers."<sup>110</sup> Fraser continued by stating that any young man who made a

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<sup>108</sup> University of Calgary microfiche. Peel Bibliography. Fc 3237 p42 No. 2215, William E. Curtis, "Western Canada Life Free From Disorder," in Letters on Canada, 1911, p. 139.

<sup>109</sup> GAI. PAM 971.2 A418c, pamphlet titled Canada, Manitoba, The North-West Territories, and the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec, 1883, p. 21.

<sup>110</sup> GAI. PAM 971 F84H, pamphlet titled A Trip to the Dominion of Canada, (Halifax: The Morning Herald Office, 1883), p. 35.

habit of frequenting saloons stood a significant chance of not succeeding in anything he undertook.

Moreover, there is a prevailing sense in this imagery that morality grew out of a certain Anglo-Saxon naturalism. That is, the presence of English institutions and English people led naturally to righteousness, as if the very air they occupied was altered and morally charged by their presence. A prime example of this is a description by John Craig, manager of the famed Oxley Ranch, in his book Ranching With Lords and Commons. Craig recounts a story about an American cowboy who, at a particularly penitential moment, testified that he would stick to the righteous ways he learned in Canada and never again revert to the wild, bibulous times he experienced on the American range. The cowboy especially promised to triumph over his greatest vices, gambling and drinking: "I know I have been a fool, but for the future not one cent will any gambler or saloon get from me."<sup>111</sup> According to the story, this individual upheld his promise of temperance until he returned to Montana, where he quickly returned to his immoral ways, proving in the eyes of readers that Canada, under the influence of British values, fostered rectitude. Indeed, as one traveler urged: "[a]bove your heads still will float the Union Jack of England, in your walks abroad, in your very labour..."<sup>112</sup> Citizens of the Canadian West were seen to be under the direction of a great spectral force that provided for their spiritual and moral health.

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<sup>111</sup> John R. Craig, Ranching With Lords and Commons (Toronto: William Briggs 1903), p. 92

<sup>112</sup> University of Calgary microfiche. Canadian Institute of Historical Micro-Reproductions (CIHM). Fc 51 c3496 No. 30685. "15 Months Round about Manitoba and the North-West," a lecture of events from a trip by J.G. Moose, 1881.

A few travelers referred directly to cowboys, and not surprisingly, their portrayals of cowboys fit perfectly into the overall theme of the Canadian West as a fount of legal order and civilization. Writers moved hastily to show the contrast between Canadian cowboys and the romanticized 'desperado' of American fiction by making such statements as, "[t]he cowboy of the newspaper and the novel writer is a fraud."<sup>113</sup> In another account, one traveler claimed that several members of his party were romantically "looking forward, with not a little trepidation, to the sight of cowboys, in fringed, deer skin breeches, weighed down with ammunition and Winchesters," an image they soon realized was false when they saw that cowboys "were dressed like ordinary mortals."<sup>114</sup> A financial editor for the Financier and Bullionist from London England made the following statement about his experience with cowboys in the Canadian West:

let me say that the cowboy of romance is nearly as extinct as the buffalo...The cowboy, as such, lives now mainly in third rate melodrama and the pages of boys' serials. His lineal successor is more businesslike in his ways and his habits, and he dresses with less tendency for the eccentric...<sup>115</sup>

As a contrast to the outlaw image of American cowboys, travelers attempted to show that the Canadian cowboy was an exemplar of British values. Primarily, he extolled practical sagacity required to build a strong nation. Many British young men, one

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<sup>113</sup> GAI. PAM 636.08 M141i, Impressions of Pioneers, of Alberta as a Ranching Country, 1881, p. 2.

<sup>114</sup> Edward J. Devine, Across Widest America: Newfoundland to Alaska (Montreal: The Canadian Messenger, 1905), pp. 54-55.

<sup>115</sup> R.J. Barrett, Canada's Century: Progress and Resources of the Great Dominion (London: The Financier and Bullionist Limited, 1907), p. 200.



individual noted, “developed into that useful person the Canadian cowboy...[who was not confined] to the mere herding of cattle.” “[T]hese men,” the writer concluded, “could do any useful work.”<sup>116</sup> The cowboy is glorified for his part in developing the West as a civilized and commercially vital region -- a role he could scarcely have played if he was portrayed as robbing trains and going on drunken sprees.

The Canadian cowboy also had social grace that set him apart from his wild and uncultured American cousin. A visitor to Calgary told how, upon hearing “the sweet strain of Mendelssohn’s ‘Spring Song,’” he entered a hotel parlour expecting to see a young woman seated at the piano. Instead, he reported seeing a man who was “in appearance an uncouth cowboy, in reality an Oxford graduate,”<sup>117</sup> providing the music. This story illustrates how image makers juxtaposed their Canadian cowboy images with those of wild and “uncouth” cowboys, presumably from the American West. In their efforts to elucidate differences, image makers in turn provided an image of the Canadian cowboy as a well bred and well raised English gentleman.

Immigration literature and personal travel accounts produced an overall image of the West that focused on settlement, order, and law. For promoters of immigration, showing that the West offered commercial vitality, modern comforts, well cultured citizens, and thoroughly developed institutions, was the best way to attract people to the West. Clearly, any image that may have conveyed a sense of disorder, such as the cowboy, was either removed or configured to suit the “idea of the West” they were trying to promote.

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<sup>116</sup> Col. S.B. Steele, *Forty Years in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild and Stewart, nd.), p. 272.

<sup>117</sup> University of Calgary Microfiche. CIHM, Fc 51 c3496 No. 17446, Lee Meriwether, *The Great British NorthWest Territory*, 1894.

That “idea” included a region under the influence of British institutions and ideas which forced certain morals on citizens -- a region whose citizens upheld and embodied all virtues expected of British subjects. In travellers’ accounts, the Canadian West was depicted as very progressive, modern, civilized and orderly. Cowboys, when they were mentioned at all, were portrayed as being part of the same British ethos. They didn’t over-indulge in alcohol; they obeyed the law; they worked hard; and they were never ignorant of high culture and social refinement.

The themes used by immigration propagandists and travellers in promoting this “idea” of the Canadian West in general, as well as those used to describe the cowboy specifically, were all used in various degrees by other image makers who upheld and confirmed the image of a civilized West.

### **Chapter Three: A Conflict of Cultures: Resistance of American Cowboy Imagery in**

#### **Periodical Literature**

An image of the West as well ordered and settled by civilized people -- including the cowboys -- was especially upheld in periodical material which is defined here as newspapers, monthly magazines, annual publications, literary supplements, and scholarly journals. These provide an excellent aggregate view of the types of western Canadian and cowboy images that were disseminated around the turn of the century. Generally speaking, Canadian cowboys are portrayed in periodical literature as hard working, honest, law abiding and dedicated citizens. They extolled all personal virtues then deemed necessary to build a great nation in a great empire. They were often well bred, almost always well educated, and, as a result, committed to an ordered, progressive society.

Cowboys' virtues went beyond personal traits and consanguinity, however; they were regarded as the vanguards of British Imperial domination and the antithesis of American republicanism and parochial legal structures. As portrayed in periodical literature, the Canadian cowboy evinced an uncanny knack for remaining devoted to his cultural and social roots despite his relative isolation and slightly unconventional lifestyle. He is seldom portrayed as succumbing to localized patterns of behaviour such as civil disobedience and when he did, he was shunned. The actions of Canadian cowboys were often juxtaposed to those of "wild and woolly" American individuals who are romanticized in popular culture. The Canadian cowboy was one important symbol seized

upon by popular image makers hoping to illustrate the superiority of British legal, political and social structures; he was the prime exemplar of one side of an intense conflict of cultures being waged in western Canada.

To Canadian and British image makers of the time, the cowboy in Canada was a sensible, hard working, law abiding, young man with a respectable family background who happened to have a unique occupation, no more and no less. Portraying his image did not require any special appeal to romanticism or hagiography, a truism commonly noted by many people referring to the Canadian West. As one article in Saturday Night pointed out: “[t]he world has had too much of hero worship. It is a relic of barbarism...[A]ltogether out of keeping with modern intelligence and the democratic principles.”<sup>118</sup> Ruminations like this one reflected a prevailing sentiment in Canada that was against mythologizing cowboys. Satirists often made fun of ludicrous tales of heroism and bravado made famous by authors of dime novels in the United States. One individual, writing in the ‘Wit, humour, and Wisdom’ section of Massey’s Illustrated, suggested that an appropriate story line for a dime novel might read something like the following:

As he rode slowly over the trail the crack of a rifle was heard. Bill Dalton lay dead with a ball through his temple...The next morning Bill Dalton arose, and, though somewhat pained by the wound through his head, set forth to find his comrades.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Saturday Night (Toronto), 7 September 1889, p. 6.

<sup>119</sup> Massey’s Illustrated (Toronto), July 1894, p.108.

Literary apologists, although not nearly as sardonic, were quick to point out that Canadian cowboys did not fit into the formula of hero worship used by story tellers of the American West. Many people forestalled comparisons to American cowboys suggesting that it is a “mistake to suppose that the wild west cowboy of the novel or sensational story is the *genus homo* to be met with on Canadian ranches.”<sup>120</sup> Others stated with casual frankness that searching in Canada for a cowboy who matches the “picturesque sensationalism”<sup>121</sup> of Owen Wister’s novels would certainly be disappointed. The particular type of cowboys who inhabited ranching districts of western Canada, according to popular lore, were hard working individuals who deserved to be distinguished from ‘rustlers’ who belied their image.

Hero worship and romantic hyperbole were eschewed because each led to inaccurate portrayals of western Canada and clouded the ‘true’ image of cowboys, according to many image makers. A writer for one Calgary-based magazine lamented in 1890 that eastern people are misinformed as to the realities of the West. He regretted that discussions of ranches often turned to cowboys, “those glorious individuals who shoot you on sight if you happen to wink, or, if they happen to be in good humour, content themselves with producing five or six knives from their boots and entombing them in your gizzard.”<sup>122</sup> This, the author obviously felt, was an unfortunate misrepresentation since cowboys were to be celebrated for their virtues, and not implicated by some fallacious reputation popularized in the United States. One virtue worth recognizing was

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<sup>120</sup> Lethbridge News 3 April 1889.

<sup>121</sup> Lethbridge Herald, 23 August 1906.

<sup>122</sup> The Prairie Illustrated (Calgary), 3 January 1890, p. 11.

a strong commitment to his occupation. "The Cowboy Proper,"<sup>123</sup> as he was sometimes called, was a hard working individual first and foremost. He paid scarce little attention to the trappings that made his American counterpart famous. For instance, the Canadian cowboy was reported to dress in a manner that deviated from popular images portrayed in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. An article in The Colonist magazine noted:

how different they [Canadian cowboys] are from the befringed and long haired genus which we have so often read about. Why, these fellows have actually linen collars...They wear blue overall breeches and blue jumpers, and the only signs that betray their occupation are the big felt hats and, the lariats hanging in a neat coil from their saddles.<sup>124</sup>

Since the primary interest of the cowboy was caring for herds and tending to other agricultural needs, he had little time to promote the frivolous notion that he was some kind of idealized figure. Real cowboys were simply hard working individuals who happened to tend cattle as an occupation. Dressing in elaborate costume was a practice widely shunned because it served no practical purpose and it denoted an individual who cared a great deal about appearance and little for ranching and its associated duties. Popular sentiment in nineteenth century Canada maintained that there was no purpose in the West for slovenly types such as remittance men, who had only the inclination to play and none whatsoever to help build the country economically. As one Calgarian noted with regret: "we have had a large number of young Englishmen out here with some

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<sup>123</sup> Fort Macleod Gazette 14 August 1882.

<sup>124</sup> The Colonist (Winnipeg), January 1894.

money, but little brains and less love for labour. They dressed themselves on arrival in picturesque cowboy costume...[P]layed cards and gambled until the small hours in the morning.”<sup>125</sup> Unequivocally against this gratuitous show of romance, image makers always portrayed the cowboy’s attire as practical, befitting his working lifestyle. Indeed, one issue of the Manitoba and North-West Illustrated Quarterly contained a page of “Character Sketches of the North West,” (Appendix, figure 1) on which the cowboy is presented as almost indistinguishable from mountain prospectors, settlers, camp cooks, and trappers. The shape of his hat differs slightly from these others and he is holding a short length of rope, but he smokes a pipe, wears facial hair, and appears to be a hard working pioneer like these other figures. At the very least, there is nothing about the cowboy’s comportment that suggests he might be wild, lawless or raucous in any way.<sup>126</sup>

Canadian cowboys in popular imagery are especially notable for their abiding adherence to established law and order. Legal transgressions were perceived as characteristic of unruly societies and unbecoming an orderly settlement of respectful Britons. Public displays of disobedience and unruliness by obstreperous young desperadoes were dismissed as ridiculous aspects of American frontier folklore. Official efforts were made to promulgate an image of law and order in the West, a fact recognized by one professor at Queen’s University when he noted: “the Government assures the timid that ‘none of the dangers from revolvers and bowies-knives so common in the United States are known here.’”<sup>127</sup> This professor went on to point out that Britons were

<sup>125</sup> Nineteenth Century Magazine (London), April 1892, p. 633.

<sup>126</sup> Manitoba and North-West Illustrated Quarterly (Winnipeg), 1883, p. 4.

<sup>127</sup> Queen’s Quarterly, 11(Jul. 1895): p. 17.

sometimes awestruck by “the famous American desperado of romance...of which there are but few specimens in the country.”<sup>128</sup>

Insistence on lawful order of the West did not come from academics alone. The image of a Canadian West free from frontier type justice was broadcast to distant reaches of the British Empire. A correspondent with the London Times wrote an article giving his impressions of Alberta and the Macleod district. The article, reprinted in the Fort Macleod Gazette under the heading “The Alberta Cow Country: How it is Being Advertised,” reported the following:

The cowboy who can ride the fastest and ‘round up’ the largest herd is a popular hero in this part of Alberta...It must be stated to the credit of Alberta, however, that the roughness of manners displayed generally along the frontier is wanting here and that the cattle-men are kind and hospitable.<sup>129</sup>

Clearly, the Canadian cowboy was promoted world wide as a figure whose work ethic was celebrated and rewarded, but who never resorted to boorish mannerisms and unacceptable behaviour commonly associated with frontier settlement.

Images which emerged from within the ranching district itself were no less, perhaps even more, insistent on the rectitude of Alberta’s cowboys. An editorial in the Calgary Herald refuted the idea that Alberta’s cowboys were of the wild and unsociable ilk known to many in the United States. The author first painted a vivid picture of American cowboys swaggering through hotels impressing citizens with the idea that they were

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>129</sup> Fort Macleod Gazette 30 November 1886.



beings to be feared; they also rode their horses through town “war-whooping” and firing their revolvers. The author then declared that such a figure was not a true cowboy, as can be seen in Alberta. The author explained that he knew cowboys as a “daring, practiced, generous class, and would be sorry to associate them with such rowdyism.”<sup>130</sup>

Other local imagery was more vociferous in its defense of Canadian cowboy behaviour, especially as compared to the American figure. One local newspaper article stressed that while Calgary was a western town, it was never a western town in the culturally remote and legally disruptive sense. The article continued by stating that Calgary was “peopled by native Canadians and Englishmen, and contains citizens who own religion and respect law.”<sup>131</sup> Even more explicit was the article’s testimony that “[t]he rough and festive cowboy of Texas and Oregon has no counterpart here. The Genuine Alberta cowboy is a gentleman, and shuns bravado in a country which is free from danger either from man or beast.”<sup>132</sup>

This article provides a clear indication of what cowboy image Albertans wished to promote. Its obvious message is stated explicitly by force and implicitly by use of language that might be overlooked by a modern reader. The word “gentlemen,” for example, is pressed with meaning for the Victorian reader. While the current meaning of the word broadly refers to any man in general, in the nineteenth century its use was limited to describing men who were exceptional by nativity, wealth, religion, manner of dress, speech and education.<sup>133</sup> This article’s use of the word gentleman casts the

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<sup>130</sup> Calgary Herald 30 January 1884.

<sup>131</sup> Calgary Herald 12 November 1884.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> See Dunae, Gentlemen Emigrants, p. 3.

Canadian cowboy in a very specific light leaving no doubt that he is not to be confused with any figure who disregards law and acceptable social mores.

Finally, at such times that citizens in the West did overstep their legal boundaries, local media printed almost patriarchal admonitions against illegal behaviour. Following one outbreak of violence by a rowdy citizen, the Fort Macleod Gazette published the following statement:

The removal of signs and other petty depredations were about on par with the tricks of kids on Halloween night. The man's brain who sees anything smart or can find amusement in such tom-foolery should be preserved and exhibited as a freak in some third rate dime museum.<sup>134</sup>

Admonitions like this one were presumably designed to shame the offending individual and reveal to the readership that unruly behaviour was not only senseless but intolerable by society's standards. The message implicit in this article is that 'real cowboys' occupy their time with the practical needs of ranching and farming; they do not waste such time on drunken displays of recklessness.

Alberta cowboys and ranchers were not only portrayed as law abiding, they also enjoyed an image of gentility and social polish that ostensibly stemmed from their eastern Canadian and British upbringing. This reputation was certainly not overlooked by women in Omaha, Nebraska who evidently recognized the Alberta cowboy as a "gallant lover."<sup>135</sup> Again, the word "gallant" conjures up images of a dashing Oxford educated

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<sup>134</sup> Fort Macleod Gazette 28 July 1899.

<sup>135</sup> Medicine Hat News 14 April 1910.

gentleman with enviable social graces. The reputation had to do with more than an ability to attract women, however; it implied that a decidedly Anglo-Saxon society and cultural ethos was taking root in Alberta. Casual observers commented that there were plenty of “gently nurtured young Englishmen”<sup>136</sup> who were “most extraordinarily polite and agreeable.”<sup>137</sup> Canadian cowboys made time in their busy schedules for reading material such as “The Century and some of the other English reviews,”<sup>138</sup> a credit not usually given to their American counterparts. Others took their descriptions a step further, making claims like “[t]he aristocratic English element is quite strong here”<sup>139</sup> -- a claim that may be technically inaccurate with respect to actual titled aristocracy in the West, but nevertheless offered an overall sense of social structure.

As an important corollary of their upper class rearing, Canadian cowboys exercised control over social and personal vice. Many visitors to the West observed with satisfaction that intemperance had not taken over; in fact, as one writer suggested, a noticeable feature of Calgary was “the total absence of the liquor traffic, and to meet an intoxicated person is a rarity.”<sup>140</sup> The writer summarized his column with the stirring reflection that “there is a western freedom about it [Calgary] that is most agreeable since drunkenness is a feature which does not enter into the fait ensemble of everyday life.”<sup>141</sup> When visitors were not so kind, local authorities hastily defended their towns and districts in an obvious attempt to restore the good reputation of the West in the eyes of

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<sup>136</sup> Lethbridge News 26 June 1891.

<sup>137</sup> Fort Macleod Gazette 10 September 1897.

<sup>138</sup> Lethbridge Herald 27 July 1907.

<sup>139</sup> Fort Macleod Gazette 27 October 1892.

<sup>140</sup> The Nor'-Wester (Winnipeg), 29 April 1884.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

outsiders and local residents. When a Mr. Miller from Orillia Ontario visited Fort Macleod in 1892, he reported to his local newspaper that “most of the people in the West appear to be addicted to drinking, profanity and gambling,”<sup>142</sup> a report that greatly incensed residents of Fort Macleod. In response, the Fort Macleod Gazette raised questions about the kind of unsavoury company Mr. Miller must have kept while visiting, and indignantly remarked: “[f]ancy being branded as a nation of profaners, gamblers and drinkers, what an exceedingly nice reputation.”<sup>143</sup> Temperance, along with social grace and adherence to law, were the personal trademarks of Canadian cowboys as they were portrayed in periodical literature before and shortly after the turn of the century.

Portrayals of Canadian cowboys in the early period of the ranching frontier covered more than personal virtues. Images of cowboys and other western figures were often used indirectly or subliminally to provide a glimpse of western society in general. Purveyors of western imagery manipulated cowboy images to bolster their assertions that western Canada could not be perceived as a land of impudent desperadoes. The idea of establishing an orderly civilization in the West had great currency during the period, and image makers made attempts to assure outsiders that cowboys were not likely to undermine that idea. As proof, news articles provided pseudo-character profiles of cowboys for the benefit of accentuating positive traits of western living. One paper in particular printed a highly eulogistic description of the Alberta cowboy as an “honest, hard-working pioneer of civilization,” as opposed to the “good-for-nothing outlaw” who

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<sup>142</sup> Reprinted in the Fort Macleod Gazette 27 October 1892.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

is almost non-existent in Canada.<sup>144</sup> Settlers could expect to establish themselves safely in western Canada without encountering this latter character.

In fact, Canadian cowboys were perceived to be sympathetic to the idea of orderly settlement or at least willing to cooperate in its evolution. Western news media testified to this fact by stating unequivocally that “cowboys do not carry guns now or bowie knives, nor do they indulge in fringed buckskin shirts or crimson neckerchiefs.”<sup>145</sup> Even as early as 1882, when large open leases were not a year old, local officials recognized that the future interests of Alberta would best be served by settlement and diversified agriculture. To promote such a notion, news articles insisted that “Fort Macleod, Calgary and the districts surrounding these places were not the strongholds of desperadoes and cut-throats...[they] contain[ed] a good, sturdy, hard-working class of frontiersmen.”<sup>146</sup> This emphasis on civilized living and usurpation of wild cowboy imagery did not go unnoticed in literary circles. Saturday Night magazine featured an article in 1888 entitled “Trouble For The Future Boy,” in which the author admitted that subjects for juvenile adventure stories are “ridiculously scarce.” He continued by saying that “the ruffian cowboy is being so unkindly muzzled by advancing civilization, as to render him perfectly useless for the purpose of romance and juvenile fiction.”<sup>147</sup> Comments like this served as proof that people recognized and responded to image campaigns; they also served to perpetuate the image that western Canada was not a hotbed of outlaw activity. An intense push to

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<sup>144</sup> Fort Macleod Gazette 28 July 1899.

<sup>145</sup> Lethbridge Herald 27 July 1907.

<sup>146</sup> Fort Macleod Gazette 24 August 1882.

<sup>147</sup> Saturday Night (Toronto), 15 December 1888, p. 6.

promote an image of civility in the West, sometimes carried to extreme lengths such as referring to “the more civilized cattle,”<sup>148</sup> played a central role in early western imagery.

Broad based agriculture was an indispensable part of developing and promoting a civilized and orderly society. Academics agreed along with government officials like Clifford Sifton, that a diversified economy and the resulting population growth would greatly improve the West’s position in the Dominion of Canada. It was pointed out that “ranching alone will support a very limited population”<sup>149</sup>; therefore, ranching needed to be supplemented with alternate forms of agriculture. The particular cowboy image that grew out of this trend and, in fact, the one exploited to further promote it, was a syncretized form of horseman and Arcadian settler. The cowboy was stripped of all popular American aspects, violence and unlawfulness for instance, and reformulated as a hard working “pioneer of civilization.” To his image was added an element of agricultural prowess which made him a multi-talented and multi-dimensional character. Cowboys were suddenly responsible for a range of ranch and farm type duties which detracted not a little from the romance of the occupation. Gordon Matthews, Secretary of the Western Stock Growers’ Association, confirmed changes in ranching when he indicated that “new and improved methods have arisen; the old happy-go-lucky, let-her-go-Gallagher style of running things has given way to careful businesslike management, practical from the word -- Go.”<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Fort Macleod Gazette 9 February 1893.

<sup>149</sup> Queen’s Quarterly, II (Jan. 1895): p. 191.

<sup>150</sup> Fort Macleod Gazette 17 January 1901.

The Canadian cowboy, like most endangered species, suffered mainly from loss of habitat. As realities of western ranching changed, Canadian and British people had to accept that an image of the Canadian cowboy more closely resembled a farmer than a free, unfettered rangeman -- even less so a lawless desperado. People seemed not only to accept this fact, but consumed such images with great relish. Impressions of the West as a great site for agricultural settlement were favoured, obviously in the interest of promoting dominion and imperial expansion. The Medicine Hat Times, for example, reported that “[t]here is, perhaps, no distinct industry that will in the near future, become more lucrative, in this part of the country than that of mixed farming,”<sup>151</sup> a sentiment echoed by Rev. James Buchanan in the Glasgow Herald. Rev. Buchanan wrote about the unlimited natural bounty that could be enjoyed in Alberta by any hardworking individual or family. Calling Alberta “the banner province of the Dominion,” Buchanan lauded its luxuriant grasses and rich soil, both of which disposed the area favourably to beef production, extensive grain growing, dairy production, and sundry livestock raising.<sup>152</sup> For Buchanan and others like him, using the province’s rich natural resources wisely meant expanding agricultural production beyond the mere raising of beef, lest Canada not realize its full potential. Moreover, as long as mixed agriculture was viewed as the optimum way to develop the West, and cowboys were clearly not commonly associated with mixed farming, it followed naturally that a Canadian cowboy image could never achieve popularity. The image that inevitably grew out of this period was that of a generic rural

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<sup>151</sup> Medicine Hat Times 4 March 1886.

<sup>152</sup> Reprinted in The Glowworm (Toronto), July 1891, p. 8.

figure who could turn his hand to practical needs of cereal farming, raise animals, and could even ride horse and rope cattle. He was a central, albeit diverse, figure in the civilized development of a region that was noted to be “on the very threshold of man’s estate, verging now, right today, on the horizon of life.”<sup>153</sup>

Any success at developing an orderly and civilized society in the West was not to be understood as isolated. The West was perceived as a region within a larger dominion, and an even larger empire. Thus, a measure of outside control was maintained over the area and its images. Champions of the West and its potential were tireless in their efforts to propagate a western image that not only favoured civilization, but also emphasized the global context of Canada’s western civilization. The idea that the West stood as “the frontier outpost of the Dominion”<sup>154</sup> was second in popularity only to the sentiment that the Canadian West was actually the future centre of a great empire.

Defenders of the British Empire seemed to find hope in the Canadian West for a new imperial direction. Many would have agreed with the claim that “[w]here the buffalo roamed in millions in the far Canadian West there is room for a mighty empire.”<sup>155</sup> Articles appeared in popular English magazines describing the natural beauty of the Canadian landscape, and the fecundity of its soil. “The real and abiding magnificence of this heritage,” one writer insisted, “lies in the fact that in the Dominion is found the largest and finest area of wheat-producing land, not only in the Empire, but in the world.”<sup>156</sup> Britons and Canadians alike were caught-up in a mild frenzy of imperial

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<sup>153</sup> Fort Macleod Gazette 9 February 1893.

<sup>154</sup> Lethbridge News 6 April 1887.

<sup>155</sup> Fort Macleod Gazette 24 November 1893.

<sup>156</sup> The Nineteenth Century (London), August 1903, p. 314.



advancement as other burgeoning nations such as Russia threatened to erode British dominance. This frenzy resulted, in part, in unprecedented pressure to develop the West. One article concluded that, among many others, “the main factor in the rise of Canada into notice is the Imperial sentiment of the English people.”<sup>157</sup>

Canada was not only conceived under a shroud of imperial sentiment, it was similarly nurtured under the auspices of British aspirations and national pride. English people experienced a sense of euphoria afforded by being able to witness the West’s almost frenetic pace of growth from bareness to established settlement -- a trend that was likely lost or faded in the public memory of Britons who experienced similar growth several generations earlier. Certain indicators of imperial success, namely technological advances, were particularly appreciated and celebrated by the English: “[b]y the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway it cannot be denied that the appetite of the English for Imperialism has been amply catered for.”<sup>158</sup> The English could monitor Canada’s success at colonial exhibitions designed to showcase advances in agriculture, manufacturing and culture. Advertisements were printed in local newspapers inviting people to contribute to the “Grand Colonial Exhibition” and “put Canada in her true place as the premier colony of the British Empire.”<sup>159</sup> Whereas British Imperial sentiment, complete with its obsession for order and material success, had initiated western development, such sentiment was continually refueled by constant assurances of success from within Canada.

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<sup>157</sup> The Colonist (Winnipeg), April 1894, p. 147.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>159</sup> Advertisements like this were printed regularly in all papers of southern Alberta. This particular one was appeared in the Medicine Hat News in 1886.

A large component of the West's imperial orientation was an avowed resistance of American influence, especially in matters of law and order. In a typical show of British chauvinism, the Secretary of the Western Stock Growers' Association commented on the great service that the NWMP had provided when:

[t]hey flew the banner of liberty and justice, the flag of England...it was their mission to oust the whiskey trader and ban him from the land; to formulate laws and ordinances and generally to establish an organized system of good government.<sup>160</sup>

British law and order was obviously favoured over what Britons perceived as localized and verily ineffective enforcement in the United States. Settlers of the Canadian West were released from the grip of American influences generally, especially "that fearful scourge of whiskey, formerly so freely introduced among them by unscrupulous traders from across the International Boundary"<sup>161</sup> British superiority in legal matters was so widely promoted that it was even heralded by American journalists who encouraged fellow countrymen to take note. A columnist for the Chicago Interior claimed that "you will not find an outlaw, or hear of a case of lynching"<sup>162</sup> anywhere in the Canadian West. Moreover, according to this columnist, when in the Canadian West, "[y]ou are made to realize that you are in the land of law and order, and that your person and property are under the care of the commonwealth."<sup>163</sup> Indeed, for many, the thought of losing this sense of belonging in the British Empire was not only unimaginable, but impossible,

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<sup>160</sup> Fort Macleod Gazette 17 January 1901.

<sup>161</sup> The Emigrant (Winnipeg), April 1887, p. 265.

<sup>162</sup> Fort Macleod Gazette 12 February 1894.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*

since “[l]oyalty to Britain and British institutions, is not a mere sentiment among Canadians. It permeates the whole national life of the country, moulding our young institutions and controlling the destinies of our young nationality.”<sup>164</sup>

Imperial association not only affected the general course of western development, it influenced how popular images from the area were configured. The cowboy’s image was moulded according to a sentiment that favoured British legal patterns. He did not shun the law as his counterparts did in American communities which were said to be “relapsing into that barbarism in which private revenge becomes the miserable substitute for public justice.”<sup>165</sup> Instead, his image was used to portray him as a great facilitator of national and imperial strength. The Dominion Illustrated summarized this best when it printed a picture of a Canadian cowboy with a caption that read: “[B]old and skillful riders, they are invaluable on stock farms, and in the performance of their duties do work of great value to the development of the country.”<sup>166</sup>

Periodical imagery of Canadian cowboys is limited for the period of this study. Moreover, a disproportionate amount of periodical imagery about cowboys came from within the ranching area itself in the form of local newspapers. Newspapers and magazines outside the area seemed so caught up in settlement rhetoric that cowboys seldom graced their pages. References to the West from outside sources were almost uniformly about its potential as a site for mass settlement and diversified agriculture, as the previous chapter notes. There was no place in the imagined West for peripatetic

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<sup>164</sup> Lethbridge News 24 March 1891.

<sup>165</sup> Fort Macleod Gazette 2 February 1894.

<sup>166</sup> The Dominion Illustrated (Toronto), February 1891, p. 187.

cowboys; there was room only for hard working settlement-oriented farmers. Besides, if Canadians and British people wanted to romanticize about unrestrained cowboys riding across open plains, or riding into a small frontier town bent on drinking whiskey all night and causing trouble, they had a ready-made image in the American West.

The Canadian manifestation of a cowboy, when portrayed in periodical literature, was a unique creation of the culture from which he emerged. He exemplified all personal virtues expected of a well bred young Briton. He was hard working, tough when necessary, and committed to his occupation. At the same time, he was a genteel individual who could discuss English reviews and appeal to women as a "gallant lover." Even more exemplary was his respect for established law and order. The Canadian cowboy is portrayed as a representative of imperial law who, even when living in a frontier town, never went the way of American cowboys.

These personal virtues were seen as the result of, and crucial for, the development of a civilized, that is British, society in the West. Administration and control of western society depended on these characteristics, especially respect for lawful authority. A major part of a settled and orderly society was agriculture, which meant that the cowboy image would change according to occupational demands placed on him.

Finally, the Canadian cowboy was configured in periodical literature according to his place in a larger imperial context. He was unique by occupation only slightly; otherwise, he extolled all personal virtues evident in many popular British figures such as explorers and soldiers. Most importantly, his imperial connection gave him a sense of cultural lineage which is especially evident in his resistance of American frontier type justice. The

cowboy's behaviour is guided by a pre-existing legal system, not by some individually inspired and personally exercised system of frontier justice. On this point in particular, British and Canadian image makers were very critical of American cowboy ideology. Cultural conflict, as evinced by local news reporters who avowedly denied the existence of American patterns of behaviour in Canada, was the root of Canadian cowboy images in periodical literature.

#### **Chapter Four: Not a Dime Novel West: Canadian Cowboys in Popular Literature**

Cowboy images in Canadian popular literature, like those in periodical literature, can be measured for their resistance of the American figure. For the purposes of this chapter, popular imagery refers to that which is taken from novels and short stories, and from Calgary Exhibition and Stampede advertisements. In the former of these especially, there is a noticeable contrast between the American cowboy image and the cowboy represented in Canadian fiction. Furthermore, not only are the formal characteristics of Canadian and American cowboys different, they occupy markedly different proportions of the literary traditions of these respective countries. In the United States, the cowboy is a mythical and literary phenomenon all his own, while in Canada the cowboy is integrated in the larger context of British social ideology.

Exhibition and Stampede Advertisements are especially useful for two reasons; first, there is no question that many people saw these posters and were exposed to their message; and because the images these posters feature were unapologetically explicit, making them relatively simple to analyze. Posters, in this case about the Calgary Exhibition, make categorical representations of the West and its inhabitants. With the exception of a few posters and advertisements dedicated specifically to the Stampede, Calgary Exhibition posters maintained the idea that the West was progressive and civilized as it had been portrayed by immigration propagandists for years.

Cowboy ideology and mythology has played only a limited role in Canadian popular imagery by comparison to its central position in American culture. The cowboy image

has figured so prominently in American mass and popular culture that he can never be discussed outside the context of culture and, conversely, a study of American popular culture in general could never exclude the cowboy. Historians and sociologists researching American culture have made a long study of the cowboy icon and how it has survived, and even grown in popularity, in the United States over the past century and a half. William W. Savage writes in his book titled The Cowboy Hero that, historical experience of cowboys notwithstanding, the cowboy is at root a myth, and such a myth should be scrutinized by sophisticated historical methodologies as much as any other historical phenomenon. Savage notes how historians' efforts to revise the historical record and show the 'reality' of western life appeal only to other historians, and their efforts do nothing to change popular ideas about the wild and rugged frontier.<sup>167</sup> The romantic, Hollywood version of the cowboy remains in tact and, in fact, the cowboy's image has gone so much beyond his occupation that a whole range of indices, other than riding horses, are now supposed to represent cowboyism in America. "He [the cowboy] represents rugged individualism in beer commercials, unadorned masculinity in cigarette advertising, and ultimate heroism in fiction and film."<sup>168</sup> All these, collectively or separately, are important elements of the cowboy archetype and each contribute to Americans' affinity with the figure. Moreover, cowboy ideology is so suffused throughout American popular culture that almost every American male can identify in

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<sup>167</sup> Savage, pp. 4-5.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

himself some or another cowboy trait -- a fact that makes cowboy imagery so effective in advertising.

In American popular literature especially, the cowboy myth is exploited by writers and, in turn, beloved by readers. American writers of the famed 'dime novel' variety, first made the cowboy a central figure of adventure stories in the latter third of the nineteenth century. The cowboy, following his fictional progenitors, bushmen and plainsmen, quickly became a mainstay in popular stories about the untamed West.<sup>169</sup> While early literature of this type may not have been sophisticated from a literary point of view, it was consumed voraciously by readers, particularly from the East, who were enamoured with the idea of life on the open range away from the scourge of urban industrial growth, widening social cleavage, and the ever tightening grip of legal authority.<sup>170</sup>

Western adventure stories became even more popular as writers imposed various literary formulae on them. These formulae cast the cowboy as a wild, unpredictable individual who interprets the law himself and metes out his own brand of punishment. Perhaps the best known Western novel, and the first major work to construct formulaic boundaries for the genre, is Owen Wister's The Virginian. Written in 1902 and set in Wyoming, Wister's novel climaxed with a shoot-out between the story's protagonist, and an outlaw named Trampas -- a climax that became standard in Western stories, both written, and on screen, for years after. More importantly, the hero engages the outlaw in the shoot-out despite being beseeched by his sweetheart to avoid the confrontation.

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<sup>169</sup> For an excellent discussion of this progression see Jones.

<sup>170</sup> See Ibid.



Ultimately, this incident “in which a man defies a woman’s wishes by fighting with another man, and wins, without alienating her -- is central to the Western genre as a whole.”<sup>171</sup> Indeed, it has been noted that the standard Western formula has appealed to popular audiences more than books whose authors attempted to redefine the prescribed formula. In her book, Selling the Wild West, Christine Bold found that novelists respecting the standard Western formula were considerably more popular than other, more technically proficient, authors. She concluded that, as a simple fact of American literary history, “the reading public has failed to respond in largest numbers to those works which subvert the Western formula.”<sup>172</sup> To put the case more simply, when images of western heroes, in this case cowboys, are presented explicitly, bound by literary formulae, and recycled in countless indistinct novels, the reading public is happy.

Cowboys are patently less obvious in fiction about the Canadian West. There is no independent genre of Canadian literature devoted exclusively to the cowboy; his role in popular stories about the West is incidental. This is to say, the Canadian cowboy usually appeared, when he appeared at all, as a minor character in western adventure stories. Of course, this is not to suggest that tales of great adventure were not written and set in Western Canada. Many were. One short story writer named Cy Warman was once compelled to comment on the great literary inspiration offered by the Canadian West. Warman told a reporter in 1904 that “Western Canada is the best place on the American

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<sup>171</sup> Jane Tompkins, West of Everything: The Inner Life of Westerns (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 131.

<sup>172</sup> Christine Bold, Selling the Wild West: Popular Western Fiction, 1860-1960 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 168.

continent to collect material for short stories.”<sup>173</sup> Other authors obviously felt likewise; writers such as Ralph Connor, Robert Stead, and R.M. Ballantyne set their enormously popular stories in the Canadian West. In Britain, readers were regaled with stories about the wilds of Canada by writers like Argyll Saxby, John Mackie, G.A. Henty, and W.H.G. Kingston. Through the pages of juvenile magazines like Chums and The Boy's Own Paper, young readers were exposed to no small amount of fiction set in Canada.<sup>174</sup> All these authors and stories notwithstanding, the fact is that the cowboy was not used as a major character with any consistency by writers who set their stories in the Canadian West. Many of their stories were about other popular western figures like trappers, voyageurs, Mounties, pioneers, missionaries, and prospectors. To be sure, even though cowboys did appear in some Canadian stories, they did not occupy the entire literary careers of Canadian novelists as they did some American writers such as Zane Grey.

That the cowboy did not become a major figure in fiction about Canada is a reflection of different literary trends in Canada and the United States. Whereas Dime novel Westerns about wild and free cowboys in the United States are regarded as reactionary, that is reacting to social angst associated with urban growth,<sup>175</sup> Canadian stories actually imposed a sense of order and progress on their characters. They were didactic in tone and often sanguine in their content respecting imperial growth and ordered settlement of the West. Stories about the Canadian West were not about escapism; on the contrary, they

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<sup>173</sup> The Weekly Albertan (Calgary), 3 August 1904.

<sup>174</sup> R.G. Moyles and Doug Owsram, Imperial Dreams and Colonial Realities: British Views of Canada, 1880-1914 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p. 38. The authors claim that in the first fifteen years of Chums' existence, Canadian stories appeared in approximately one hundred of its weekly issues.

<sup>175</sup> See Jones.

expressed strong sentiments about civilized and ordered society. In a sense, the myth of the West and frontier ideology seems not to have inspired authors writing about the Canadian West reflecting, as many of them did, their culturally driven urge for imperial progress.<sup>176</sup> As literary critic Leslie Fielder notes:

Ironically, the dream of the West as escape from culture, eternally renewed by the unending flight from schoolmarms, mothers, wives etc...[h]as not, as far as I'm concerned, continued to move the imagination of eminent Canadian Makers of fiction...<sup>177</sup>

In any case, the American West was the true fount of cowboyism in literature, specifically, and popular culture in general. British and Canadian writers had a ready made setting for stories about cowboys; they used the Canadian West differently. For them, the Canadian West was an idyllic natural setting, sublime in its pristineness but perched on the edge of great influence from the outside world. Being less overtly concerned with boosterism than writers of periodical literature, authors of fiction were more passive in their assurances that the Canadian West was a future site of imperial greatness, but it was nevertheless implied in their works. On the rare occasions when writers did use the cowboy in a Canadian story, they used him as a tool of Anglo-Saxon dominance and British order.

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<sup>176</sup> Edward Said provides an excellent study of how literary and artistic works reflect and reinforce the imperial endeavour in his book, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993). Also, localized resistance to the imperial burden which Said identifies, is not evinced in Canada this early.

<sup>177</sup> Fielder, "Canada and the Invention of the Western," p. 97.

John Mackie was a former Mountie-turned-writer in the late nineteenth century. His novels tell hair raising-stories about shoot-outs with Indians and bracing horse chases across the open prairie under such titles as The Devil's Playground, The Heart of the Prairie, and Sinners Twain. Mackie made more reference to cowboys in the Canadian West than most of his literary contemporaries; thus, his stories are perhaps most useful for a search of cowboy imagery. Despite writing stories about cowboys, however, Mackie's descriptions of them are regrettably short. In one case Mackie described "a typical old-timer" in the West by stating that "[h]e wore an unplucked beaver cap, a buckskin shirt...and a pair of high-heeled cowboy boots of the orthodox pattern...he was a hunter, trapper and rancher."<sup>178</sup>

Indeed, Canadian cowboys were often described by their differences from popular American cowboys. In The Heart of the Prairie, John Mackie describes a group of cowboys as a "hard-working and steady lot." These men wore leather overalls and carried revolvers but, as for mannerisms, they were to be distinguished from the celebrated characters of American style fiction. Mackie writes that it is "only the sham, shoddy article who preys like a parasite upon civilization in the little frontier towns, and the cowboy of penny dreadfuls, who indulge in unaccountable and indiscriminate shooting."<sup>179</sup> Even when authors do write about individuals who, primarily owing to temporary poor judgment, stray away from acceptable patterns of behaviour, they insist, almost apologetically, on the rarity of such occurrences. In George Surrey's, An Outlaw

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<sup>178</sup> John Mackie, Sinners Twain: A Romance of The Great Lone Land (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1895), pp 13-14.

<sup>179</sup> John Mackie, The Heart of the Prairie (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1890), P. 91.

on the Plains, a group of young ranch hands make a trip to Calgary but, the author insists, their program of activities was quiet and simple. They were by no means intending on engaging in:

the kind of riotous dissipations fictionists and others have painted in such vivid colours as taking place in the cow towns of the western United States when an outfit of punchers makes holiday. Canada doesn't approve -- has never approved -- of the high spirited young men...painting the town a gaudy vermillion, the taking of pot shots at citizens...[a]nd the other similar delights dear to the heart of the United States cowboy.<sup>180</sup>

Clearly, in this one excerpt, one witnesses a complete disapproval of such riotous behaviour. The author leaves no doubt as to his intended message: wild behaviour is shunned, even in fiction, because it is not deemed appropriate for otherwise well-behaved young men. Surrey repeats his message when he writes that acts such as discharging a Colt 45 revolver in the street may well be beloved in magazines, but they are a "distinct novelty to Canada, then or at any period."<sup>181</sup>

The revolver, as portrayed in most novels about the Canadian West, was a tool to be used primarily in the regular course of performing cowboy duties. At the very most, it was donned to "give just the touch of romance"<sup>182</sup> some writers wished to impart to their stories, but it was seldom used as an implement in wild and violent outbursts. The

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<sup>180</sup> George Surrey, An Outlaw on the Plains (New York: Herbert Jenkins Limited, 1922), p. 10.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>182</sup> Robert Stead, The Cowpuncher (Toronto: The Musson Book Company, 1918), p. 2.

popular American idea that cowboys occupied much of their time in the presence of weapons was, according to John Mackie, a major reason why cowboys earned a wild image. He claims that:

[t]o the average reader of the six-penny novel, he [the cowboy] is a species of walking arsenal and circus rider knocked into one; who rides his horse into bar-rooms and over bars; who shoots on the slightest provocation.<sup>183</sup>

On the contrary, the true cowboy, the one used by Mackie in his stories of the Canadian West, “is a law-abiding citizen enough...often an apt student of Nature, and a reader when he gets the chance.”<sup>184</sup> The cowboy of the Canadian West did not avoid work, nor did he use his occupation as an excuse to live a “nomadic, shiftless life [of] card sharpening and a little horse-stealing.”<sup>185</sup>

Differences between American and Canadian cowboy images go beyond general good behaviour and responsible use of firearms. An element of high birth rite and upper class rearing was pronounced in stories about the West, especially with reference to cowboys. The protagonist of Argyll Saxby’s story, The Taming of the Rancher, was a perfect example of how frontier ruggedness and aristocratic upbringing come together in a single character, with the latter influence ultimately prevailing in defining the character. Dick Westgarth was a rancher who, although not uncommon at one time in Canada, was said to be fortunately disappearing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Westgarth

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<sup>183</sup> John Mackie, The Devil’s Playground (New York: F.A. Stokes, 1894), p. 89.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

is described as belonging "...to the class popularly known as 'tough' but in this case, the toughness was a superficial deposit upon a substratum of refinement, the latter being a foundation laid by early education in the Old Country."<sup>186</sup> In other words, this character was as tough as necessary given his occupation, but his unmistakable refinement and mannerisms were the antecedents of the eventual change he would undergo -- as suggested by the book's title.

Refinement and high-class mannerisms defined Canadian western figures as they were portrayed in literature. John Mackie described one member of the NWMP as a fellow who, despite belonging to a "profession that has at all times to be prepared to face danger," had an "air about him that bespoke a training which the cowboy...[c]ould not lay claim to."<sup>187</sup> Other characters were also cited for their upper class backgrounds. In Comrades Three, Argyll Saxby described young Fred Calvert as a man who may have dressed in typical cowboy garb, but "there was that in the blue of his eyes that reflected the blue seas that thrash the rugged shores of his native home. He was a young Cornish giant...[c]lothed in cowboy garb that added to his manliness without burying his nationality."<sup>188</sup> Calvert's friend and fellow countryman, Stewart Edyvean, was described in similarly sententious terms. Edyvean was also dressed in:

"suitable garb of the West, and there was no mistaking the sturdy set of his figure, the honest blue eyes...[T]here was no mistaking these for evidences of a thoroughly British boy, bred in an English school that had

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<sup>186</sup> Argyll Saxby, The Taming of the Rancher (Toronto: The Musson Book Company, 1909), p. 7.

<sup>187</sup> Mackie, The Devil's Playground, p. 136.

<sup>188</sup> Argyll Saxby, Comrades Three: A Story of the Canadian Prairies (Toronto: The Musson Book Company, 1893), pp. 12-13.

painted him from head to foot with the sign  
'gentleman'.<sup>189</sup>

Not surprisingly, as in other types of imagery, law and order was highly respected by characters in Canadian Western literature. Moreover, law and order in the Canadian West is not a frontier phenomenon as it was often perceived to be in the American West. The Canadian West was regarded as being under the grip of British law, free from personalized justice and retribution. When a young fugitive from justice named Michael Kalmar, was finally caught by tenacious Canadian police in Ralph Connor's The Foreigner, it was noted that he "had sinned against British civilization, and would now have to taste of British justice."<sup>190</sup> This line reflected the prevailing attitude that a transgression of British law, even in the relatively open and isolated Canadian West, was taken very seriously. Furthermore, a local offense was not local in principle, it symbolized an offense to the entire British Empire and for that reason alone, could not be tolerated.

Mounted policemen are to Canadian Western fiction what cowboys are to American fiction. That is, their image is as ubiquitous in stories about the West as cowboys are in Western American fiction. They are not, however, simple literary replacements for cowboys just because, in a generic way, they are both western adventure figures. On the contrary, the Mountie, rather than being a parallel to the cowboy, is actually his antithesis. But, with the general dearth of imagery about Canadian cowboys in popular

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., pp. 13-14.

<sup>190</sup> Ralph Connor, The Foreigner: A Tale of Saskatchewan (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1909), p. 105.



fiction, the Mountie and his image can offer a glimpse at what type of imagery writers were hoping to portray in the Canadian West. Moreover, popularity of the Mountie symbol provides evidence for why the wild and rugged cowboy did not ascend to icon status in Canadian fiction.

The Mountie was the sole upholder of British law and order in the Canadian West during the period of the ranching frontier and beyond. Depictions of the Mountie in literature are wholly laudatory, even slightly romantic. H.A. Cody's story, The Long Patrol, describes one Mountie thus:

[a] belt filled with cartridges encircled his waist, and his revolver sheathed in its leathern holster hung at his hip. His appearance at that moment was sufficient to win both respect and admiration from the most indifferent.<sup>191</sup>

The notion that the Mountie had about him a natural, although ineffable, quality that inspired obedience in all his subjects, was popular in Canadian fiction. Examples of this phenomenon can be found everywhere in early literature: Roger Pocock's Tales of Western Life<sup>192</sup> written in 1888, Luke Allan's -- a pseudonym for Lucy Amy -- The Westerner,<sup>193</sup> and beginning a few years later, Robert Leighton's series of stories about Sergeant Silk,<sup>194</sup> are a few examples of the many which entered the lexicon of police hagiography on this point. Perhaps the most popular and explicit however is Ralph

<sup>191</sup> H.A. Cody, The Long Patrol: A Tale of the Mounted Police (Toronto: William Briggs, 1912), P. 2.

<sup>192</sup> H.R.A. Pocock, Tales of Western Life: Lake Superior and the Canadian Prairie (Ottawa: C.W. Mitchell, 1888).

<sup>193</sup> Luke Allan, The Westerner (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1926).

<sup>194</sup> See for example, Robert Leighton, Rattlesnake Ranch: A Story of Adventure in the Great North West (London: C. Arthur Pearson Ltd., 1912).

Connor's story, Corporal Cameron. In the book's most celebrated scene, Corporal Cameron confronts a rampaging and recalcitrant desperado in a barroom. Cameron at first implores the would-be outlaw to relinquish his weapon but the man, refusing to do so, stood gazing at the Mountie. When Cameron added "Quick, do you hear?":

There was a sudden sharp ring of imperious, of overwhelming authority, and....[t]here followed one of those phenomena which experts in psychology delight to explain, but which no man can understand. Without a word the gambler slowly laid upon the table his gun...<sup>195</sup>

The first source of this Mountie's power seems to be social caste: in Mackie's The Devil's Playground for instance, he notes that "a very large percentage of the men belonging to the rank and file were gentlemen"<sup>196</sup> -- an indication that caste is perceived as a basis of authority in the NWMP. The second, and more likely source of this almost ethereal power, is the British Empire. In the aftermath of Ralph Connor's famous barroom scene, he explained that the outlaw could do no other than obey the young Mountie's command since, "behind that word lay the full weight of Great Britain's mighty empire." To this Connor added that "[t]o the North West Mounted Police and to the pioneer missionary it is due that Canada has never had within her borders what is known as a 'wild and wicked West.'" <sup>197</sup> In this one statement, as a literary historian once put it, "is and apt embodiment of the spirit of empire."<sup>198</sup> The Young Mountie not only

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<sup>195</sup> Ralph Connor, Corporal Cameron (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912), pp. 307-308

<sup>196</sup> Mackie, The Devil's Playground p. 15.

<sup>197</sup> Connor, Corporal Cameron p. 308.

<sup>198</sup> Dick Harrison, "The Mounted Police in Fiction," in Men in Scarlet, ed. Hugh Dempsey (Calgary: McClelland And Stewart West), p. 165.

maintained the law, he maintained the “right,” which he does with the aid of an intangible power he does not even carry with him.

In a sense, the obsession of Canadian writers with the Mountie precludes any popularity for an outlaw type figure like the American cowboy. Whereas American fiction often focused on the doings of desperadoes, Canadian stories were concerned with what police are doing to stop such illegal behaviour. The Canadian cowboy, at least as far as his image was concerned, was far more like the Mountie, occupation notwithstanding, than he was like the American cowboy of fiction. This is certainly not to suggest that the Mountie was a Canadian alternative to the cowboy because they are different figures. On the other hand, there is a certain homogeneity of characteristics between these two figures to the point that cowboys are not afforded a separate share of popular fiction. Canadian cowboys are portrayed as little more than an occupational sub group operating within a western ethos that obviously favoured law, order, civilization, and especially, Christian morality.

Stories about cowboys and the West almost always included a moral or spiritual message. In particular, writers sometimes feared aloud in their works what might result from lack of Christian contact; they feared that isolation from the more civilized, outside world, could lead to spiritual depravity among cowboys. C.L. Johnstone expressed his concern for ranchers in the following query: “why, oh, why do they [the Anglo-Saxon race] allow their boys to remain for months in solitary situations without a chance of

joining in a Christian service?"<sup>199</sup> Writers not only expressed fear, they endeavoured through their works to deliver a serious message about the gravity of spiritual poverty. An evangelical rangeman in John Maclean's The Warden of the Plains stated the severity of the situation in the West, as he saw it, and worded it in the idiom of the cowboy:

The biggest cattle bosses I've known -- an' a good many I've met in my day -- are the Lord Jesus Christ and the devil. I'm a wee bit afeared the devil's got the biggest herd, for his range is cropped off pretty bare, and the cattle are pretty thin.<sup>200</sup>

Not only did the devil have potential to control many souls, the ones he did control were so unsightly as to prompt this cowboy evangelist to note: "He's no a bit partic'ler how he gets them...Sich a lot of scrubs you never saw afore."<sup>201</sup>

The devil's penchant for stealing souls was not cause for serious concern however; at least not when Christian redemption and Anglo-Saxon morality were available. Writers endeavoured to champion the existence of both in the West. So long as Christian teaching and English social sensibility prevailed, writers urged, it could "never be supposed that men and women in the North-West are of necessity picturesque and barbarous."<sup>202</sup> To be sure, Argyll Saxby's The Taming of the Rancher, called upon a large measure of each to show how a man, turned tough by life on the open range, could be delivered from savagery. Dick Westgarth and his ranch hands had a reputation for mistreating the long

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<sup>199</sup> C.L. Johnstone, The Young Emigrants: A Story for Boys (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 189?), p. 134.

<sup>200</sup> John Maclean, The Warden of the Plains: And Other Stories of Life in the Canadian North-West (Toronto: William Briggs, 1896),

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> Pocock, Tales of Western Life, p. V.

string of missionaries, or sky pilots, who made visitations to the ranch. A considerable repertoire of rancorous practical jokes had been amassed by the men in an effort to frustrate even the most oblate visitor until, a lovely young sky pilot named Ethel Ross arrived at the ranch. After a minimal adjustment period, Ethel Ross was well received by Westgarth and, by assuming all domestic duties, she instilled a sense of order in his life. She also assisted the erstwhile impenitent cowboy in realizing his sins before God and, eventually, in achieving spiritual redemption. Westgarth's redemption before his heavenly father was an allegory for the forgiveness he sought from his earthly father, from whom he had been estranged since his remittance to Canada. Ethel Ross made both these reconciliations possible. Just as importantly, Ethel Ross restored in Westgarth a pride in gentility and English social values. The two eventually married and after a trip to England, returned to Alberta, arriving at the ranch in a well-appointed democrat and dressed in typically aristocratic clothing. This story makes no sophisticated attempt at concealing its message: Christianity was necessary to combat savagery and, English style comportment signaled progress and was clearly favoured over western wildness. Here is a perfect example of how authors of popular fiction wished to portray the West, the traditions that guided it, and the people who contributed to its development.

Novelists were not alone in their portrayal of the West as an area under the jurisdiction of British progress and social order. In 1884, local interest in the establishment of an annual exhibition and agricultural fair for Calgary was growing. The purpose was to promote Calgary and its benefits to the world. By 1886, both interest and financial

support were strong enough for a fair to be held in October of that year. Since that year, an Exhibition, under various names, has been held annually and survives to the present.

In 1912, owing to the promotional efforts of an American named Guy Weadick, the first Calgary Stampede was held in conjunction with the exhibition. The Stampede was billed as “The Greatest Outdoor Show On Earth”; a thrilling display of frontier activities and lifestyles. Local businesses and civic boosters publicized the event by portraying Calgary as a town with a rich cowboy history and, a ‘wild and woolly’ folklore. In fact, when this event was held, there was an observable shift in cowboy imagery as presented in popular imagery. All positive aspects relating to the cowboy’s work ethic and personal integrity were kept, but his image began to take on qualities formerly associated with the romanticized American cowboy. A sense of nostalgia pervaded images which began to emerge, primarily from within the ranching area itself.<sup>203</sup>

Guy Weadick, and the show’s major financial backers known collectively as ‘the big four’, sold the Stampede as a celebration of Alberta’s frontier heritage. As stampede fever spread, news columns and magazine articles suddenly reflected how regrettable was the passing of a by-gone era. An article in the Calgary Herald titled “The Cowboy, Like The Indian, Has Passed His Hey-Day Of Life Here,” did not distinguish Canadian cowboys from those of Texas, Colorado, Wyoming and Montana when it declared that frontier days were over.<sup>204</sup> Other articles were overtly sentimental. One in particular, written by

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<sup>203</sup> See Robert M. Seiler and Tamara P. Seiler, “The Social Construction of the Canadian Cowboy,” (Unpublished Paper), The University of Calgary. They correctly point out how romantic nostalgia has pervaded Stampede advertising, but they focus on the period after the twenties. As I will show, for the period of this study, the romantic cowboy image was overshadowed by images of modernity and progress.

<sup>204</sup> Calgary Herald 4 September 1912.

L.V. Kelly, titled "History of Range Herds and How They are Fast Being Depleted by The Coming of the Grain Farmer,"<sup>205</sup> was almost mournful in its disappointment over the disappearance of cowboys and their free lifestyle.

Stampede advertising in the Calgary Herald reflected perhaps the most remarkable change in cowboy images. An image of marauding cowboys on horse back firing revolvers in the air adorned the pages of the August 15, 1912 issue of the Herald. Ironically, this image appeared on the same page as an article titled "Calgary Certain to Become Gateway Metropolis," a suitable juxtaposition that showed how stampede imagery was only a temporary promotional tool surrounded by progress oriented rhetoric.

In another issue of the same paper, merchants advertised their stores by using exceedingly romantic images of cowboys. In one case, an unruly outlaw is pictured in full complement of cowboy dress -- wide brimmed hat, neckerchief, woolly chaps, boots and spurs -- firing two revolvers simultaneously.<sup>206</sup> This image not only contradicts early accounts of Canadian cowboy dress, it is a curious use of an outlaw/desperado image by a paper that had expressly denounced such a figure years before. Image makers, formerly obsessed with showing that wild cowboys did not exist in Canada, began using that very image to sell the Calgary Stampede. Why they thought such an image would appeal to people who had been told for years that such figures didn't exist in Canada -- a fact that was considered to be positive -- is a question not easily answered.

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid., Sept. 6, 1912.

<sup>206</sup> Calgary Herald 4 September 1912.

Romantic images which emerged with the stampede forced a temporary “wild west” myth on perceptions of Alberta’s history. In fact, any mythologization of the Canadian West that survives today started with the stampede and, it developed in spite of, not because of, Alberta’s actual ranching history. In an extraordinary change of imagery around 1912, a wild, decidedly more American, cowboy image became popular for a brief time once every year in the very papers that had denied that symbol for years. What is more ironic about image makers forcing this new image on ranching’s history, is that they did so at time when ranching was significantly reduced in size and scope. When ranching did have control of the West for a very brief period, image makers -- newspaper columnists, magazines editors, etc. -- refused such images; when that control was over, they began longing for cowboy heroes

Official Stampede posters also reflected a shift toward romantic cowboy imagery. But the Stampede, despite its meteoric rise to popularity as a celebration of cowboyism after the 1920’s, was only a small part of Calgary’s exhibition experience before 1920. The Stampede, with its appeal to frontier romanticism, was held only twice before 1923, while the Calgary Exhibition, with its promotion of order, progress, and technology, was held yearly. Clearly, the Stampede and its related propaganda was an island in a sea of progress and technology oriented Exhibition material.

People went to the Exhibition and Stampede, it was observed by one visitor, to imbibe themselves of the modern amenities offered. In a book titled, A Policeman From Eton, R.W. Campbell wrote that for women the Exhibition was their only hope of “seeing the latest in stockings, hats, knickerbockers, and sewing machines. To the young girl the



Exhibition means electric lights, steam bands, fortune tellers, ice-cream, and a mild flirtation.”<sup>207</sup> The modernity of the event didn’t only appeal to women and young girls; the event appealed to all people who, “[a]fter looking at the bald-headed prairie for eleven months and three weeks,” found a week in Calgary to be quite “refreshing.”<sup>208</sup>

Exhibition advertising reflected this desire for modern trappings. The only extant Exhibition posters begin in 1908, but from that point on they provide a consummate portrait of the organized movement afoot to promote a sense of order and progress in the West. The 1908 Dominion Exhibition poster (figure 2.), is perhaps the best known among historians due to its seemingly explicit message. The image of a horseman -- presumably a cowboy although wearing a Mountie style Stetson -- skidding to a halt at a barbed wire fence, with sheaves of wheat in foreground, is obviously a comment about encroaching settlement on the open range. There is a message of Arcady lost in this image, but there is no way of knowing if the message represents a sincere lament. It could be suggested plausibly that the image of an open range free from constraints, although resisted by image makers in the area for years, is being used as a tool to attract people to the West for the Exhibition. There is a tendency when viewing this poster to assume automatically that the poster was designed as a lament, but the wheat in the foreground conjures up positive images as much as the cowboy halting at the fence inspires sadness. This poster is not an example of collective yearning for a by-gone era; it is a promotional mechanism. While image makers had emphasized for years the benefits of filling the West with settlers, they

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<sup>207</sup> R.W. Campbell, *A Policeman From Eton* (London: np, 1923), p. 83.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

began using romantic imagery to sell the Stampede -- irony became their best marketing tool.

The 1908 poster is somewhat anomalous in its inclusion of a cowboy figure. Most Exhibition posters simply imparted to their audience a feeling of upper class, order, and technological progress. The 1909 Provincial Horse Show poster (figure 3.) clearly portrays images of English gentility and grace. The man standing atop the horseshoe and the woman driving the horse drawn democrat are dressed in ways hardly reminiscent of a pioneer lifestyle. Neither, it is abundantly clear, is the rider pictured on the 1911 poster (figure 4.) a figure who is commonly associated with the "Wild West." This figure, complete with top-hat, three button riding tunic, and riding boots, betrays an image English gentility, as does the woman who adorns the 1914 poster for the Calgary Industrial Exhibition. (Figure 5.) On this poster, not only is the image a striking example of the event promoters' desires to portray class, the attractions listed, such as "High-Class Music," reveal the tone of the event.

Exhibition promoters were overtly concerned with portraying a sense of order in the West. The cowboy depicted in the 1912 poster (figure 6.) is "keeping his hand in" the economy of the West by joining the move to more organized forms of agriculture. As for native people, the control of whom was viewed as an important requirement in ordering an otherwise chaotic west, they too were depicted as joining the spirit of the progressive West. As the 1918 poster shows (figure 7.), native people were controlled by drawing them into the fold of Exhibition excitement. Despite his poor diction, this Native is caught up in the spirit of the event and apparently taking time to witness the proceedings.

Military presence was also critical as a demarcation of order. Military style bands were popular attractions while their comportment bespoke legal authority. The poster for 1919 (figure 8.) depicts a marching band in formation at the order; in the background, to the left of the grandstand, are large domed buildings with Roman columns -- buildings which symbolize civilization, but ones which didn't exist in Calgary.

Finally, a premium is placed on technological advancement in these posters. The archaic ways of cowboys and other pioneer figures are herein usurped by new and improved methods. In the 1910 poster (figure 9.), for example, a progression of tillage methods -- from walking ploughs, to tractor drawn methods, to self-guided and self-propelled machines -- is shown. The clear message in this poster is one of inevitable, and preferable, technological advancement. Advertising for the 1911 Exhibition was no different. In this poster (figure 10.), in an obvious representation of the progress sweeping over the West, a cowboy is shown roping an airplane as it flies overhead. That this individual is in favour of such technology is evinced by his desire to rope the airplane. The image is complimented by a the list of features which includes: "Industrial Exhibits," "New Buildings," "Aeroplane," and "Monorail."

Popular imagery in Canada reveals that cowboyism did not engender a range of unique or frontier inspired traits, as it did in the United States. In the Canadian experience, the cowboy is occupationally distinct, but nevertheless an arbiter of English values. He was not a renegade, outlaw, or desperado; these were all relics of the American appetite for self-imposed and self-administered law in the West. The myth of the West in Canada was progress. Cowboys took a back seat, as it were, in Canadian popular imagery to the

immensely popular Mountie who is credited with opening the West for safe settlement. While the Mountie didn't replace the cowboy in Canadian imagery, his existence somewhat diminished any need for cowboy icons who, in effect, extolled the same virtues as Mounties.

In Calgary Exhibition advertising, the romantic cowboy had a brief moment of popularity which served all the more to illustrate how uncommon and out of place such a figure was in Canadian popular imagery. In official Stampede posters, the cowboy is entirely overrun by progress. Ultimately, the Canadian cowboy of popular imagery was either assimilated with other similar figures who shared typically British characteristics, or supplanted by an overwhelming push for images of progress and civilization.

## Conclusion

Romantic cowboy mythology as it existed in American novels, movies, stage productions, and advertising, was ill-fated from the very beginning in Canada. Despite -- on the surface at least -- having a similar economic enterprise in ranching, the Canadian West never inspired the kind of popular imagery of the cowboy in the minds of Canadians as the American West did for Americans. To put it another way, no special tradition in Canadian popular culture was ever devoted specifically to a Canadian cowboy. By contrast, several major industries grew up in the United States dedicated precisely to the cowboy icon: traveling "wild west" shows of the Wild Bill Cody genre, Hollywood western movies, country and western music, and an endless stream of western novels.

This, as mentioned previously, is not to say that Canadians completely rejected the idea of a cowboy figure. Indeed, cowboy adventure stories were read by Canadians before and after the turn of the century, while the Calgary Stampede has become immensely popular among Canadians who now consume, with great relish, the western ambrosia hosted at that event. These factors notwithstanding, however, when a young boy living in late nineteenth century Toronto, for example, read a dime novel about cowboys, he would surely have made his mental flight to Texas and the beginning of the Chisolm Trail, or to Tombstone Arizona, where famous outlaws and lawmen staged legendary gun fights. He most certainly would not have thought of the Canadian West for two reasons. For one thing, his history lessons would have taught him that in the Canadian West, pure open

range ranching was an ephemeral phenomenon, shortened by a push for settlement, irrevocably altered by introduction of mixed agriculture, and inhabited by many well bred Englishmen who maintained their old world sense of decorum. All this, he of course would have realized, took place under the watchful eye of the Mounties, who represented and upheld the Queen's law in the West. The second reason for his likely mental flight to the American West is that he would have been bombarded with images of the Canadian West as a place where such lawlessness did not occur anyway. Image makers impressed on young boys, and adults too, that the Canadian West was a civilized, orderly, and well policed region, where frontier justice and uncouth cowboys did not prevail. Instead, they portrayed the Canadian cowboy as a hard working "pioneer of civilization" who turned his hand to whatever duties were necessary in the development of the West. Young boys probably knew that cowboys lived in western Canada, but they also knew from images of that cowboy that he was too busy putting up hay for winter feed, slopping hogs, and observing the Queen's law, to become embroiled in thrilling shoot-outs or exciting train robberies.

The historical development of Canada's ranching industry was not conducive to the emergence of a popular cowboy image. Ranching did not begin on a large scale until the early 1880's, and then by major cattle companies that were established on large, government sponsored land leases. Had the large cattle companies maintained their monopoly in the West, free from the encroachments of urban settlers and cereal farmers, cowboy culture may well have contributed more to Canadian popular culture than it did.

But as circumstance would have it, cattle companies found their economic and political strengths eroding, in relative terms, shortly after they were established.

Since the ranching industry began so late in the nineteenth century, its position in the West's and the country's popular imagination was bound to be diminished by the onslaught of settlers who began moving to the West in the 1890's and occupying land formerly used for stock grazing. Opening the West for settlement was not only likely, but inevitable by late in the century and as a consequence, ranching alone did not define the West as a region. Fences were erected and cowboys were no longer free to roam the range -- a luxury they had to relinquish only a few years after it began. Settlement of the West and expansion of cereal farming were pervasive themes occupying many people's thoughts and business dealings during this period; this preoccupation was a *de facto* hindrance to the emergence of cowboyism as a popular theme in Canadian culture.

While beef producers maintained political and economic strength into the twentieth century, as David Breen has correctly argued, the particular nature of their industry was such that cowboys were more like farmers in general than 'free riders of the range.' Since images do not emerge from bank statements and balance books, the economic strength of ranchers had little to do with the production of cowboy imagery. On the contrary, how ranching was performed and what type of people did the work seriously affected the configuration of a cowboy image. To begin with, a significant portion of the ranching community was comprised of English or eastern Canadian people who stamped their cultural heritage on the area. David Breen notes that "[b]y virtue of their cultural and educational backgrounds, the managerial staff of western ranch companies was simply a

transplanted part of the eastern managerial class. The Canadian range was never in the hands of 'wild and woolly' westerners, either American or Canadian."<sup>209</sup> Although not all members of the ranching community were from upper crust English or eastern Canadian backgrounds, the ones who were ultimately defined the ranching frontier in Canada and, an unruly cowboy image would never have emerged from their ranks.

The very practice of ranching also mitigated against the emergence of cowboys as regionally definitive characters. As conditions necessitated, many ranchers were forced to expand their operations to include winter feeding, cereal crop production, and diversified livestock raising. Moreover, cattle raising became more of a controlled business in the 1890's with ranchers keeping closer watch over herds and more carefully managing feeding schedules. Even L.V. Kelly, who seemed to sincerely resent the passing of the open range ranching frontier in Canada was forced to admit that the live-stock business had grown "from a haphazard, go-as-you-please system to a fairly careful, methodical business."<sup>210</sup> At any rate, ranch hands were suddenly tied to a schedule of duties which must have made them feel like farmers as much as cowboys; they certainly did not enjoy the kind of free life on the open range that is often associated with a cowboy lifestyle. This sometimes rigid schedule of farm related duties exacted a price on the Canadian cowboy's image; he did not develop a wild, untamed image complete with a veneer of romanticism. On the contrary, the image of a Canadian cowboy that did emerge was a reflection of the material culture from which he evolved. He was bound by farm activities

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<sup>209</sup>Breen, The Canadian Prairie West and the Ranching Frontier, p. 30.

<sup>210</sup> Kelly, p. 251.



more than he was set free on the open range and, as a result, the Canadian cowboy never enjoyed an image as a desperado, steeping in his own solitude on the range.

Historical development alone did not lead to the image of the Canadian cowboy as an abstemious, law-abiding citizen. Images can emerge in contrast to, and in spite of, actual historical processes, as historians of the American West are now suggesting.<sup>211</sup> In the case of the Canadian West however, there were external forces, in addition to those working from within, which resisted placing a wild and lawless cowboy image in the Canadian West. Because the West was earmarked for settlement in the late nineteenth century, an entire tradition grew up determined, whether intentionally or not, to promote a certain image of the West. In essence, the movement of settlers themselves into the region did not militate against a cowboy image as much as the images used in the promotion of that settlement did.

Immigration literature and, to a slightly lesser extent, travel accounts, were unabashedly devoted to portraying the West as a civilized and well ordered place with all modern amenities. The motivation for this devotion to positive imagery was obvious; economic gain was clearly one rationale for promoting settlement of the West as was political gain. Canada would be strengthened considerably by incorporating the West into the Dominion and years of speculation and fear over American expansion threats would be put to rest. Such threats had been taken quite seriously by Canadians, especially British descendants, who were “convinced that the republic represented an undesirable

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<sup>211</sup> See for instance, Richard White, *It's Your Fault and None of My Own: A History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

social order.”<sup>212</sup> Thus, all aspects of Canadian western life that immigration promoters and visitors chose to emphasize were distinctly against a the wild, American cowboy image. They emphasized the ‘civilized’ nature of the West’s inhabitants, and they pointed to outward signs of commercial and economic success.

Politically and socially, immigration literature assured potential settlers that the West was stable and that its philosophies were based on progressive liberal philosophies of England. The individual enjoyed freedom but not the freedom to interfere with the peaceful order of a civilized society. Potential immigrants knew that they would not encounter marauding bands of desperadoes who selfishly assumed their own desires to pillage and plunder the region were paramount to the wishes of peace loving citizens. Furthermore, immigrants could be assured that protection of their rights was not just a nominal function of civilized society; they knew that the NWMP were proactive in ensuring the lawful proceedings of everyday life. All these images were designed to convince outsiders that the West was distant from the East and England only in terms of miles, not in terms of culture, civility, and political stability. It was hoped that this image would encourage waves of immigrants for whom orderly settlement was important.

The very positive image of the West that immigration promoters pushed was upheld in other types of media. In periodical literature for instance, the idea of the West as orderly and progressive, was pervasive. Image makers from within the area insisted that the West was brimming with potential for settlement and commercial prosperity; it offered modern

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<sup>212</sup> Carl Berger, The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), p. 153.

institutions, well developed town sites, law enforcement, and almost unlimited land for cultivation. The West was marked for incorporation into the Dominion of Canada and attracting settlers was a substantial part of the scheme to make that process a success. Images from periodical literature upheld a positive image of the West in order to promote the region as perfectly suited for orderly settlement.

When image makers did refer to cowboys, they forced them into this overall scheme of order and progress. He commonly extolled virtues expected of well bred young men with British heritage; he was highly cultured, law-abiding, hard working, and very often respectful of Christian values -- namely temperance. What is more telling about cowboy images in Canada however, is how they were so often cited as antithetical to American cowboys. What cowboys were not, seems to have been as important as what they were. In periodical literature, image makers regularly dismissed the image of a wild and lawless cowboy as a relic of American fiction. The Canadian cowboy, they insisted, was not reminiscent of that image at all.

In Canadian popular fiction, the cowboy was similarly noted for his differences from the American figure; writers went out of their way to mention that "wild outbursts" were anomalous in Canada. Writers seemed to favour the Mountie "whose legend insisted on the Pax Britannica: the mounted policeman was a model of courtesy...[w]hose very presence made wild cowboys tame, who sent bad men scurrying back to their hideouts in Montana."<sup>213</sup> Their insistence on the Mountie meant two things; it meant that writers were as caught up in the idea of a civilized and lawful Canadian West as other image

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<sup>213</sup> MacDonald, p. 46.

makers, even immigration promoters; and it meant that the cowboy, despite being a different figure, was unnecessary in Canadian popular literature. The cowboy was not replaced by the Mountie; but he was so remarkably close in behaviour and expression of British values to the Mountie that he was almost indistinguishable and thus, nearly superfluous.

Resistance to the American cowboy image speaks volumes about the Canadian West and Canada in general. On a practical level, inducing settlement in the West would obviously have been more difficult -- perhaps impossible -- if potential immigrants believed that bands of wild desperadoes were meting out their own brand of frontier justice on the prairies. On a more abstract level, the cowboy image of American fiction was frowned upon by people of British heritage as barbarous and savage. His image reflected too much personalized law determined by the environment as opposed to the constituted authority of the King and parliament favoured by Britons. Canadians and British subjects in general demonstrated a prevailing fear of social and legal anomie, which kept them from grasping a wild cowboy image and placing it in the Canadian West. Wild festive cowboys were fine in American fiction for entertainment purposes, but, as many image makers asserted, they were not to be associated with the Canadian West.

Active resistance was not the only reason why the Canadian cowboy image was unlike that of his American counterpart. The Canadian cowboy emerged as he did as a natural outcome of his cultural heritage. There is more than a hint of social evolutionary thought in the Canadian cowboy and his image. As a hard working individual struggling to

improve or at least maintain his surroundings and conditions, he was the perfect embodiment of Spencerian principles. On a larger scale however, English nationhood and the Anglo-Saxon race were thought to be on the leading edge of unilinear social evolution. English institutions and values were believed to have evolved through various stages, and rose to the apex of human civilization. Popular heroes would do nothing but reflect that belief and extol all virtues exemplified by British values.

The cowboy was more than a folk hero; Canadians resisted more than an insignificant, parochial figure. In America, he was an archetype who stood for republican principles: a free and unrestrained life; and the right of individuals to administer the law as they saw fit. Canadian and British image makers resisted the American cowboy because the traits he symbolized were distinctly American and, thus, deemed to be inferior. Alternatively, image makers hastened to fill the void left by an absence of American cowboy imagery with a more civilized -- and Canadian-type -- character. Canadians desired to cultivate their identity as distinct from American, an identity that paid homage to their predominantly British heritage. The Canadian cowboy was a part -- albeit small -- of the heritage Canadians sought to celebrate, and the identity they struggled to achieve.

## APPENDIX

Figure 1.

# CHARACTER Sketches of the NORTH WEST



A. Sells



A. Mountain  
Pioneer



A. Ranchman



A. Hunter



The Camp Cook



A. Cowboy



A. Stranger

Figure 2.

**DOMINION EXHIBITION**

**CALGARY**  
ALBERTA.

VISIT  
BANFF  
CANADA'S FAMOUS  
MOUNTAIN  
RESORT

**JUNE 29**  
TO  
**JULY 9**  
1908.

\$140,000.  
TO BE EXPENDED.  
VISIT ALBERTA  
BEFORE THE  
GOLDEN OPPORTUNITIES  
PICTURES ARE GONE  
AND INDIANS ARE GONE  
WRITE FOR RATES

"ANOTHER TRAIL CUT OFF"

**WESTERN CANADA'S GREATEST FAIR**

I. S. G. VAN WART, PRESIDENT. E. L. RICHARDSON, MANAGER.

HAMMOND LITHO CO. CALGARY



Figure 3.

Annual Provincial  
**HORSE SHOW**  
UNDER DISTINGUISHED PATRONAGE  
AFTERNOONS AT VICTORIA PARK  
EVENINGS AT SHERMAN'S AUDITORIUM  
**\$3,500 IN PRIZES**  
BAND IN ATTENDANCE  
ENTRIES CLOSE  
MARCH 18TH

Annual Provincial  
**FAT STOCK SHOW**  
AND  
DRESSED CARCASS  
COMPETITION  
ENTRIES CLOSE  
MARCH 15TH

Annual Provincial  
**AUCTION SALE  
OF  
CATTLE**  
PURE BRED CATTLE SHOW  
180 BULLS TO BE OFFERED  
ANIMALS SHIPPED TO PORTER IN ALBERTA  
AND SASKATCHEWAN FOR \$200 EACH  
AND TO BC PORTS FOR \$150  
SEE RULES

**VICTORIA  
PARK  
CALGARY, ALTA.  
APRIL 5<sup>TH</sup> TO 9<sup>TH</sup>  
1909**

REDUCED PASSENGER RATES

FOR ENTRIES, PRIZES, CATALOGUES, ETC. WRITE  
E. L. RICHARDSON, SECRETARY AND MANAGING DIRECTOR  
ALBERTA LIVESTOCK ASSOCIATIONS, CALGARY, ALBERTA

PRESIDENTS:  
ALBERTA CATTLE BREEDERS' ASSOCIATION  
AND, WILFORD, 1900  
ALBERTA HORSE BREEDERS' ASSOCIATION  
AND, A. TUCKER, 1900  
ALBERTA SWINE BREEDERS' ASSOCIATION  
AND, T. B. BROWN, 1900  
ALBERTA SHEEP BREEDERS' ASSOCIATION  
AND, G. W. BROWN, 1900

Figure 4.

# THE GREAT ALBERTA PROVINCIAL

## SPRING SHOWS

### FAT STOCK SHOW

### AUCTION SALE AND SHOW OF CATTLE



## HORSE SHOW

**Attractive Prize List**

**SHEEP AND SWINE**  
Transported Free  
— FROM —  
**Alberta Points**  
—  
**NOMINAL RATE  
FOR CATTLE**

**Beef and Dairy Breeds**

Association Ships Animals  
To and From Sale at a  
Very Low Rate

**SHOW APRIL 18th**  
**SALE 19th**  
Animals Shipped Home  
on APRIL 20th

## CALGARY

APRIL
18-21
1911

PRESIDENTS  
OF THE

**ALBERTA HORSE** - George Lane, Calgary  
**CATTLE** - Jas. Walters, Crowsfoot  
**SHEEP** - Bryce Wright, DeWinton  
**AND SWINE** - Lew Hutchinson, Dalmat  
BREEDERS' ASSOCIATIONS

HELD UNDER THE AUSPICES OF  
THE ALBERTA AND DOMINION  
DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE  
— AND —  
ALBERTA LIVE STOCK  
ASSOCIATIONS  
Calgary, Canada

For RATES  
PRIZE LIST  
ENTRY FORMS OR CATALOGUE, write

**E. L. RICHARDSON, SECRETARY**  
AND MANAGING DIRECTOR  
**ALBERTA LIVE STOCK ASSOCIATIONS**  
CALGARY

ENTRIES CLOSE  
Cattle Sale, February 15th.  
Horse Show and Fat Stock Show, March 31st.

Figure 5.

# CALGARY INDUSTRIAL EXHIBITION

JUNE 29 to  
JULY 4, 1914



BETTER BABIES' CONTEST  
SPECIAL PRIZES FOR CHILDREN  
Generous Live Stock Prize List  
Large Prizes For      Special Prizes For  
——Grain——      ——Bread——

High-Class Music  
and Attractions

INCLUDING  
GRAND MILITARY  
TATTOO



President  
J. DEWEY


1st Vice-Pres.  
COL. JAS. WALKER

2nd Vice-Pres.  
A. McKILLOP

Prize List and all information from  
E. L. RICHARDSON, Manager  
CALGARY, ALBERTA

Figure 6.

**CALGARY**  
**INDUSTRIAL**  
**EXHIBITION**  
**CALGARY, ALBERTA.**  
**JUNE 28TH TO JULY 5TH**  
 EXHIBITION ENTRIES **1912** CLOSE JUNE 15TH



**LIVESTOCK PRIZE LIST THE LARGEST IN WESTERN CANADA**

**FREIGHT PAID ON ALBERTA EXHIBITS**  
**HIGH CLASS MUSIC & ATTRACTIONS**  
 INCLUDING JIMMY WARD WITH HIS CURTISS AEROPLANE.

Figure 7.

# CALGARY INDUSTRIAL EXHIBITION

## JUNE 28 TO JULY 6

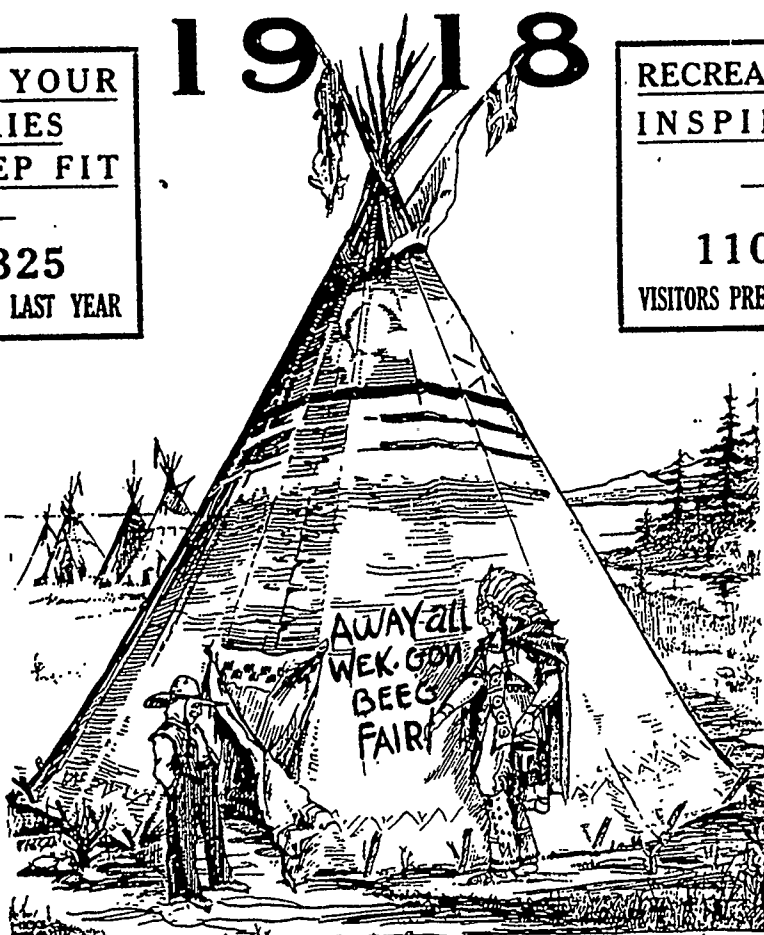
## 1918

**FORGET YOUR  
WORRIES  
AND KEEP FIT**

**\$22,325  
PAID IN PRIZES LAST YEAR**

**RECREATION AND  
INSPIRATION**

**110,000  
VISITORS PRESENT LAST YEAR**



**June  
29**

**July  
1, 2, 3,**

**July  
4 & 5**

**World's  
Fastest  
Drivers**

COMBINED WITH  
**ENTERTAINMENT BY the WORLD'S BEST ARTISTS**

*Special Excursion Rates. Exhibition Entries Close June 13. 50 per cent. of Freight paid on Alberta Live Stock Exhibits*

E. J. DEWEY, President      FRED JOHNSTON, 1st Vice-Pres.      E. D. ADAMS, 2nd Vice-Pres.      E. L. RICHARDSON, Manager  
Held with the Assistance of The Alberta and Dominion Departments of Agriculture, and the City of Calgary.

Figure 8.

120

**JUNE 28**  
**1919**

**CALGARY**  
**EXHIBITION**

**JULY 5**  
**1919**



**ALBERTA'S BEST PRODUCTS**  
**\$50,000.00**  
In Prizes and Attractions.  
**GREATEST PROGRAM EVER PRESENTED**

**Horse Races**  
June 30  
July 1, 2 & 3

**WORLD'S FASTEST  
AUTO RACES**  
July 4 & 5

**PASSENGER CARRYING AEROPLANES**  
AND  
**AVIATION STUNTS**

**NEW  
CONCRETE  
GRAND  
STAND  
and  
CATTLE  
PAVILION**

**CAPT. FRED McCALL,**  
D.S.O., M.C. with Bar, D.F.C.  
CALGARY

**CAPT. W. MAY,**  
D.F.C.  
EDMONTON





**SOUSA AND HIS BAND**

**E. J. DEWEY, President.**  
**FRED JOHNSTON, 1st Vice-Pres.**

**Special Passenger Rates**

**E. D. ADAMS, 2nd Vice-Pres.**  
**E. L. RICHARDSON, Manager.**  
CALGARY, ALBERTA, CANADA

Figure 9.

**ALBERTA PROVINCIAL EXHIBITION**

**CALGARY**

**JUNE 30<sup>th</sup> TO JULY 7<sup>th</sup> 1910**

FREIGHT REFUNDED  
ON ALBERTA  
EXHIBITS

**THE MOST INTERESTING  
LIVE STOCK  
AND INDUSTRIAL  
FAIR**

**BEST MUSIC AND  
ATTRACTIONS**

Hear The  
**NAVASSAR LADIES' BAND**

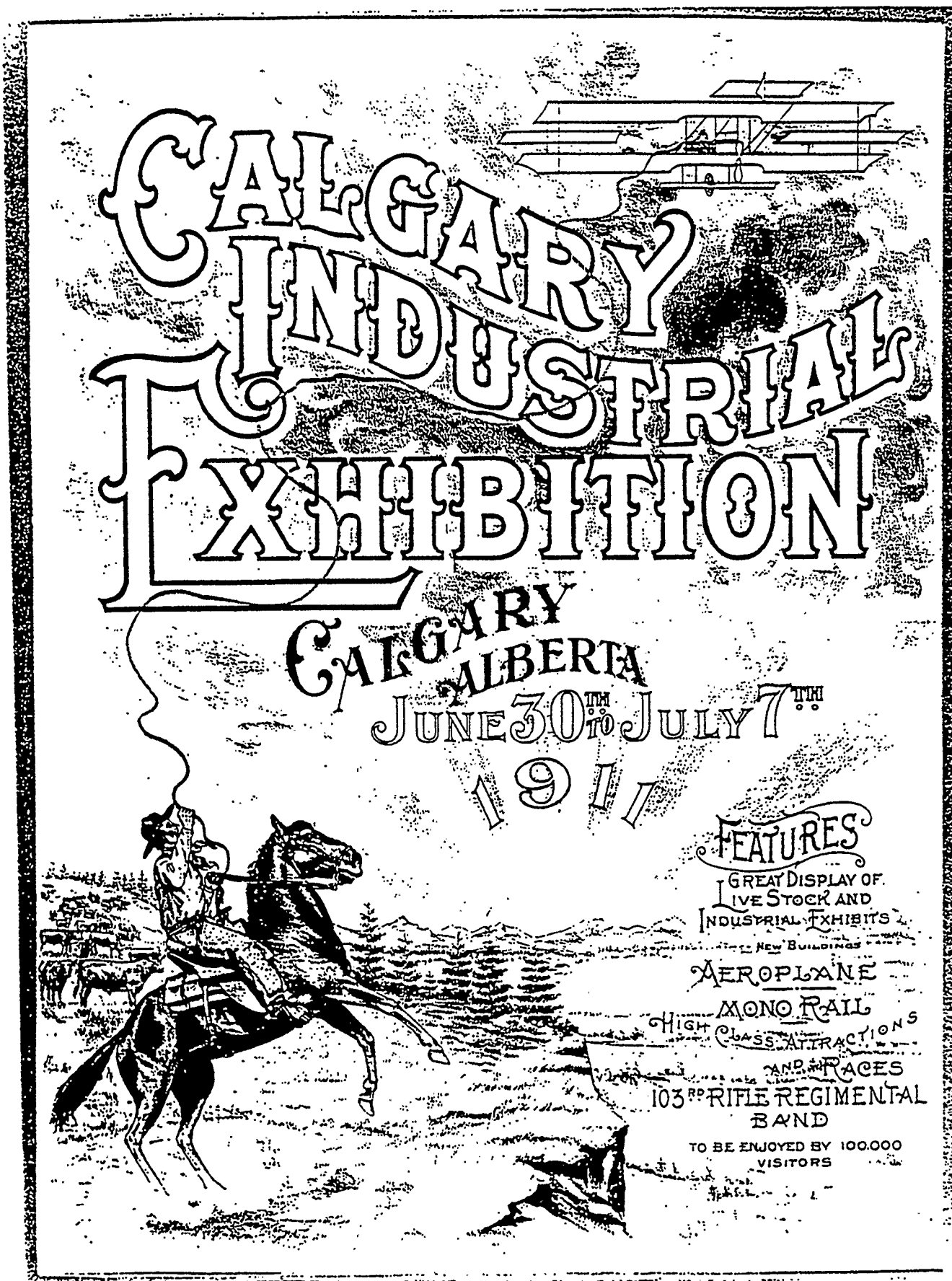
Grand Reproduction of the  
**BLACKFEET INDIAN TREATY OF 1877**  
ILLUMINATED WITH FIREWORKS

**MILKING MACHINE DEMONSTRATION**

**ACRE YIELD GRAIN COMPETITION**

PRINTED BY J. C. VAN WAGEN  
CALGARY

Figure 10.





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