



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

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3: 'Selling to Outsiders': Marketing Coal, Hay, and Freighting Services

INTRODUCTION

The belief that Native Canadians have participated little in the national economy is not uncommon. Thus the activities of Native peoples in local economic environments have been largely ignored as an area of study. Historian Walter Hildebrandt observed, "for Native people, inclusion in the national and international economy has not been carefully planned at all."¹ Hanna Samek, in her *The Blackfoot Confederacy 1880–1920*, paid scant attention to Canadian Blackfoot economic interaction with the communities surrounding the various reserves generally viewing the reserves in isolation.² Where attention has been given to the inclusion of Natives in the workplace, the conclusion has been that, hamstrung by bureaucratic indifference to their needs and proscriptive interference in their plans, Natives have not been able to overcome Anglo-Canadian competition for available resources.³ Indeed the focus has been on the planned exclusion of Aboriginal people from integrative activities with non-Native neighbours through the pass and permit systems. These policies are believed so successful that some historians conclude that generally Natives entered an era of 'irrelevance' in the mid-nineteenth century and did not emerge for approximately a hundred years.

There is, however, an emerging consensus among social scientists that Native peoples were participants in, and contributors to, the capitalist market-driven economy, even during the era of supposed 'irrelevance.' John Lutz, for example, argues that Natives "were the main labour force of the early settlement era, essential to the capitalist development of British Columbia."⁴ Noted earlier was the work of Rolf Knight. The work of Carl Beal on Saskatchewan Indian reserves, however, is of particular note in

refuting standard interpretations that reserve economies failed and therefore exerted no market influences. Indeed, Beal concludes, "Between 1870 and 1885, the Indian population was pivotal for the initial development of monetized markets in western Canada."⁵ Similarly, Innes, Macdougall, and Tough illustrate the diversity of Saskatchewan reserve economies between 1897 and 1915 and note: "The growth experienced by band economies corresponds to a general economic recovery and expansion of prairie settlement."⁶ It may take some time, however, before these revisionist trends become accepted consensus, with more general applicability, among scholars of western Canadian and Native economic history.

In southern Alberta the close proximity of Native groups to Anglo-Canadian settlements and the altering or destruction of the environment occurred to such an extent that traditional Native economic behaviours were largely rendered obsolete. The Bloods, like their non-Native neighbours, faced basic problems of survival. The search for solutions dictated participation in the local economies to which the Bloods and various other Native groups found themselves attached. The only practical means of acquiring credit, currency, and merchandise was through providing a market commodity in the form of goods or services, the latter often in the form of seasonally determined labour. Beginning in the 1890s, the Bloods immersed themselves in various economic activities both in response to local market demands and their subsistence needs in keeping with Beal's observation that money "fosters a calculating rationality one moreover which tends to reduce qualities of things to their measure in money."⁷

The western Canadian economy was laid on a foundation of agriculture and basic extractive industries, such as coal mining, driven by the market in that price determined production. These production activities were labour-intensive, mining requiring a continual supply of labour and agriculture requiring seasonal workers especially during the fall harvests. From the beginning, the West was plagued by labour shortages, which drew immigrants to work the coalfields and harvest crops in southern Alberta and British Columbia. Harvest excursions, as Cherwinski has pointed out, encouraged by the government and railways witnessed yearly migrations of predominantly male workers from eastern Canada, the United States, and Europe to labour in the fields and were a response to perennial labour shortages.⁸

This situation increased market opportunities for Blood entrepreneurs and labourers. The growing population of immigrants determined to make their homes on the prairies combined with seasonal floods of itinerant

workers created demand for the Bloods' products and labour. They became participants in the market economy, offering the commodities they produced and competing with others engaged in coal mining, haying, and freighting. At times the Bloods' productive proficiency created a demand for their products and services and earned them a market share. Their competitiveness also at times drew the wrath of their non-Native competitors.

By the early 1890s, most Bloods had come to grips with changed circumstance such as the loss of the buffalo and the restrictions imposed by reserve life and had adjusted accordingly. Realizing that their reserve could not immediately provide a livelihood for all, many Bloods adopted strategies suitable for survival in the new economic setting. Agents, responsive to the DIA's dual goals to economize and make Natives self-supporting citizens, actively tried to place Bloods in off-reserve occupations. Although the program was never fully realized, some 292 Bloods of approximately 1,200 reserve residents left the reserve for work in 1899–1900. The work opportunities were varied and often of limited duration: logging, freighting, mail cartage, scouting for the NWMP, day labour, and seasonal participation in fairs and exhibitions.⁹ It is not clear who these individuals were or the length of their absence. If this is a reference only to working males, then a substantial percentage of the male working population of the reserve worked away during this brief period, and this is a clear indication of the Bloods' economic significance and their adaptive capability. Some of these men were certainly accompanied by family, which added to the percentage of reserve absentees. For those wishing to stay on the reserve, coal mining, haying, cattle ranching and agriculture, some in support of Euro-Canadian entrepreneurial initiatives, were the occupations of choice.¹⁰

The focus of this chapter will be on the economic interaction of the Bloods with the local community. Emphasis will be placed on their roles as coal and hay merchants and as freighters because these were significant points of interaction between the Bloods and their neighbours. These occupations or activities offered the Bloods the greatest opportunities for both employment and the sale of reserve resources. The agents encouraged such work as training in the ways of 'civilization' and, it was hoped, it would ultimately lead to the Bloods' economic independence. It will become clear, however, that as the area economy developed, the Bloods' attachment to and participation in local economic activities was deliberate and considerable and changed with time and circumstance.

MARKET ACTIVITIES

Coal

One of the first commodities the Bloods offered for sale was coal, which they began mining in 1890. The first coal mine was small. The coal was dug initially with pick and shovel from a coal seam, likely of a non-coking bituminous or sub-bituminous variety, located in a cutbank about twenty miles from the agency.¹¹ Afterwards the assistance of two or three men was all that was required to work the seam. However, the operator, Heavy Gun, was ambitious and opened a tunnel with rails for a car to bring coal to the surface. Eventually two rooms were opened with an air course, shoot and screen for cleaning the coal and a loading bank.¹²

As a commercial venture, this mining was hampered by lack of quality and inconsistency of output. Though limited, the operation was in part driven by the prospect of “selling to outsiders,” that is “marketed by the Indians themselves.”¹³ Agent James Wilson, however, believed that opportunities for off-reserve sales were limited by low quality and competition. The coal seam, he reported, was divided into three layers with slate between each. Mixed with the coal was also a large amount of white mineral “which causes a large accumulation of ashes and keeps the coal from burning.” This condition made it both expensive to mine and reduced its value. However, Wilson did believe that the mine could supply reserve needs for the hospital, mission, and agency.¹⁴

Though experiencing some initial success, the mine operated with difficulty, and Wilson felt that some of the problems were due to the absence of ‘white’ expertise. The work remained generally unsupervised, except for the involvement of the agent, until the accidental death of Mistaken Chief at the mine in 1930, and “a coal mining expert” more closely supervised operations thereafter.¹⁵ Generally while it operated, however, the Blood reserve coal mine was solely a Native operation, jealously guarded by the Bloods, and the only non-Native participation was in an advisory capacity.

Despite its limitations the mine intermittently produced marketable coal, though in small quantities. Having their own transportation and being closely situated to Fort Macleod and the surrounding area made the Blood coal mine, at times, competitive. In February 1894, the *Macleod Gazette* announced the arrival of Blood reserve coal in the town but dismissed the rumour that the coal was superior to that produced by the Galt mines at Lethbridge.¹⁶ Regardless of the *Gazette’s* disclaimer, the mine produced

200 tons of coal in 1894, 130 for use of the agency, fifty for the boarding school, and twenty tons for settlers in Macleod and district.¹⁷ Hugh Dempsey reports that an additional 100 tons of reserve coal were sold to the Galt mining company.¹⁸ Though, perhaps, not significant enough to affect the supply or price of coal on the local market, there was at least a market presence. Black Horse, who had taken over the mine operations by 1894, approached the business with enthusiasm, producing approximately 260 tons in the following year, for both reserve and public needs.¹⁹

Though production from the reserve mine was spotty, its significance is perhaps suggested by the fact that local entrepreneurs expressed occasional interest in acquiring the mine operations or commercial mining rights on the reserve. However, periodic inquiries about coal rights evinced no interest from the Bloods or the DIA.²⁰ One inquiry made in 1911 was based on a predicted increased need likely tied to an ongoing coal strike in southern Alberta since April of that year.²¹ By January 1913, this prediction had come to pass and the *Raymond Leader* reported shortages in Raymond because Lethbridge's Galt mine could not keep up with local demand.²² Agent S. Swinford recognized the potential for Blood coal sales in light of the rapidly expanding local economy when he reported, "To have coal there would be worth a lot and be a tremendous advantage not only to those on the Reserve but it could be sold to all the settlers across the Belly River and would give those Indians who cares [*sic*] to work a chance to make a good living all winter long."²³ However, with too many 'domestic' coal producers and with the seasonal nature of the demand for fuel, such expressions of hope were misplaced.²⁴

Fuel shortages occurred intermittently during the next several years, increasing the value of potentially productive coal seams on the Blood reserve. This was particularly so during World War I when demand was high and labour was in short supply. For example, the desire by local individuals to open and operate coal seams led to a minor squabble in 1917 when Frank Bruce and N.X. Hansen, Hill Spring, "entered into a contract with some Indian residing in the Blood Reserve." They subsequently opened a vein with the intention of supplying their own community and Glenwoodville (Glenwood) with coal. When the small mine became productive, however, the Bloods refused permission to mine, causing the men to seek legal advice. Their attorney, Z.W. Jacobs, Cardston, attempted to persuade the Honourable C.A. Magrath, Fuel Controller, Ottawa, that as a result of the thwarted coal production "the people in that locality are experiencing considerable difficulty in obtaining fuel." The Fuel Controller's Office

pointed out that as the greatest possible coal production was important in wartime the matter should be looked into with a view to allowing mining to resume. Permission was granted only “on the distinct understanding, however, that this is not to form a precedent,” the Department in this instance considering only “the existing exceptional circumstances.”²⁵

Although some elected politicians, such as Frank Oliver, Independent member from Alberta, might express regret that Natives competed with non-Native commercial enterprise, senior DIA officials were faced with the agent’s plans for the Indians and the need to balance the books.²⁶ As a result, the desire to have Natives pay their own way overcame reservations about market place competition. Agent J.T. Faunt, for example, in the face of complaints from local producers, affirmed his belief in the Bloods’ right to market coal and indicated that they were certainly competitive locally. He estimated that the Bloods sold at least 200 tons in December 1920. Faunt further observed that the mine had been in operation for over three decades and that in 1921 “more coal has been taken out than usual, as I have been encouraging the Indians in this work, as on account of the crop failure at the North end of the Reserve, this appeared to me as a means of putting some of them through the winter with no expense to the Department.” D.C. Scott supported Faunt’s policy and stressed that Blood coal producers were not to be interfered with in their usual practice of selling their coal on the open market.²⁷

In this case the DIA justified Blood competition in the market place because of the savings it produced for the Department. This was certainly the case in 1934 when Inspector M. Christianson reported:

... as long as the Indians of this band had nothing to work at during the winter we would be called on from time to time to issue rations to them.... In 1919 we had a total crop failure on this reserve: everything was burned off – even the grass. We lost about 40% of our cattle herds during the winter of 1919–1920 ... on the Blood Reserve, if we have not grain or livestock to sell the Indians are not able to make a living and we simply have to call upon the Department for assistance. That is why I have been so anxious to get a coal mine going as that seems to be the only natural resource on this reserve that there is any chance of developing.²⁸

On at least one occasion, however, when the Bloods were not able to supply sufficient product to meet local demands, permission was given to Whites to enter and remove resources from the reserve. Despite the fact that Blood miners were already working a coal area, in 1934 Agent Pugh issued over 200 passes for farmers from Glenwoodville and Hill Spring to enter the reserve and take coal from the river bottom. There is no indication what charge, if any, was made for this coal. Christianson did believe that demand was such that a new Blood mining operation could be profitable during the winter as farmers, temporarily idle, had the resources and time to purchase and haul coal provided they could acquire the fuel at a reasonable price.²⁹ Clearly, there were times when the official policy and the aims it envisioned were not applicable to local circumstances. The policy was then modified to suit the situation.

The coal venture on the reserve, though having occasional market influence, never established a definitive market presence. Operations continued sporadically during the 1920s and 1930s. In November 1933, Blood miners and freighters were hauling coal to the Raymond sugar beet factory and the factory had been given permission to haul from the reserve. Prospecting for coal on the reserve also continued. It is likely that Blood reserve coal mining became unprofitable over time due to poor quality, inadequate capacity, competition, and shifts in market demand.³⁰

Hay

Like coal mining, the cutting, sale, and hauling of hay afforded Blood hay producers opportunities to compete in the local market. Production, as with other crops, was determined both by climatic conditions, especially rainfall, and natural disasters such as fire, and the number of acres given to hay. Yield per acre, therefore, varied. In 1876 one settler in the Red River area estimated that each acre of prairie could yield three to four tons of hay.³¹ The yields on the Blood reserve varied from year to year and such variations were caused by changes in the number of acres given to hay as well as the impact of climatic conditions.

Haying was done in summer and employed both men and machinery. Initially the haying crews utilized basic tools such as scythes, mowers, and forks. From about 1900 the introduction of hay loaders eased the toil of loading wagons and the development of overhead horse forks and slings simplified stacking. Eventually mechanical mowers, side delivery rakes, and hay tedders increased both capacity and efficiency, but these

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Figure 3.1. “Caravan of loaded hay-racks on the Blood reserve, [ca. 1905].” Glenbow Archives, NA-451-6. The caravan depicted here, and Figure 3.2 below, illustrates the Blood’ organization and capacity to produce hay for reserve consumption and sale.

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also required more expert personnel. When machinery was used, a crew was required to run and maintain the equipment through to the end of the haying.³²

With hay production, just as with coal, the Bloods' own needs took priority over market sales. In 1890, for example, although Agent Pocklington encouraged Blood producers to supply the North West Mounted Police (NWMP) detachments of Big Bend and Stand Off, he declined to contract 250 tons, at fifteen dollars per ton, for Lethbridge, claiming a shortage of hay on the reserve and in the district.³³ In seasons of scarcity, considerable effort was required to fill contracts. Chief Moon, for example, had to haul hay twenty miles to fill the terms of his contract with the NWMP.³⁴ When the season was over, Agent Pocklington concluded that, in future, such contracts should be declined unless the Indians received more transport and more machines with which to do the work.³⁵ Pocklington was likely aware that his sentiment was expressly contrary to DIA wishes to turn Natives into peasant farmers tied to the soil through their own exertions of physical labour and not in any way liberated through the employ of mechanical devices. As the man on the spot, however, he was keenly aware of the difficulties of fulfilling contractual obligations without recourse to labour-saving devices.

In July 1891, Pocklington succeeded in securing the contract to supply forty tons of hay to the Stand Off NWMP Detachment and, despite the poor season, fulfilled the contract in October. Other reserve residents entered into other arrangements such as cutting hay on a share basis with local White settlers adjacent to the reserve. These agreements, as described by Agent Pocklington, had Whites supplying the machinery and horses and the Bloods the labour. The Bloods then sold their share of the hay to the Whites. An added bonus with this arrangement, in the eyes of the agent, was that Blood farmers became familiar with the operation of agricultural machinery that the Department was so anxious to deny them.³⁶

At the same time, Heavy Gun, who had overcome departmental resistance and acquired his own machinery, was cutting for two others as well as for himself and was putting up hay for a beef contractor, likely the Cochrane Ranche. According to Pocklington, the Indians put up sixty-eight tons of hay for the contractor for which they were paid \$3.00 per ton. The agricultural tabular statement of December 1891 shows that the Bloods harvested 168 tons of hay both individually and on share agreements with Whites. It is likely that the Indians' sale of their portion of the harvest was an agreed-upon part of the share arrangement. It is not clear whether

or not they could withhold their hay for their own needs in the event of hay shortages. There was, for example, a hay shortage in July 1892, and on this occasion the agent, on behalf of Blood farmers, declined a contract to supply the NWMP.³⁷

In another case during the 1893 season Agent James Wilson thought it advisable not to attempt to fill a hay contract for the St. Mary's NWMP Detachment, citing the difficulty in securing the quality and quantity desired by the police because of a very poor growing season. Wilson did feel that he could supply fifteen tons to the Big Bend NWMP Detachment and the same for the Kootenai NWMP Detachment, "as hay in the neighbourhood of these places is good and plentiful." Wilson wanted six dollars per ton, though he eventually agreed on \$5.50 per ton of 600 cubic feet for Big Bend and Kootenai detachments, and he pointed out to Inspector Sam Steele that a White man would oversee the work to ensure that the quality of the hay was satisfactory. Eventually Wilson agreed to provide 135 tons of hay to all the various detachments.³⁸ At the same time other Bloods were contracting with neighbouring settlers. Wilson also actively sought a contract to supply hay to the New Oxley Rancho Company.³⁹

Agent Wilson, however, did not always calculate the needs of the reserve correctly and in his enthusiasm to find employment for some Bloods may have, in 1893, oversold the reserve's hay. When approached by Father Legal for ten tons of hay to see the two hospital cows through the winter, Wilson refused and confessed to the likelihood of a winter shortage. He requested departmental permission to purchase hay from any Natives who had extra for sale.⁴⁰

During times of shortage the agent's permission to sell reserve hay to outsiders was refused and unauthorized sales were discouraged through the rigid enforcement of the permit system. In 1899, for example, Agent Wilson requested police assistance in stopping hay sales in Lethbridge. In cases where individuals were caught attempting such sales, the police were requested to seize the Indians' hay and sell it, remitting the proceeds to Wilson, an action not calculated to improve reserve supply shortages unless in its salutary effect. But with reserve farmers complaining that much needed hay was being spirited away at night, Wilson's concern was for winter shortage.⁴¹

There were some legitimate hay sales to locals, however, as Wilson, guided by circumstances, continued his efforts to gain market advantage for Blood farmers in securing contracts to supply the NWMP with their fodder needs.⁴² In June 1899, he inquired as to whether his tender to deliver

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Figure 3.2.

"Hay making on the Blood Reserve, [ca. 1905]." Glenbow Archives, NA-451-5.

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Figure 3.3.

“Rumely steam engine and plough owned by the Blood, probably Blood reserve, southern Alberta, 1915.” Glenbow Archives, NA-4429-4. The use of such technology indicates a progressive approach to agriculture and resistance to any intention to make the Bloods ‘peasant farmers.’

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hay for the police would be accepted without a deposit as in the past, even though others were required to do so. The tender that Wilson eventually submitted was for hay delivered to the police detachments at Kootenai, Stand Off, and Kipp. Wilson also secured a contract for the delivery of oats to the Stand Off, St. Mary's, Kootenai, Big Bend, and Cardston Detachments. For 1899 the Bloods put up 2,269 tons of hay of which 1,186 tons were sold to the NWMP, Cochrane Ranche, and settlers for sales approximating \$5,900.00.⁴³ What special consideration, if any, was given to Wilson to secure this contract is unclear but special favours from one government Department to another is a likely explanation. It is also possible that Wilson managed to underbid others because Blood producers were willing to contract their produce and services for less.

Whatever the circumstances, the Bloods' presence in this market did affect supply and price. In 1901 the *Lethbridge News* reported that the reserve sold over 1,000 tons of hay "in filling police and ranchers' contracts, to livery stables and citizens of Macleod and Lethbridge." The agent's report for 1901 notes that "Situated as the reserve is, near to Macleod, Lethbridge, and Cardston, a good demand is always had for hay in these places, and at fairly remunerative prices, while the larger ranches along the rivers and boundary lines also look to the Indians to put up their supply."⁴⁴ PCH Primrose, Mounted Police, reported from Macleod that hay was very expensive in 1903 because the Indians were not selling as much as before.⁴⁵ The agent's report for 1903 states that the Bloods put up a total of 3,500 tons of hay and sold 1,200 tons to the police and local settlers for prices ranging from \$4.50 and \$7.50 per ton. This range in prices suggests that the Bloods may have been withholding hay from the market or from the police because of unhappiness with the price. The Bloods harvested approximately the same amount of hay in 1901, at 3,451 tons. By 1906 Blood producers were so prominent with their hay sales that the *Macleod Gazette* called them the "hay maker[s] of southern Alberta." The *Gazette* reported the Bloods were taking large contracts to supply livery stables and local ranchers "usually filling the contracts in short order."⁴⁶

The making and harvesting of hay continued to be an important source of income for Blood farmers. Agent W.J. Dilworth reported in 1914: "nearly every adult puts up every year a large quantity of hay for sale."⁴⁷ During August 1914, the Bloods put up more hay than ever before, providing 1,353 tons for agency consumption plus 4,000 tons for their own use. They had also provided 300 of a 1,500-ton lessee contract as well as contracts to provide 242 tons to various Mounted Police posts, and additional contracts for

500 tons. The agent commenting on the Bloods' willingness reported, "No difficulty has been experienced in getting them to do this work."⁴⁸ Agent Dilworth's report for 1914–15 stipulates that the Bloods harvested 10,000 tons of hay for which they realized \$30,000.00, not an inconsiderable sum and indicative of a serious and effective approach to this work.⁴⁹

Blood haymakers were certainly a market presence, and it is only sensible to conclude that besides being competitive in pricing labour, they did good work and delivered a high quality product, which helped them to sustain their market share. A copy of a 1915 hay contract between the NWMP and Agent Dilworth indicates that the police were exacting in their specifications. The contract called for 108 tons of hay delivered to Barracks at Macleod between October 1914 and June 1915 with the specification being "That the hay shall be Upland Bunch Grass Hay No. 1 quality of this year's crop, well cured, free from weeds, dirt and old bottom that it shall be subject to inspection and rejection as delivered." The Bloods were to be paid \$12.00 per ton. Interestingly, section four of the contract requiring the bidder to deposit 5 per cent of the value of the contract was deleted, likely as one government department's accommodation of another. Should the Bloods fail in their contract with regard to quality or quantity, the contract stipulated that other sources would be sought to make up the remainder, with the Bloods liable for the difference in price.⁵⁰ When it became clear in May that they would default on their contract, for reasons not given, seventy-four tons of more expensive hay had to be purchased elsewhere at a loss to the government of \$131.10. The NWMP comptroller deducted this from the amount due the Bloods.⁵¹

The Bloods themselves, however, could also be demanding in their contract specifications. Their 1915 hay contract with Gordon Ironsides and Fares, under the terms of the company's lease, stipulated that the company purchase from the Bloods not less than 700 tons at the rate of \$5.00 per ton. The Bloods, however, were under no obligation to supply that amount. When the company wanted to break or alter the terms of this agreement, the agent responded that he was determined to "see that these Indians get a square deal."⁵²

There is little detailed comment on the haying activities of the Bloods in later years, but hay sales continued, much as they did for the Blackfoot, for example, in subsequent decades.⁵³ Kainai elders Eva Hind Bull (born 1928), Jim Shot Both Sides (born 1912), and Mabel Beebe (born 1915) recall haying activities to supplement their incomes.⁵⁴ Leasing to large ranching interests continued on the reserve well beyond the period

of study, and it is likely that the Bloods continued to supply hay on at least an occasional basis, if not more often. Grazing lands also continued to be leased, offering a different approach to the sale of hay.

Freighting

Freighting also brought lucrative market involvement for the Bloods. This activity provided opportunities for employment off the reserve and was required to transport the reserve's resources to market. Such work likely appealed to the Bloods because of their involvement with horses, which many of them owned. Freighting also offered some flexibility as one could accept work when needed or desired. The basic requirements were simple; a man needed a wagon and horses, usually consisting of two or four horse teams, the latter appearing to have been most common. During the appropriate seasons, the haulage teams could be very busy with as many as fifty-three freighters operating at any one time.⁵⁵ This was a substantial commitment of men, wagons, and horses.

Freighting, for the Bloods, took place along well-travelled routes. Generally they were engaged in hauling reserve coal to the various locations needed on the reserve as well as into Fort Macleod, Cardston, and Lethbridge. Among the more travelled routes were those connecting the various mines, especially at Lethbridge, with the NWMP posts in southern Alberta. (See Figure 2.5.) Also important were the routes connecting the reserve and area hay lands with the local farmers and the ranches, such as the Cochrane Ranche. There were also lesser routes taken when Blood freighters engaged in incidental freighting for businesses or worked on construction projects such as the irrigation works around Cardston. Freighting services offered significant opportunity for the utilization of the Bloods' labour resources in the local economy.

In the case of freighting, the Blood freighters' invasion of the marketplace was based on two simple strategies, competitive pricing and influence. They were often willing to freight commodities from the various mines to the customer at the cheapest rate. Under these circumstances they were self-employed with Agent Wilson arranging contracts for their services. In 1893 Wilson reported that the Galt Coal Company would provide him coal for the NWMP contract, at the mine for \$3.25 per ton. It was Wilson's opinion that the district market would support a price of \$7.50 a ton and he was hoping for a 100-ton delivery at that price to the various

Mounted Police posts. The \$3.25 per ton difference was calculated to clear expenses and provide attractive profit for the individuals engaged.⁵⁶

October of that year proved to be a very busy time for coal hauling as preparations were made for getting in a winter supply. Agent Wilson reported twenty four-horse teams and one two-horse team hauling coal to the various NWMP posts. The 100-ton contract for the Mounted Police was completed inside of two weeks. Wilson anticipated that this prompt delivery would result in a larger share of future police contracts.⁵⁷ Clearly Wilson counted on Blood freighters winning contracts away from local non-Native haulage contractors.

In February 1898 the Bloods were busy filling their coal contract with the NWMP having delivered 280 tons of a 600-ton contract. Wilson also reported: "A number of Indians were also engaged [in] purchasing coal on their own account and taking it to Macleod for sale" for eleven dollars per load.⁵⁸ He noted in January 1897 that forty-nine Bloods earned \$1,895.96 freighting coal, which compares favourably with the \$7,510.11 of total earnings declared for 1896.⁵⁹ The Bloods delivered 115 tons of coal to the NWMP at Macleod in late 1898 and earned \$650.00. In requesting speedy payment, Wilson pointed out that the "Indians are hard up for money at present to purchase winter clothing, extra food, etc."⁶⁰

By 1898 Wilson had abandoned any prospect of the Blood coalmine being able to produce commercial quality or quantities of coal but he continued to obtain delivery contracts. In September he gave the police quotations for coal delivered to the various southern Alberta detachments. His plan was to purchase the coal from other companies and resell it, adding a delivery charge. Although police Inspector R. Burton Deane tried to drive a hard bargain, Wilson was inflexible and pointed out to Deane that, besides increased coal prices, a shortage of labour in the freighting business placed upward pressure on value.⁶¹ Wilson, as the Bloods' representative, was intent on exploiting prevailing market conditions and maximizing returns to Blood freighters for the services they provided.

The fact that the Mounted Police were the Blood reserve's biggest non-agency customer came to the attention of the *Lethbridge News*, which reported, in March 1901, that the Bloods, in an obviously efficient operation, had delivered 120 tons of coal to the police in just three days. As well, "a large quantity of coal" was delivered to the Cochrane Ranche, and to a variety of Agency institutions.⁶²

The *News* observed that Blood freighters were significant players in the freighter-for-hire marketplace:

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Figure 3.4.

"Blood men, freighters, west of Macleod, Alberta, [1894]." Glenbow Archives, NA-2459-1. Figure 3.4, and Figure 3.5 below, provide a good indication of the men, horses, and equipment the Bloods could muster to engage in the freighting business for income.

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The Indians are very eager to get freighting, but although the agent never misses a chance to procure it, either in single loads or in large contracts, he [the agent] cannot keep them regularly employed. This, however, is not surprising: they can turn out one hundred and thirty four-horse teams, instantly, upon receiving notice that they are wanted.⁶³

Such communal effort was a significant factor in the Bloods' ability to secure freighting contracts and caused local non-Native freighters and suppliers some concern, anxiety, and aggravation over their own loss of work and income.

When shortages of freighting services occurred, the Bloods were sought out by businesses needing haulage teams. The agent noted in his yearly report for 1898 that freighting was a principal occupation of the Bloods, including freighting for the agency, the NWMP, local ranchers, local merchant houses, as well as on one occasion freighting lumber for the construction of an irrigation canal undertaken by the Mormons at Cardston.⁶⁴

After 1901, little detail of the freighting activities of the Bloods is available. It is reasonable to assume, however, that the Bloods continued to take advantage of freighting opportunities offered by local farmers, businesses, and works projects. In 1914, for example, they were reported doing "a large amount of freighting" for local farmers, and during the 1916 harvest season "Some 150 teams and 200 men availed themselves of the labour at remunerative wages and with satisfaction to their employers."⁶⁵ It is likely that Blood freighters were involved in the large irrigation projects going on in southern Alberta at this time. As the Bloods acquired motor vehicles, they could take advantage of opportunities farther from the reserve.⁶⁶ Though treaty promises to protect the traditional economy were seldom honoured, and with the passage of time, it became impractical to remain tied to outmoded economic activities, the Bloods, through their own and their agents' initiatives, secured alternative sources of income.

THE SPECIAL EFFORTS OF AGENT WILSON

When Hayter Reed became Indian Commissioner in 1888, he took advantage of existing legislation, specifically the pass and permit systems, to attempt control of Native participation in local economies through

isolating them on reserves in an effort to turn them into 'peasant farmers.' A pass gave an Indian the agent's official permission to be away from the reserve. The permit granted the legal right to dispose of goods or produce in the off-reserve marketplace. The pass system originated with the 1885 rebellion and was intended as a temporary measure to monitor the movement of Natives leaving their reserves. It was likely maintained following the rebellion because the DIA recognized it as an expedient method of control over many aspects of Native culture and life.⁶⁷ Evidence shows that some agents were very rigid in applying the policy in an attempt to restrict, as much as possible, Indian involvement in the marketplace on the one hand, and to encourage the husbanding of the reserve's resources on the other.⁶⁸ In the case of the Bloods, the pass and permit systems failed to meet the Department's expectations for two basic reasons. The first was the complicity of reserve and departmental officials in undermining the legislation by generally encouraging and permitting the Bloods to leave the reserve to work. The second was the obvious need and/or desire of the Bloods to circumvent the official regulations to their own benefit.

By the 1890s Blood farmers, in keeping with advancing trends in farm mechanization, had become acutely aware of the value of machines as labour-saving devices and sought to acquire them in order to be more productive.⁶⁹ Efforts in this direction were met with little sympathy from the Department as they ran counter to Commissioner Hayter Reed's desire to tie Canada's western Native 'peasant farmers' to the soil.⁷⁰ Reed determined that reserve farmers were "not to be assisted in the purchase of labour saving machines." At the same time, Agent William Pocklington noted that non-Natives were not to be permitted to cut hay on the reserve; instead, the Bloods were to be encouraged to cut and market the hay themselves.⁷¹ The Department appeared to ignore the contradiction of wishing the Blood farmers to market a commodity in an increasingly mechanized agricultural setting without mechanical assistance.⁷² With the Bloods desperate for both money and work, it is inconceivable that Pocklington would grant permits to outsiders to cut reserve hay, in any case.

But even during Reed's tenure, local circumstance and cost considerations sometimes took precedence over "official" policy. Before 1894, for example, the Blood hay producers had enjoyed special consideration with regard to the granting of government contracts in that the usual 10 per cent deposit was dispensed with in favour of the Indians. The rules for government contracts, however, were altered in that year, and not in favour of the Bloods.⁷³ In June, Agent James Wilson wrote Superintendent Sam

image not available

Figure 3.5. "Blood people hauling grain, [ca. 1900-1903]." Glenbow Archives, NA-1437-8.

image not available

Steele, NWMP, that he could put up the hay at the Stand Off Detachment for eight dollars per ton instead of the earlier agreed nine.⁷⁴ The reason for this reduction he made clear in a subsequent letter. The granting of DIA contracts to Indians was to be placed on the same footing as others: to be awarded to the contractors with the lowest bids. Wilson petitioned the Indian Commissioner to intercede with the Police Commissioner to secure an agreement that 25 per cent of the police contracts be held for the Indians as was previously the custom. In the meantime he was forced to lower his bid to secure work for the Bloods.⁷⁵

The Bloods' impact on market conditions often depended on the agent working on their behalf. In this respect Agent James Wilson stood out for his unceasing and untiring efforts. In July 1894, for example, the ever-aggressive Wilson agreed to have the Bloods deliver coal to NWMP detachments at Macleod, Kipp, and Stand Off from any of the Galt, Sharon, or Hauk's mines for \$7.00, \$6.50, and \$6.00 per ton, respectively.⁷⁶ On this occasion, however, Wilson's bid to secure the NWMP contract for Macleod failed and so he approached W.D. Barclay, Lethbridge, who held the contract, with the idea of sub-contracting about 200 tons of the contracted amount. If this were not possible, he wished to have the Bloods hauling coal to Barclay's agents in Fort Macleod. Wilson was ostensibly driven by his desire to have "some work for these Indians to do during the next month or two."⁷⁷

Success for the Bloods, as for the remainder of the community, also depended upon the vitality of the local economy. In January 1895, Wilson reported that during the previous month little outside work was done except for minimal freighting of hay and coal. With regard to the latter, "sales are hard to make at any price in Macleod at present."⁷⁸

As a result of Wilson's efforts, however, and their willingness to accept whatever contracts were available, a number of Blood freighters remained busy. Wilson reported in October 1895:

The freighting of lumber etc. is quite a serious affair at the present moment and I have just completed arrangements with Major Steele to haul other [*sic*] 75 tons of coal to Stand Off detachment before the middle of the next month and I have also made a contract with the Cochrane Ranche Company to deliver 40 tons of coal and 4000 bricks. All this coal and brick must be hauled from Lethbridge which is distant from Stand Off 35 miles and 47 from the Cochrane Ranche.⁷⁹

Similarly, Wilson's request that departmental officials use their influence to secure work for the Bloods bore fruit. Indian Commissioner Hayter Reed wired Agent Wilson that "If you can freight six hundred tons coal police require at Macleod at five ninety five I shall get contract for you."⁸⁰ Reed also wanted the reserve mine to supply various other police outposts. The Bloods said they could deliver on the request. Although they secured the police contract, the arrangement collapsed.⁸¹ The NWMP, complaining of the quality, refused to accept coal from the Indian mine. Local citizens at Fort Macleod exhibited a similar reluctance.⁸² The Blood teamsters then turned to delivering coal from Lethbridge under contract. Although, in this case, contracting their haulage equipment to deliver a competitor's coal left the reserve mine without delivery capacity, it was a sensible alternative and secured both work and income.⁸³

What is most interesting about Hayter Reed's involvement in acquiring off-reserve employment for the Bloods is that it was, as he knew, in direct contradiction to both the spirit and letter of "official" departmental policy, a policy devised by and driven by Reed himself.⁸⁴ Why then did he acquire work for the Bloods that was so likely to bring them to public notice? As a DIA official, Reed was certainly aware that the pass system had no legal basis and that the North West Mounted Police were reluctant to enforce it.⁸⁵ Making the pass system work, therefore, was both a difficult and legally dicey business. Also, with the experience of 1885 fading, the policy likely seemed less urgent. Another possible explanation is that the policy was, in part, a public relations ploy for the benefit of local settlers and never envisioned as absolute. One also suspects that the policy was very idealistic and thus easily forsaken in the face of financial considerations. It was, therefore, a way to pay lip service to those occasional complaints of unfair Native competition that were inevitably followed by public demands that the Indians have only restricted access to local economic opportunities. If the policy, however, could be circumvented without too much public notice and outcry, and such evasion presented the promise of reduced departmental expenditure, then Native involvement in the marketplace was encouraged.

THE MARKET RESPONDS

The Department's, and especially the agent's, aggressive activity on behalf of the Blood freighters and producers was bound to lead to resentment from locals intent on protecting their livelihoods. When Agent James

Wilson tendered for the delivery of 400 tons of coal to the NWMP barracks at Fort Macleod and other detachments, in August 1895, he warned the Commissioner:

... as there is a considerable amount of feeling among the white people in this district about Indians doing such work I would ask you to kindly see the Commissioner of the Police on this matter and do what you can to obtain a share of this work for the Indians. I am afraid a good deal of pressure may be put upon the Commissioner to try and prevent us getting any.⁸⁶

Clearly Wilson expected a backlash against the Bloods' freighting activities and wished to pre-empt any attempt to cut them out of the lucrative work.

Wilson also wished to reduce the uncertainty of winning freighting contracts during the yearly bidding competition. He suggested to the Indian Commissioner that perhaps in future it could be "arranged that a certain part (say one half) of the coal supply should be held back for the Indians to deliver without putting it to open tenders.... If this was done it might tend to lessen the feeling that the Indians were taking away the living of the white men."⁸⁷ It is difficult to see how the removal of one half of the business opportunities afforded by these important contracts would lessen local entrepreneurial resentment against the Bloods, unless it was a case that half a loaf was considered better than none. Wilson's action not only reveals concern for the well-being of his charges but also suggests that, through the auspices of the agency, the Bloods had considerable influence in tendering on contracts.

Clearly the Bloods were not reluctant participants in the marketplace. Nor were the pass and permit systems, designed to prevent market access and the squandering of reserve resources, an unqualified success. Inevitably competition from the Bloods, and other Indians, led to complaints. A letter to the editor of the *Macleod Gazette* from "Freighter" bluntly stated the case against Indian competition. It criticized those perceived as "not only permitting, but assisting the Blood Reserve Indians to compete with the White settlers and laborers in the putting 'up' and sale of hay." The basis of the complaint was that the Bloods had secured large contracts through underbidding the Whites. "It is bad enough to allow these Indians to put up hay on outside contracts," the writer observed, "but when it comes to their bringing it into town for sale in large quantities, as they are doing

now, it is carrying the thing a little too far.” The crux of the matter, as this particular complainant saw it, was that the government, thus giving them a competitive edge, supplied all the material and resources placed at the Indians’ disposal. “Because their machines, wagons, grub and every other thing necessary for the business are provided for them,” the writer protested, “and because, in order that these things may be provided, the very men with whom they compete pay dollar for dollar the same money as others in Canada into the fund, out of which the machines, wagons, etc., used by these Indians are purchased,” it was hardly fair.⁸⁸ Competition was no problem, as long as equity prevailed.

The *Gazette* supported this complaint and observed, “The only apparent argument that can be used in favor of the present system seems to be that the Indians have not been very successful in their other pursuits, and that putting up hay seems to be one of the very few things that they can do.” The *Gazette* railed against the government’s expensive and futile effort at making Indians self-sufficient. The paper also charged there was unfairness in that the peoples’ wards were being financed in undercutting their beneficiaries:

It is submitted that these Indians are earning a certain amount of money by putting up hay with implements supplied by the government; by hauling supplies with wagons obtained from the same source, and by getting out (under a white man) and hauling coal, in all of which occupations they compete with hard working white men, does not indicate any advance toward independent self-support.⁸⁹

Blood producers, however, were simply availing themselves of market opportunities presented by local settlers and towns people looking for a bargain. There were bargains to be had as the Bloods, among other things, freighted supplies, hauled coal, hunted wolves cut logs, and did herding and other work for settlers.⁹⁰ They were especially successful with the production and sale of hay, and in 1896 exceeded the agent’s “most sanguine expectations” and again in 1898 they sold a considerable amount of hay in Fort Macleod.⁹¹ Indeed prices were so good, and the market so brisk, that Agent Wilson was concerned about the possibility of Blood farmers selling hay that they needed for their own cattle. In July he requested that the Lethbridge town police warn the public that the purchase of hay from Bloods not possessing a duly authorized permit to sell left the purchaser

open to prosecution.⁹² He did note that “A great deal of talk had been going on among the White men [freighters] in Macleod district about the Indians doing freighting work and if I am to put in tenders for police hay and coal then I will require to cut down low to secure them and that will cause them [freighters] to kick more than ever.” Consequently Wilson did succeed in getting the contracts for the Stand Off and Big Bend Mounted Police detachments, because the Bloods had the competitive edge.⁹³

Complaints against the Bloods fluctuated with time and economic conditions. The ‘exceptional circumstances’ created by World War I and a 1917 coal strike, for example, shut down most of the coalmines in western Canada.⁹⁴ By 1921, however, market conditions had returned to normal so complaints were received about Blood reserve coal competing in a restricted market environment. G. Finnie, the Chief Inspector of Mines for Alberta, notified the Department of Indian Affairs of complaints from operators in Magrath and Raymond in particular. Local producers expressed dissatisfaction because the Blood sales presented unfair competition because Blood miners did not have to pay leasing dues and royalties. Thus the right of the Bloods to sell coal on the open market was challenged but without effect. In an open market situation complaints from competitors who believed themselves at a disadvantage were bound to occur.⁹⁵

CONCLUSIONS

The Bloods participated in the local marketplace with the assistance and encouragement of the local agent and often the Department of Indian Affairs. Coal mining occurred because some Bloods saw it as profitable and because the agents encouraged this activity despite, at times, some misgivings about its viability. Coal mining, sales, and freighting fitted nicely into the local economic infrastructure. There was a constant demand on the reserve for coal and often from those in the vicinity. Both the Bloods and the DIA were cautious with regard to the management of this resource and so it was never allowed to come under the control of non-Natives, outside of occasional advisory services.

Haying illustrates the interactive exploitation of a Blood reserve resource. The share-crop agreements regarding the harvesting and sale of hay is indicative of mutually beneficial resource use, the reserve provided a product for which there was much demand in the surrounding community. Farmers, ranchers, the Mounted Police, and the Bloods themselves placed great reliance on hay in this particular period when horses were a major

source of agricultural power and transportation, and cattle were a chief source of food.

Freighting or shipping activities brought the Bloods into most direct conflict with non-Native economic agencies. This work was separated, in the public mind, from other activities that originated on the reserve. The perception was that, whereas the Bloods owned the coal and hay, they did not own the freighting and there was great concern that the livelihoods of non-Natives be protected through assured equal access. Non-Natives were well aware of the Bloods' special status as wards of the state and saw any advantages accruing as a result of that status as unfair competition. Despite public perceptions, however, there is no evidence that the government made any attempts to curb the Bloods' participation in freighting activities.

The willingness to exploit on- and off-reserve opportunities likely made the difference between marginal survival and abject poverty, a fate that faced many of the Bloods' contemporaries, both Native and non-Native. The *Macleod Times* of July 21, 1920 reported that both Bloods and Peigans were digging bones from the south bank of the Oldman River and selling them for fertilizer, one endeavour that the *Times* estimated earned the Indians several thousand dollars.⁹⁶ In his memoir, amateur historian Bud Spencer reported Blood teams engaged in hauling wheat for local farmers some twenty miles to Cardston.⁹⁷ In 1927, the Bloods shipped over 2,000 "canner" horses to Great Falls, Montana, for forty to fifty cents per hundredweight.⁹⁸ By 1928 the Bloods were granting oil leases on the reserve.⁹⁹

Some individuals like James Gladstone, the future senator, sought economic security for his family, wherever opportunity presented itself. Gladstone shared in the "general prosperity" of the 186 Blood reserve farmers during the latter years of the 1920s, and in the unexpected and devastating collapse of grain prices in 1929. Despite the economic hardships of the 1930s, he established a small trucking outfit on the reserve and secured contracts hauling wheat, coal, and cattle, eventually acquiring contracts from the Department of Indian Affairs. As business developed, the tiny company was able to expand and provide Gladstone and his family with some financial security.¹⁰⁰

Despite the sometimes overwhelming management control of the agent and DIA, the Bloods' economic activities were self-motivated. They opened and worked the mines and sought out contracts. They instigated the share-crop arrangements with local farmers and ranchers, and they

mustered their horses and wagons to ensure efficient delivery of coal, hay, and other commodities under contract. It was the Bloods who laboured to ensure their own livelihoods. Their evident motivation, perhaps, ensured the willingness of the DIA to, at times, adjust its policies to local circumstances. It also ensured the behind-the-scenes work of the various agents currying favour from one government agency or another. This was sufficient to secure for the Bloods a periodic, profitable, and sometimes influential market presence, especially in the supply of coal, hay, and freighting services. Criticism from the non-Native public seems to have had little impact on curbing the Bloods' desire to take positive action to secure economic independence. Clearly, and as will be illustrated below, the Bloods had a marvellous capacity for work and a ready willingness to engage competitively and energetically in the marketplace.