

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

by W. Keith Regular

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1: Introduction

There is a long-standing and firmly entrenched belief among Canadians in general that holds that Indian reservations are culturally confused, economically emaciated, physically isolated 'islands' of poverty. Buckley has called reserves *terra incognita* to all but their own people, while another has concluded that the majority of reserves produce nothing but people.¹ Robertson has posited that, overall, reserve economies have been colossal failures from their inception until as recently as the 1960s.²

While some Native reserves do fit this description, the predisposition to accept such a judgment for all is, in part, informed by the pseudo-scientific theories that were in vogue at the turn of the twentieth century and results that issued from the theory *cum* policy embodied in the Indian Act.³ Duncan C. Scott, Superintendent General of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932 and, arguably, the most influential individual to hold that post, best summed up the aims and the inherent contradictions of the Act when he stated:

This system was designed to protect them from encroachment and to establish for them a sort of sanctuary where they could develop unmolested, until advancement had rendered possible their absorption with the general citizenship. The Reserve System was intended to ensure the continuation of the tribal life and the life of the individual as an Indian, as well as to render possible a continuous and consistent administrative policy directed toward civilization.⁴

Ultimately, of course, 'civilization,' as envisioned by Scott and the government, was incompatible with the continuation of Native economic and social traditions. The Plains Indians' loss of the buffalo by 1880 was, for the Government of Canada, a fortuitous circumstance. The demise of entrenched economic patterns necessitating cultural adaptations created

significant temporary confusion in Native life, thus assisting the government's assimilationist policy aimed at erasing Native identity through re-education and the curbing of certain social and religious practices.⁵

This policy of isolation was vigorously promoted and zealously applied to Canada's Aboriginal peoples by an army of Indian agents and other government servants. The Indians, however, challenged both the policy and its repressive application, from day to day and generation to generation. The Act was intended to protect and assimilate, while at the same time severing Native homelands from the economic, social, and political milieu which surrounded them and to which they were attached. That the Act succeeded absolutely in this intent has, to a large degree, been uncritically accepted by Canadian historians, both Native and non-Native alike. Thus the 'fact' of Native exclusion and isolation, with all the attendant disadvantages that this entails, has seemingly been sustained. The consequence of Canada's hegemony over Indians, historians have concluded, has resulted in a less than marginal existence for Native people, their only victory being 'survival.'⁶

Native Canadians have been presented as a culturally primitive people and works largely now dated have sustained this view. During the early reserve period Natives were believed to have an unsustainable economic and population base and were, therefore, dependent on Canadian government beneficence. The nineteenth-century belief that Indian societies had lost their cultural and economic vibrancy and were a people headed for extinction has helped perpetuate the view of Native irrelevance that is reflected in Canadian historical and literary writings, especially those dealing with the post-World War I period.⁷ Discussion of Native and non-Native interactions is generally cast in a negative mould because Natives were viewed as irrelevant to Canadian economic and social development.⁸ Historian James St. G. Walker has noted that Indians have made little impression on how historians write Canadian history. In fact, Native peoples are denied a historic role except for that which the dominant society chooses to give them.⁹ It is telling, perhaps, that to date they have been accorded very little.

THE LITERATURE

The view that Natives have played no significant part in Canada's modern history was set out by an earlier generation of scholars, one of the most influential being G.F.G. Stanley. In his work *The Birth of Western Canada*,

first published in 1936, Stanley established the premise of a dichotomy between 'civilized' and primitive peoples and cast the latter or Aboriginal peoples at a predictable disadvantage. How could it be otherwise for societies described as 'simple' and 'inflexible'? In essence he argued that Canadian plains Native cultures were not viable in the face of Euro-Canadian advancement.¹⁰ There were apparently then only two possible outcomes. Native societies had to adjust, such adjustment requiring total cultural re-orientation, or fortune and disease would dictate whether or not they were doomed as a race.

Stanley also firmly entrenched the idea of the permanent disastrous effect of the loss of the buffalo to plains Native cultures.¹¹ The consequences according to both Canadian and American historians were an economic and cultural destabilization from which the Plains Indians have never recovered.¹² Inherent in Stanley's outlook is the supposition that Anglo-Canadian individualism in both economic enterprise and social behaviour is superior to individual Native initiative and to Native communities acting in economic and social concert. Although surrounded on their reserves by an immigrant culture, there was apparently nothing they could contribute to or gain from this association. Thus the stage was set for the Indians to fade to the back of both the real and perceptual landscape. A new generation of historians, although no longer viewing Natives and their affairs through a Euro-centric cultural lens, has found little to celebrate in Native attempts to prosper, basing their views on a core body of literature with interpretations largely ingrained.

Hugh Dempsey, one of the most prolific writers on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries southern Alberta Plains environment, for example, has focused, chiefly in the form of biography, on the valiant if vain efforts of individual Native leaders to lead their people after the decline of the buffalo and the move to reserves. His work is a calendar of cultural turmoil centred on the Native struggle to remain economically and culturally relevant. Though his biographies of leaders and individuals, such as Crowfoot, Red Crow, James Gladstone, and Tom Three Persons in particular, are tributes to individual endurance, adaptation, fortitude, and ultimately personal success, they are nonetheless presented against a backdrop of collective tribal economic and social dysfunction and despair.¹³

Helen Buckley's 1992 study *From Wooden Ploughs to Welfare* is a chronicle of the long despairing descent by prairie Indians into welfare. Buckley's is a damning indictment of a federal government Indian policy that, she claims, was shortsighted in its planning, repressive in its application, and largely

sterile in its results. Buckley is clear, however, in holding the government and its policy to account, and not the Natives themselves, for their victimization and failure. Dealt with differently, that is, offered the same opportunities as non-Native farmer-settlers, the Indians might have succeeded. But fail they did and that is her ultimate bleak conclusion, a current stasis that has no predictable end except in Native self-government. Unfortunately there has been a general acceptance by Canadians of what Buckley has termed the “melancholy reality” of Native and reserve existence as all-embracing and for all time.¹⁴

Historian Hana Samek’s *The Blackfoot Confederacy 1880–1920* scrutinized the similarities and differences in the administration of Canadian and American Indian policy by focusing on the reserves of the Blackfoot Confederacy. Samek accepts ‘the failure of reservation economies’ among the Blackfoot, including the Bloods, a failure which she sees as rooted in the loss of the buffalo, geography, climate, and government policies. She claims the latter were bound to fail because of the “cultural chasm” that existed between government officials and the Indians they administered. Her study, however, ends in 1920 and her discussion of the most recent years is brief and unsatisfactory. Samek believes that Canada continues to pursue a policy that will continue the cycle of dependency.¹⁵

In their *Town Life: Main Street and the Evolution of Small Town Alberta, 1880–1947*, Wetherell and Kmet focus considerable attention on the southern Alberta towns of Fort Macleod and Cardston. Key developments in town genesis, political life, economic activities, physical planning and structure, and community living are analyzed. Except for occasional references, however, significant Native influences on community development are ignored. There is no recognition of Natives as transient visitors or permanent residents. Natives are noticeably absent in discussions on doing business and street life. They are accorded little or no influence in the important phases of town genesis and growth. The view of a contentious and confused relationship between resident Aboriginals and the towns established in their traditional territory, a relationship in which Natives were rejected as out of place, is discussed by New Zealand historian David Hamer in his *New Towns in the New World*.¹⁶ Yet even the most cursory glance at local newspapers for Fort Macleod and Cardston leads to starkly different conclusions. In some ways, as will be discussed, Natives were an essential determinant of the kind of urban and rural setting that emerged in southern Alberta.

The origins of the perception that Native economies have developed in isolation are uncertain. Early ethnographic works seem not to have laid this foundation. Goldfrank, for example, suggests that the Bloods took to haying simply because a market existed and “onerous cultivation was unnecessary” and “work for the agency or white ranchers, for the money wages received ... offered a greater measure of independence.”¹⁷ Significantly, Goldfrank declares that for the decade from 1910 to 1920, “for the first time in the history of the Blood, a money economy, entirely divorced from the traditional horse economy, flourished exuberantly and with success in this competitive society.”¹⁸ Goldfrank may have under-stressed the importance of earlier decades. Similarly Hanks and Hanks note a similar proclivity among the Blackfoot to engage in contract work, although the focus of their efforts is mainly on the reserve economy.¹⁹ The acceptance of an isolated Native economy, therefore, simply seems to fit with the government’s stated policy of isolation on reserves, the desired social and physical control and the assumption that the policy succeeded.

American historians have delved more deeply into the nature of the processes and place of the ‘frontier,’ ‘borderland,’ or ‘middle ground’ experience and how to interpret the interplay occurring in the economic and cultural meeting area has led to spirited exchanges.²⁰ The various works, however, point to one certainty: Natives were *not irrelevant* to the processes of integration in the earlier phases of contact, influencing as well as being influenced. At the very least it is unreasonable to expect Native people to have melted away in the face of non-Natives’ unwarranted designs on their land, labour, and personages.

As both Alan Trachtenberg and Patricia Limerick have illustrated, there were no empty spaces in the American West and America’s expansion into the occupied spaces resulted in a melding of peoples and fusion of economies.²¹ Both historians see the West’s resources and people as intimately linked to the development of the American nation. As Trachtenberg astutely observes, “The West poured its resources into the expanding productive system, contributing decisively to the remaking of that system into a national incorporated entity.” Native peoples as well, of course, were sucked into the vortex of the incorporation experience but not without resistance, a fact brutally brought home to both Native and non-Native alike in a series of violent confrontations.²² Violence aside, economic co-existence was not a rarity but it fell victim to American national political and economic exigencies, which saw in the Indians the “utmost antithesis to an America dedicated to productivity, profit, and private prosperity.”²³

Limerick concludes that after conquest was affected Indians became “a population in trouble, with massive unemployment and poor prospects for economic recovery.”²⁴

Historian Daniel Calhoun, in his rejection of the picture painted by both Trachtenberg and Limerick, has perhaps come closest to unmasking the reality of frontier peoples’ experiences with each other. In a short but perceptive essay on Parras, Coahuila Province, Mexico, Calhoun concludes: “There were segments of the community as complex as anybody’s ‘middle ground,’ there were other segments almost as homogeneous as somebody’s ethnic ‘ideal types.’ Observers then and historians since have oversimplified and generalized. The various peoples worked together or defended against each other as the need arose.”²⁵

An exponent of this view in Canada, and a significant departure from the literature in general, is the work of Arthur J. Ray. Although his study, *Indians in the Fur Trade*, is not specific to southern Alberta, it does offer commentary on the Plains region and its economy. The significance of Ray’s work is that it firmly anchors Native people as pivotal players in the fur trade economy and in a deliberate participatory fashion, reacting to the ebb and flow of goods and adjusting their relations with each other and with fur traders. Ray notes, for example, “these changes [in the fur trade] strongly influenced the evolving tribal economies of the Indians of Western Canada.”²⁶ When the Assiniboine were undercut as middlemen, Ray suggests, they likely “shifted the primary focus of their trading activities from the exchange of furs to the bartering of dried meat and grease in a relatively short period of time.”²⁷ Ray argues that both the Assiniboine and the Plains Cree “exerted their economic power either to obtain more favourable rates of exchange for themselves, or to prevent their enemies from trading at various parkland posts,” findings supported by Thistle in his *Indian-European Trade Relations* and by Ray and Freeman in ‘*Give Us Good Measure*’.²⁸ A significant note by Ray is that, despite changing economic circumstances for the Natives, their “earlier practice of exploiting woodland, grassland, and parkland resources on a seasonal basis persisted among a large proportion of the Indian population,” a testament to both persistence and adaptation, as will be discussed below.²⁹

Also worthy of consideration, because of a more contemporary focus, are Hildebrandt and Hubner, *The Cypress Hills: The Land and Its People*, and Hildebrandt’s *Views from Fort Battleford: Constructed Visions of an Anglo-Canadian West*. The former is a study, not so much of people in a place, but of successive transitory populations through a place, in this case the

Cypress Hills of southern Saskatchewan. Unlike the Bloods, who are, in the reserve period, resident specific, Hildebrandt and Hubner describe the attractions of the Cypress Hills for various peoples and the interactions of these peoples with the land and each other. Nonetheless, it is a well-crafted study of social and environmental interaction during a dynamic period of change in the last half of the nineteenth century. As Hildebrandt and Hubner observe, “The economy” in which Natives played a part, “changed from one preoccupied with consumption to one that concentrated on production for exchange.”³⁰

In his *Views from Fort Battleford*, Hildebrandt presents the theme of change and adaptation in the Battleford area, located in Plains Cree territory. In this specific place the usual colonial discourse is played out, the Natives predominate in the early history of the area only to be displaced and marginalized economically, physically, and socially by an Anglo-Canadian presence. Worthy of note here is the view that the local and regional economies of the Natives and Métis “lacked vitality” and so the traditional barter and market economy suffered in the face of externally imposed economic structures.³¹

The economic, social, and political culture of the West tends to be viewed, as Francis has illustrated, strictly in terms of a transplanting and melding of Euro-Canadian influences.³² This is an important consideration when one realizes that Natives were, though often in a negative way, a significant part of what was perceived as the western setting. Much about Indian life and mythology also permeates our cultural and literary heritage.³³ Why Natives have apparently made no lasting impression on Anglo-Canadian interpretations of the ‘image’ or of the history of the region is an important question. This may, in part, explain why efforts to study Native and non-Native economic history as a regional integrated whole have been slow to occur.

Generally speaking, J.R. Miller’s assessment that Canada’s Natives existed in a limbo of ‘irrelevance’ until the post-World War II period may well be correct.³⁴ Although the nature of Indian participation in local economies and environments has yet, in large measure, to be determined, there is little doubt that, in the case of the Blood tribe of southern Alberta, its partial integration into the economy was multi-faceted, deliberate, sustained, and an important contribution to the local emergent economic activities in which it was involved.³⁵ Willingness to look at the southern Alberta area as an organic whole leads to other possible conclusions with regard to the extent of the Indian detachment from, or conversely

attachment to, the physical and economic environment in which the Blood reserve existed. Accepting the above in no way excludes accepting differing, perhaps divergent, experiences for other Native and non-Native communities sharing physical and economic regions, such as the conclusion reached by Sarah Carter in *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy*, her study of the Cree, or Elias in his study of the Dakota.³⁶ Even a heritage of sometimes uneasy cohabitation of a region need not, however, result in completely or exclusively divergent experiences when there is clearly a 'conjunction of interests.' The Bloods may well be, after all, not an isolated case.

Historian Paul Voisey assumes that "everything about a new community in an area lacking a Native host culture can ultimately be traced to environment, tradition, frontier, and metropolis."³⁷ I think that allowance must be made for modification and formation through interaction with a host Native community, in this case the Bloods. The intent is to detail the nature of some of the economic points of intersection of Native and non-Native in the process of forming communities. Though governments at various times attempted to isolate the Bloods and their affairs from the emerging surrounding communities, they failed to prevent the Natives' interaction with the newcomers.

The Native presence in southern Alberta, however, defies the rigid application of formulae to predict a pattern of relationships as the community developed from pioneering beginnings to the more permanent structures of the 1930s. The Bloods' presence, with their land base, likely complicated formal and informal economic and group relations so that simple dichotomies did not exist. The economic development of southern Alberta occurred in response to both on- and off-reserve conditions that prevailed from the pioneer period through the Great Depression. Clearly, any attempts to economically and physically isolate the Bloods were frustrated by the demands and needs of the Bloods and their neighbours, the reciprocity this engendered, and the governments and agencies that worked on their behalf.³⁸

Historical analysis of the post-fur trade era, I believe, has led to a stilted view of the reality and extent of Canadian Indian integration into local economies. The government policy of reserve isolation, with the assumed result that there was no, or little, movement of people and materials to and from Native reserves is unrealistic. Equally, the potential for a distinct Native population and its reserve land base to influence developments among an immigrant population have not been recognized. How, for example,

does the non-Native population determine its economic and social agenda, execute its economic functions, and otherwise express itself in relation to the Native presence? What attempts are made to draw the reserve and its inhabitants into the newly imported economic strategies? In this case, are the Bloods considered as liabilities or, when needed, a resource upon which to draw?

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Discussions of economic motivations and organization for the period under discussion are usually viewed in terms of market capitalism and deals with trade, labour, and investment capital and its relationship with the state, centred on an axis of exploitation and racism. It is not the intent here to offer detailed explanations but simply to introduce concepts that, though having general economic and social applicability, need to be considered in light of specific local circumstances. American historian William Robbins argues, “The penetration of market forces ... the subjugation and colonization of native peoples” among other elements “provide the essential framework for broad historical analysis” of western American development. He concludes, however, that capitalism as a theme for understanding that development has been neglected.³⁹ Canadian scholarship, it can be argued, has suffered from similar neglect, despite a reality promoted by Richard White that post-contact history can be defined by “the persistent effort of whites to integrate Indian, land, labor, and resources into the market.”⁴⁰ These were certainly objects of much desire among the Bloods’ neighbours, but to what effect?

The above observation aside, Canadian scholars have initiated discussion of Native integration into market capitalism. Carl Beal expertly details the variety in theory and argument surrounding market economics and its application to western Canada and Native involvement and influences. Beal views economics as a set of interrelated factors, “market economy, monetization of economic relations, the economic organization of Indian reserve economies, and government policy.” Importantly, Beal observes, in a market economy “market prices regulate economic activity,” with regard to resource allocation and production, including “land, labour and capital” and “money functioning as purchasing power in the hands of those who possess it.”⁴¹ Germane to discussions here, however, are Beal’s views that Indian involvement in the western Canadian market economy

likely “figure[d] prominently in market growth” and undermines the view of their marginalization.⁴²

Rolf Knight, for example, referred to British Columbia Natives as both “workers and independent producers” connected to industrial capitalism “right from the start.” As well, they were entrepreneurs and players in the “general capitalist development” of British Columbia and he labels attachments to exclusive alternative interpretations of Native economic behaviours as highly romanticized.⁴³ In providing a capitalist framework for his brief discussion of the sugar beet industry in southern Alberta during the 1950s and 1960s, Ron Laliberté applies a structure of domination and exploitation of labour where state regulation encourages capital accumulation, with the state “intervening into the economy in order to facilitate the flow of workers into available job positions.”⁴⁴ Similarly, Newell notes that such state strategies were employed in the Pacific Coast fisheries and, likewise, Bourgeault for Aboriginal labour in the North-West, specifically Saskatchewan.⁴⁵

Bourgeault and Laliberté consider capitalism as both exploitative and racist, in that its *raison d’être* is a “continuous supply of cheap labour subjected to various means of coercion and exploitation” to achieve “maximum production of surplus value” by conscripting marginalized racial groups.⁴⁶ Bourgeault views the treaties, the Indian Act, and the reserves as aids making land available to “industrial and financial capital.” He further argues that the pass system and vagrancy laws “disallowed Indian direct participation in the greater capitalist economy other than as labour. Any commodity production as in agriculture for outside sale was seriously restricted.”⁴⁷ As always, however, one has to separate what was officially stated as desirable from what actually occurred, especially in the case of the Bloods. The Bloods possessed a large contiguous land area with various resources in fluctuating demand and which they disposed off often at whim. They possessed a sustainable, concentrated, adaptable population possessed of skilled leadership, and market savvy, all at some time or other and individually or in concert, calculated to mitigate the considerable weight of arbitrarily and bureaucratically imposed capitalist structure. As well, the individual personalities of the various reserve agents were an unpredictable and modifying factor regulating the integration of Natives with capitalism during much of the reserve era.

Bourgeault attributes only one *law* to capitalism, “that labour ... must be exploited in the maximum production of surplus value.”⁴⁸ Consequently, as Laliberté notes, capitalist beet interests put the *squeeze* on beet labour.⁴⁹

Contrary to what might be expected, however, the implementation of this *squeeze-law* often worked to the detriment of capitalism in the sugar beet fields during the period of Knight Sugar as it placed the industry in competitive conflict with other industrial demands on labour. As discussed below, the Bloods, on occasion, abandoned physically demanding sugar beet labour with a view to greater personal gain for less effort.

One can also argue that the active aim of the state, as opposed to official stated policy, with regard to Natives underwent transition between the early reserve period and the later half of the twentieth century. Laliberté illustrates that the Canadian state purposely removed Native peoples from relative isolation in northern Alberta and Saskatchewan to southern Alberta in the interests of capitalist labour needs. Early state policies such as the pass and permit system, the Indian Act, and the establishment of reserves, however, were calculated to have precisely the opposite effect. And even on occasions when some officials believed the enhancement of capitalism was a state obligation, the bureaucracy of the state was at cross-purposes on the occasions when agents protected Natives, in this case the Bloods, from exploitation in ranching leases, commodity resource markets, labour in the sugar beet fields, and debt retrieval. There was certainly no seamless web of efficiency tying the Bloods to their land, labour and capital, to capitalist structure with the effect of relegating them a permanently exploitable resource. Tied they were, but at times on conditions of their own determination. Tough and Ray noted that just such a self-interested tendency among Natives engaged in the northern fur trade was enough even to threaten Hudson's Bay Company monopoly profits.⁵⁰

For much of the immediate pre-reserve period, the Plains economy, including that of the Bloods, was a dual economy, that is, Native economies and capitalist economies co-existed. This arose because the imported capitalist economy was unable to terminate or assimilate the Native economy. Thus a middleman position emerged to bridge the two, and on the Plains, Gerhard Ens concludes, the Métis filled this void. This status quo continued until the 1880s and 1890s when, with the loss of the buffalo, this dualistic economy disappeared, supplanted by developed capitalism.⁵¹ The Bloods were thus required to continue transition from subsistence-based economics through dual economic adaptation to inclusion in a capitalist market economy, with its emphasis on profit from labour provided by free agents.⁵² Friesen asserts that capitalism "re-created the entire region" between the 1840s and the 1890s with subsequent decades having the economic and "political arrangements of a democratic capitalist state

confirmed.”⁵³ Similarly, Thompson, in his synthesis of western prairie history, states that by the end of the nineteenth century, “The region had been drawn into the web of industrial capitalism, and ways of life evolved over two centuries had been swept aside; the Indian and Métis people who were once central to that way of life had been forced to the margins.”⁵⁴ This was the economic environment where the Bloods applied the greatest strategies of adaptation and strategic accommodation.

The Government of Canada, as did certain elements of the local community, viewed the Bloods, and Natives generally, as obstacles to ‘civilization.’ Many locals, however, recruited the Indians to help create and amass wealth. Robin Fisher has determined that in British Columbia the government’s policy “reflected the fact that the Indians had become largely irrelevant to the development of the province by Euro-Canadian settlers.”⁵⁵ The experience in southern Alberta, however, was that the government’s policies aimed at creating and sustaining that irrelevance were much diffused in transmission from the Department of Indian Affairs officials in Ottawa to the citizens of Fort Macleod or Cardston, the ranchers and farmers in the surrounding countryside, and the reserve agent. Evidence exists to show that the Bloods aggressively and sensibly participated in local economic activities because they preferred not to remain on the periphery. Often, circumstances beyond the Bloods’ control such as depletion of resources, drought, depression, national economic policies, dictated that they should retreat to the confines of their reserve. Their integration into the local economy, however, was sufficient enough that their neighbours resisted the Bloods’ disengagement. Indeed, the extent to which they withdrew their labour, and access to their land and capital precipitated, as we shall see, significant upset among the local business interests which in many instances found their very survival compromised.

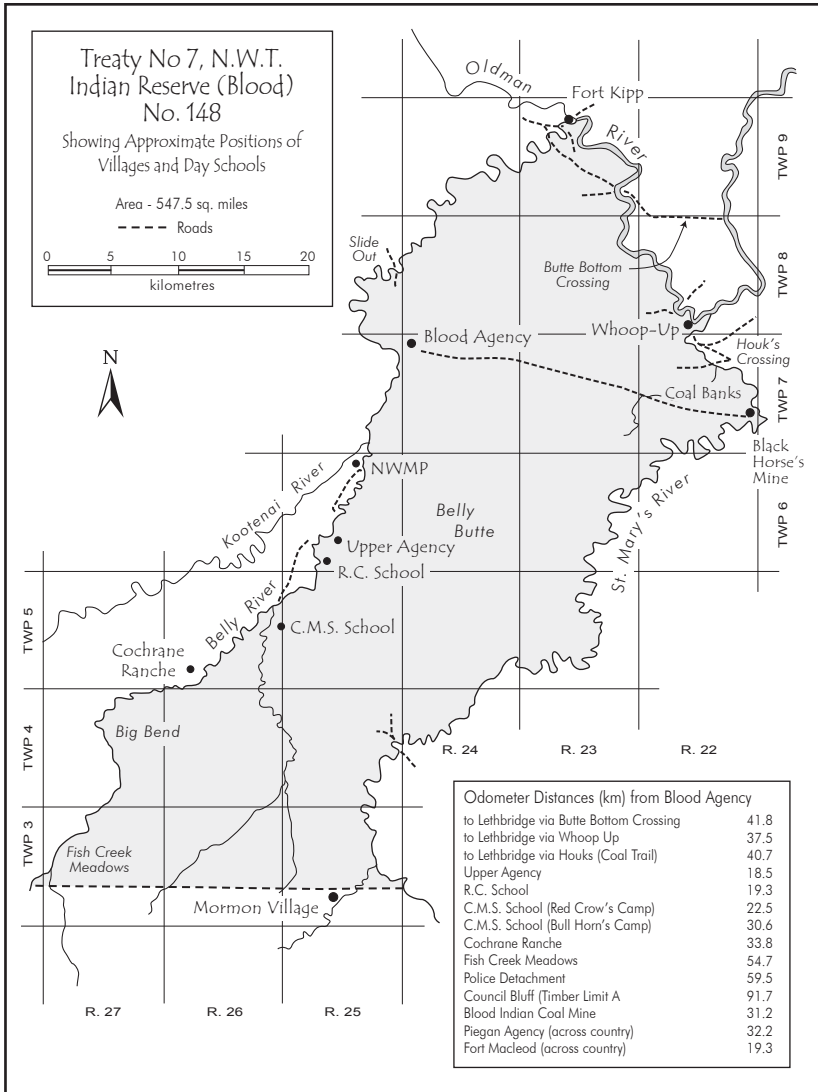
Doxtator has charged, “the act of building Canada involved asserting a nation literally over the top of Native cultures.”⁵⁶ Here we can clearly see the tendency to fit Aboriginal Canadians into Eurocentric history rather than to see certain strands of Canada’s development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a common shared heritage. By studying a small region of southern Alberta, detail will emerge to more sharply focus the non-Native and Native partnership in the development of a given locality. In the period of supposed Indian ‘irrelevance,’ the Bloods, at least, forged a relevant meaningful economic association with their non-Native neighbours in the period between the establishment of the reserve and the onset of World War II.

THE LOCALE

Peter Carstens has properly observed that, though Native reserves are defined spaces, they are nevertheless politically and economically tied to the broader community.⁵⁷ Historians must move beyond the view of the Natives as passive receivers, and the notion of Plains Indians, and their neighbours (homogeneously grouped as pioneers on the frontier) as having, despite their diversity, separately felt homogeneous experiences. In reality change and accommodation accompanied the realization by both Natives and non-Natives that they shared people and resources in common.

The primary focus of this work, therefore, is people and place, more specifically people in a place. The main study area is roughly the shape of a parallelogram bounded on the north with an axis connecting Lethbridge and Fort Macleod and on the south with an axis connecting Cardston with Hill Spring just west of the Blood reserve. The central focus of this territory comprises 541 square miles of Blood reserve land, centred on Townships 3 to 9, Ranges 21 to 28, West of the fourth meridian. The reserve has natural borders, bounded on the east by the St. Mary's River, on the north by the Oldman River and in the west by the Belly River. Its southern extent is an east to west line determined by the township survey system (Map 1).

During the 1880s the Bloods settled their reserve mindful of established historical economic and communications patterns and cultural ties to the surrounding area. They tended to concentrate along the western border; that is, along the eastern bank of the Belly River. Townships 5 north through Township 8 had the heaviest concentration of settlement. The south and the eastern length of the reserve along the St. Mary's River were relatively empty of settlers. This tendency to group in the west can, perhaps, be explained by the presence of Fort Macleod to the west and north of the reserve. The Blood agency buildings in the northern portion of Township 7 were only twelve miles from Fort Macleod where many Bloods shopped and where much official agency business was conducted. The presence of a North West Mounted Police post near the confluence of the Belly and Kootenai Rivers, the location of the Bloods' timber limit in the mountains to the west, and Cochrane Ranche lands to the immediate west of the reserve likely influenced reserve settlement patterns. Bands and family groupings also naturally concentrated to the north and south of the agency occupying available space. Eventually ties to Cardston became important in drawing settlement into the reserve's southern portions.



Map 1.

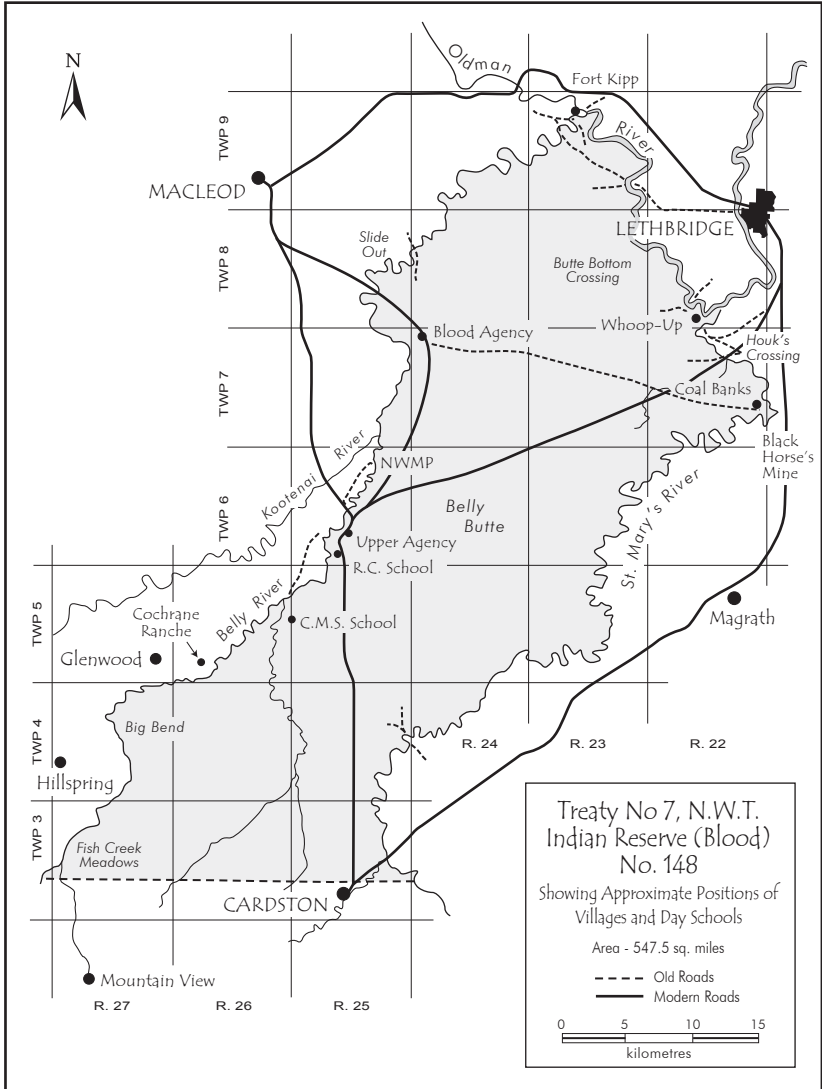
Map of Blood Reserve and Area. Adapted by Marilyn Croot from a map in LAC, RG 10, vol. 3851, file 75988.

Trails also tended to cross and exit the reserve in relation to important sites such as the old Fort Slide Out and the old Fort Whoop-Up located in the western and southeast portions of Township 9 respectively. A trail from the area of the agency buildings crossed the reserve to Coal Banks, on the St. Mary's River, where Black Horse operated his mine. Another trail crossed the northern tip of the reserve in the vicinity of Fort Kipp (Kipp), continued to Butte Bottom Crossing and carried on east to Lethbridge. Trails exiting the reserve at Fort Whoop-Up and Houk's Crossing were similarly used. These trails were so placed as to eventually tie in with developed communications and transportation routes. Thus contact with Fort Macleod and Lethbridge and eventually with Cardston, Raymond, and other small communities was maintained (Map 2).

PEOPLE

The population of the study area is composed of Natives, chiefly the Bloods, and non-Native ranchers, farmers, and settlers residing in rural and urban settings. Towns have a centralized social, political, and economic infrastructure directed towards attracting resources and people from the periphery. From the start, the Bloods, by dint of numbers were poised to be significant players in the local economy, helping to both generate and sustain growth. Most of the Bloods' commercial intercourse was in trading and purchasing in both Fort Macleod and Cardston and in selling their labour in Raymond. Wetherell and Kmet surmise that phases in the growth of newly established towns in southern Alberta likely mirrored developments in the region as a whole; towns focused both population and trade and trade in particular "remained a force in knitting together a patchwork of local concerns and policies."⁵⁸

Comparing the population figures for these towns and the Bloods, it is possible to get some perspective on the Bloods' relative position. In 1882 the government estimated the Blood population at 2,589.⁵⁹ Thereafter it declined, but in 1901 the Blood population was 1,253 or 87 per cent of that of Fort Macleod and Cardston combined. Given that the reserve was established in 1880, there were two decades in which the Bloods likely had a significant impact on the economic well-being of one or both of these places. The relative weight of the Blood population sharply declined to 1,168 or 31.5 per cent of Fort Macleod, Cardston and Raymond in 1906 and by 1911 was at 1,128 or 25 per cent. Thereafter it appears to have hit a low of approximately 20 per cent in the mid-1920s (Table 1.1).⁶⁰ But even



Map 2.

Map of Indian Reserve (Blood) No. 148, showing settlement and use patterns. Adapted by Marilyn Croot from a map in LAC, RG 10, vol. 3851, file 75988, and a map in the *Lethbridge Herald*, August 12, 1968.

Table 1.1. Population at Census Year.

Town	1901	1906	1911	1916	1921	1926	1931	1936	1946
Cardston	639	1.001	1.207	1.370	1.612	2.034	1.672	1.711	2.334
Macleod	796	1.144	1.844	1.811	1.723	1.715	1.447	1.365	1.649
Raymond	----	1.568	1.465	1.205	1.394	1.799	1.849	2.094	2.116
TOTAL	1.435	3.713	4.516	4.386	4.729	5.548	4.968	5.170	6.099
Blood	1.253	1.168	1.128	1.154		1.158*		1.325**	
Blood as % of total	87.3	31.5	25.0	26.3		20.9		25.6	

Census of Prairie Provinces, Vol. 1, 1946, p. 522. The 1881 and 1891 census reports do not differentiate on the basis of community and so were not used.

Data on the Bloods is taken from Agent's Reports contained in *Canada Sessional Papers*.

*This is the population count for 1924 taken from C.S.P., No. 14, 1925, p. 28.

**This is a reading for 1935 taken from NAC, RG 10, vol. 12645, file 205/3-2, pt. 1, M. Christianson to R.H. Coats, December 30, 1935.

at this minimal ratio the number of Bloods represented an attractive and significant market to local businesses, some of which specialized in retailing to Native peoples.⁶¹

The population for these communities peaked in 1926, declined during the early Depression, and recovered again in 1936. The Bloods' economic value was likely greater during this period of non-Native population decline. Given that the reserve was a home base to which the bulk of the Bloods were tied, the population was a constant presence and the people a captive market. The Blood population maintained its levels and in fact began a slow but perceptible increase. An indication of that value is illustrated by the heightened desire for Native patronage and the frantic demands for the settlement of credit accounts as discussed in Chapter 5 below.

Towns were the focus of commercial activities and the attractions they offered lured the Bloods to frequent town environs. However, the rural setting was not insignificant. The nature of land use, and government

regulations, during the ranching era encouraged sparse populations.⁶² The ranchers and few farmers, however, incorporated the Natives into their economy by hiring them as ranch labour, renting Native land, and purchasing fuel and fodder supplies Natives offered for sale. These commercial bonds increased as the area became more settled and as Blood labourers and entrepreneurs became more adept at marketing their resources.

STRUCTURES OF MANAGEMENT: THE RESERVE

Because it was a political entity, the Blood reserve was not independent of Canadian law or political influences. Affecting both the well-being of the Bloods and their relations with their non-Native neighbours was both the infrastructure of the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) and its policy, as embodied in the Indian Act. The reach of the Department was extensive and was, as far as the Native peoples were concerned, a smothering embrace. Other than the often expressed and significant Native resistance, the only protection that the Indians had from the Department's grasp was the presence on the reserve of a concerned agent who placed the well-being of his charges before blind obedience to Ottawa. As for policy, it was nativist-informed and was based on the ultimate goal of assimilating the Natives, on the one hand, and making them economically self-sufficient by turning them into subsistence farmers, ranchers, or entrepreneurs, on the other.⁶³

The reserve was subject to decisions made by a host of government bureaucrats, chiefly those in the Department of Indian Affairs in Ottawa. The main purpose of policies emanating from Ottawa was to isolate and control the Indians on their reserves while encouraging them to adopt White ideals of advancement and eventually assimilate with the non-Native population. Hence, it was hoped that Native peoples, as a distinct segment of the Canadian population, and their reserves as distinct political units, would ultimately disappear.⁶⁴

The DIA was organized into an inside and outside service. The inside service was composed of the personnel at Ottawa, which included divisions for a deputy superintendent general, chief clerk, accountant, and unskilled positions. The outside service was made up of the workers in the field who dealt with the Indians on a daily basis. The most important of these was the reserve Indian agent, the ultimate government authority on the reserve. His main responsibility was the implementation of DIA directives and the Indian Act. Because of his intimate daily contact with the Indians

under his charge he was in a position to influence decision making among the Native peoples. The agent's powers were increased in 1881 when an amendment to the Indian Act made him a justice of the peace with powers to effect an arrest, conduct trials, and pass sentence.⁶⁵ Other reserve personnel, such as farm instructors, worked under the agent's supervision and direction.

When the Laurier Liberals came to power in 1896, Minister of the Interior Clifford Sifton instituted cost-saving reforms that ultimately resulted in more centralized decision making. Consequently more power was concentrated in the hands of J.D. McLean, Secretary and eventually Assistant Deputy Superintendent, and accountant Duncan Campbell Scott. Scott became the Deputy Superintendent General in 1913, a post he held until 1932. McLean and Scott were the major influences and powers in Indian Affairs during their tenures in office. Harold W. McGill succeeded Scott.

Canada made its most significant contribution to the management of Indians and their affairs with the passing of the Indian Act in 1876, an act so comprehensive in scope that it regulated practically every aspect of Native life.⁶⁶ Simply put, the Indian Act of 1876 was an instrument of repression reinforcing a culture of repression with regard to Native Canadians.

In impact the Act was all-embracing and, in hindsight, it institutionalized racism as government policy, though contemporaries did not perceive it in this light. Brazen in design, the Indian Act intended no less than to sever Natives from the substance of their humanity. The Act, as law, condemned Native religion and, through its proscription of political, social, religious, and economic functions, reformatted their culture. As the foundation for the new status quo with Native people, it offered the rationale for an attack on Native language and their traditional educational system in an attempt to infuse Natives with the White ideals of civility. The passage of this repressive and comprehensive legislation was justified on the basis that it would turn Indians into 'civilized' and productive citizens of Canada.

Thereafter the matter of most concern to the government bureaucracy was the implementation of the agenda as outlined in the Act. As part of that plan, Indians were given some responsibility for their own local affairs as the act made provision for the election of chiefs and councillors. The powers of intrusion reserved to the Department, reserve inspectors, and the agent, however, were so extensive as to make the decision-making authority of the band and council, in the view of one contemporary official,

practically a legal fiction.⁶⁷ An amendment to the Act in 1895 allowed the minister to depose chiefs, necessary, according to Tobias, “because the band leaders in the West were found to be resisting the innovations of the reserve system.”⁶⁸

The Act, a dynamic and evolving piece of legislation, was a weapon deftly wielded by politicians and bureaucrats to respond to all manner of circumstance. Amendments to the Act, in conjunction with officially accepted illegal repression, especially in times of perceived crisis and emergency, permitted the government to pursue its own agenda of ‘protection, civilization, assimilation,’ and domination. An examination of the government’s treatment of the Indians subsequent to the 1885 Rebellion and during World War I will be illustrative.

SYSTEMS OF CONTROL: THE RESERVE

Though not based in the Indian Act, the pass system, implemented to control Indian movement, was made possible by the empowerment of Indian agents and government officials through the Act. Agents and police could pressure Indians into compliance because the pass system did not have to stand on its own merits but could be reinforced through a myriad of other supportive legislation which legalized dominance, and in which a culture of control was systemic and systematized. Sarah Carter says that the pass system “became an established institution” in the wake of the 1885 troubles and turned the West into “a virtually segregated society.” Its intent was to confine Natives to their reserves, a crass attempt to control their behaviour. Without legal justification and mostly on his individual initiative, Assistant Commissioner Hayter Reed began imposing pass restrictions on Indians. Soon after the 1885 Rebellion, the government, responding to his enthusiasm, issued books of passes to Indian agencies across the West in 1886.⁶⁹

Though initially intended to keep Indians under surveillance during the Rebellion, passes soon evolved into general application in attempts to control Indian movement for all manner of purpose, including food-gathering activities, off-reserve work, excursions, social activities, and the curtailing of parental access to children at the various residential schools. In this latter case, compliance in sending their children to school was coerced when families were threatened with removal from the reserve’s rations list, the loss of an important and valued means of sustenance during difficult times. The intent changed from one of monitoring movement during a

military crisis to coercion, the objective being to force Natives into following government-desired social patterns and economic behaviours.

The Indians quickly condemned this pass policy as a betrayal of treaty. Some historians condemn the policy as unduly repressive and stifling. Blair Stonechild has noted what he considers to be long-lasting repercussions of the pass system. “What little influence Indian people had over their own lives was removed,” Stonechild observes, “and Indian people became vulnerable to government whim, manipulation and mismanagement.”⁷⁰ Clearly the Indians became vulnerable, but the extent to which that vulnerability was taxed is less easy to quantify, given the lack of a full-scale study of the use of the pass system. Indeed some historians question the effectiveness of the pass system. Harring points out that the pass system was “extra-legal” and makes the point that department and government circulars “indicate that official lawlessness was structured and institutionalized, but they do not reveal the extent of the actual use of the pass system.”⁷¹ J.R. Miller supports this assessment.⁷²

Although the pass system lacked legal foundation, it was in keeping with the repressive spirit of the Indian Act. The permit system, however, implemented to control and restrict Native and non-Native business transactions and interactions, was securely grounded in the Indian Act and the government and its agents could act secure in that knowledge. An Act to amend the Indian Act, 1880, permitted the government to restrict “the sale, barter, exchange or gift, by any band or irregular band of Indians ... of any grain or root crops, or other produce grown upon any Indian Reserve in the North-West Territories” and all such transactions were null and void unless conducted in accordance of the provisions of the Act. To make such business transactions extremely risky for recipients, any produce or materials acquired from Indians could be seized.⁷³

From the southern Alberta Indian perspective, and certainly from that of the Bloods, the permit system was used to stop them from taking advantage of local market demands for resources and labour. For some, the permit and pass systems were an abuse of power that made the Indians lose faith in the intentions of Whites regarding their dealing with the Indians. The fact that some Indians regard the permit and pass systems as one and the same may speak volumes about the government’s duplicitous attempts to use the legality of the permit system to shore up the repressive and ‘extra-legal’ authority of the pass system.⁷⁴

The Indian Act also regulated the leasing of Indian reserve land. Section 36 of the Amended Indian Act of 1880 stated: “no reserve or portion

of a reserve shall be sold, alienated or leased until it has been released or surrender to the Crown for the purposes of this Act.” Section 48 of the Act permitted the government to enforce payment for lease in case of arrears. The rules governing leases were clearly in the hands of the government, which had the power to act irrespective of Indian wishes. This was very clear when the government introduced the Greater Production program during World War I. The effect of this program on the Bloods will be discussed below, but it should be pointed out that the government felt no obligation to consult the Bloods before granting leases on their land to non-Natives. Strangely, one of the powers granted to chiefs under Section 74 of the act was that of the “prevention of trespass by cattle, – also for protection of sheep, horses, mules and cattle.”⁷⁵ As will be discussed, the Bloods themselves were not without the ability to determine who got leases and under what conditions. It will also be clear that the Bloods took seriously the heavy demands placed on the reserve’s grazing capacity through illegal incursion by non-Native-owned cattle and horses.

This official legal and extra-legal position, however, does not truly reflect the status of the Bloods and their chiefs and band council. The chiefs and council wielded a great deal of authority with regard to band and reserve matters. Though some agents were repressive, the Bloods and their leaders were determined not to surrender total control of their affairs to officials, they believed, ought to advance their cause and protect their rights. In such cases, the Bloods appealed to other authorities. When Agent James Wilson attempted to prohibit the holding of a Sun Dance in 1898, Red Crow appealed to the North West Mounted Police at Fort Macleod to use their influence to permit the holding of the event.⁷⁶ One notable attempt to coerce the Bloods into a surrender of a portion of their reserve failed in the face of the determined opposition of Chief Crop Eared Wolf. Crop Eared Wolf both cultivated and mustered his people’s resistance to the alienation of the land.⁷⁷ Agents often sided with the Bloods against DIA policies regarding reserve land leasing and considered both the wishes and needs of the Bloods in their decisions and petitions to reserve inspectors and headquarters. It is clear that the Bloods were aggressive on behalf of their own interests.

Once the reserve was established, defending its integrity from the encroachment of neighbours determined on achieving access to its resources was a constant concern of both the Bloods and the Department of Indian Affairs.⁷⁸ After some initial growing pains, the boundaries of the reserve

image not available

Figure 1.1.

"Crop Eared Wolf, Head Chief of Bloods, Blood Reserve, Alberta, [ca. 1900-1913]."
Glenbow Archives, NB-3-9. Crop Eared Wolf, Chief of the Bloods, was a staunch defender of his people's rights and land.

were established and its integrity was, in the main, successfully defended, though defending its resources was considerably more difficult.

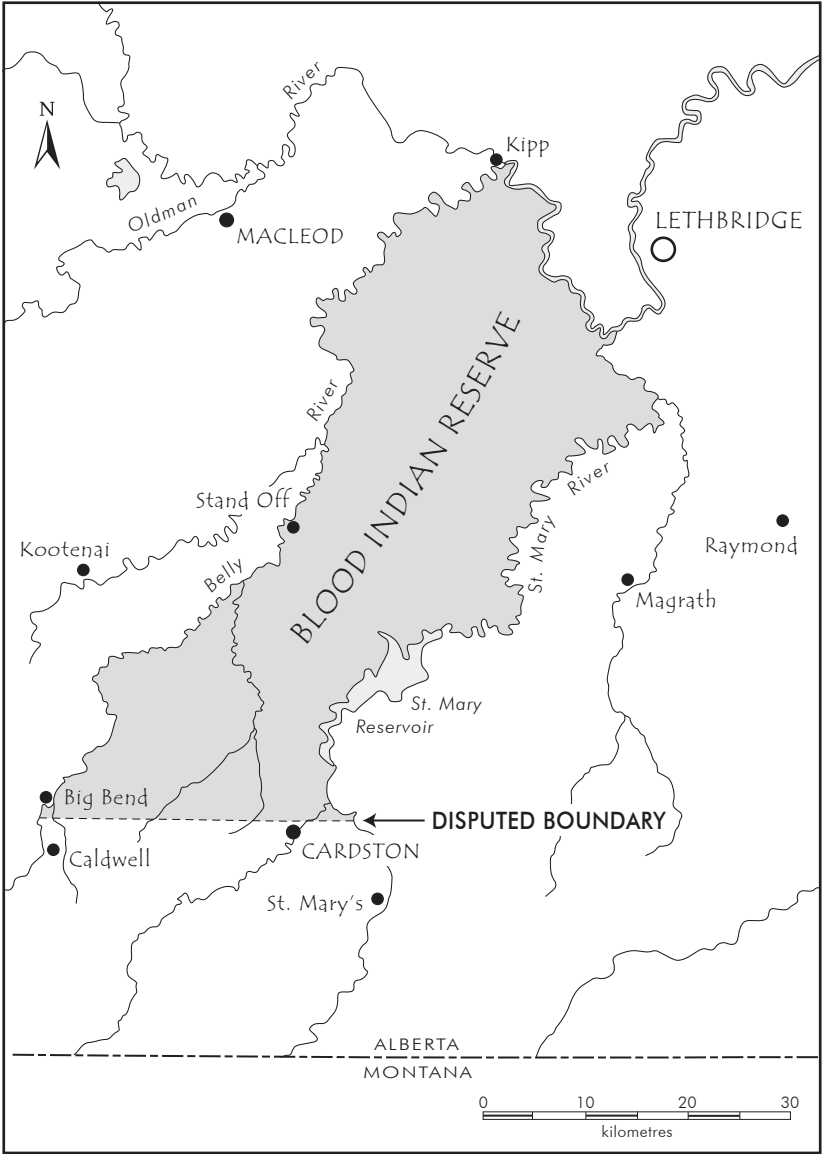
THE RURAL COMMUNITY

As the Blood reserve was being occupied, the surrounding area was quickly coming under the dominance of the large cattle-ranching interests. Scattered settlers, such as Dave Akers and D.J. Cochrane, were harbingers of the formal occupation of the land that was to follow as the large ranches gave way to smaller ranches.⁷⁹ Eventually cereal farm and mixed farm agriculture predominated.

It can be assumed, but not without qualification, that the region experienced much the same cycle of growth as described by Paul Voisey for the Vulcan area. Here there occurred quick settlement, followed by continual growth and the realization that a quarter section of land was inadequate for prosperity. Subsequently, there was a forced exodus of surplus population and the redistribution of the land among those left.⁸⁰ During the various phases of settlement and growth, the rancher and farmer/settlers worked out an accommodation with the Bloods and their reserve as required. The demands most often placed on the Bloods were for direct use of the reserve land, subscription of labour, and supplies such as coal and hay.

FORT MACLEOD

Though the erection of the North West Mounted Police post at Fort Macleod predated the establishment of the Blood Reserve by a decade, the relationship between Fort Macleod and the Blood Indians began with the arrival of the police in 1874. The forces of integration were at play even before the reserve land base was established and the incidence of conflict was never severe enough to significantly impede this process. Fort Macleod, situated northwest of the chosen reserve site, was a focal point for an economy based on the import of consumer goods and export of raw materials along the Whoop-Up Trail (Map 3). Its selection as a NWMP post, and the later establishment of the town, were largely determined by the presence of the Blackfoot Indians among whom the Bloods figured prominently. The supply of the Indians with food and other goods following Treaty 7 in 1877, in large part, drove the economy of the region, creating wealth and attracting permanent non-Native settlement.⁸¹



Map 3.
 Map of Indian Reserve (Blood) No. 148, showing communications links. Adapted by Marilyn Croot from a map in the *Lethbridge Herald*, February 24, 1976.

Although Paul Sharp correctly emphasizes Fort Macleod's commercial dependence on American trading companies out of Fort Benton, Montana, he sees this history as exclusive, with Fort Macleod as the meeting of "the two great streams of Anglo-Saxon pioneering."⁸² The Natives are, therefore, relegated to the position of displaced hangers-on, reminders of a once-'noble' primordial past. This perception is common to the historiography of the formation of non-Native communities in Aboriginal territory, and the subsequent associations of Natives with non-Native communities is generally viewed by historians as negative. David Hamer has argued that the establishment of towns "involved the obliteration of, attractive aspects of the natural landscape ... of all indications of the original, 'primitive' condition of the site. Included in this were the indigenous peoples of the territories being settled." The result was banishment to the hinterland and "their presence in towns became more and more marginal and ghostly."⁸³ But this view was/is more ideal than real and the banishment, no matter how much desired, never became totally effective or complete. In fact, the Bloods were drawn to the area reassured by the Mounties' presence.⁸⁴ The selection of the reserve with Macleod located to the northwest, therefore, only cemented an already established tie.

CARDSTON

Refugee Mormons from Utah led by Charles Ora Card founded the town of Cardston in 1887 near the St. Mary's River. Card and his followers chose to settle at Lee Creek, close to the Blood Reserve's southern border. From the very beginning relations between the Bloods and the Mormon settlers were based on mutual mistrust and disagreement. Initially the ill will stemmed from the belief that deception had been used to gain Blood acquiescence to Mormon settlement in the area. Blood Elder Camoose Bottle claimed that the Mormons acquired the land at Lee Creek by getting Red Crow drunk. This, and the fact that the subsequent agreement between the Bloods and Mormons was not sanctioned by the tribe, led to some Bloods questioning, and continuing to question, its legitimacy.⁸⁵

It was clear from the beginning that the Mormons at Cardston saw themselves as a people apart, sharing little with their Native neighbours except the land which both claimed as their own. A clear indication of that separateness was the manner in which the *Cardston Record* chose to locate the community within the western setting. In 1898 the paper described Cardston's location in relation to the broader western region, as "nearly

800 miles due west of Winnipeg, forty-eight miles south-west from Lethbridge, and twenty miles north of the international boundary or the 49th parallel. A semi-weekly stage plies between Cardston and Lethbridge our most convenient railway station.” The same article also noted that Cardston had more than one thousand residents and was close to the settlements of Aetna, Leavitt, and Mountain View.⁸⁶ Interestingly, no mention was made of the Blood reserve, which in 1897 had a population of 1,300, making it the largest community in the vicinity next to Lethbridge.⁸⁷

Unlike Fort Macleod, the town of Cardston did increase its commercial influence in southern Alberta and became the dominant trading centre in the area around the Blood Reserve. The Blood and Peigan reserves to the north and west of Cardston separated the town from Euro-Canadian settlement to the west creating a ‘sub-region’ that Cardston dominated. Spared from competition and stimulated by railways, irrigation, and sugar beet growing and chosen as the religious centre of Mormonism, Cardston grew apace.⁸⁸

RAYMOND

Unlike Fort Macleod and Cardston, Raymond, to the west of the Blood reserve, was, from the very beginning, planned as a one-industry town. It was the centre of a sugar beet industry that would be the mainstay of the community and provide an export commodity to supply the sugar needs of the immediate area and beyond.⁸⁹ The industry, however, held its brightest promise only in its planning stages; sustaining it proved to be a frustrating and in the end bitter experience.⁹⁰

Initially, however, sugar beet cultivation brought Raymond stable and sustained growth. By 1906 it was the largest Mormon town in southern Alberta with a population of 1,500, and it soon began to rival Cardston as the centre of the Mormon religion in Canada.⁹¹ But lacking Cardston’s history, it also lacked its influence, and when Cardston was chosen as the site of the Mormon temple, Raymond’s secondary status was confirmed.⁹²

Interaction between Raymond and the Blood reserve revolved primarily around the need of the sugar beet industry for a stable labour supply to work the beet fields, especially during the fall harvest. Large groups of Bloods made the trip to Raymond to engage in wage labour during the period of 1903–15. It is reasonable to assume that there was commercial interaction between the Bloods and Raymond businesses during times of

Blood presence in the town. Little evidence appears in either the local press or government documents to shed much light on the subject.

CONCLUSION

Using the Blood reserve and its immediate geographic area this book argues against prevailing views that the post-buffalo period for the Blood People of southern Alberta was singularly unattractive. It promotes a view that the Bloods, through energy, foresight, and, above all, economic adaptation, both promoted their own integration and were encouraged to integrate into the regional economy. They were an important factor in fulfilling the economic visions of neighbours while also intent on realizing their own individual and collective ambitions. This approach examines the role of the reserve land and its resources, the Bloods' personal and individual wealth, and the Blood peoples' skills and labour in promoting local economic enterprise. This is in essence a case study, which, perhaps, may suggest approaches to considering the part played by other reserves and their people in regional area economies.

There is great benefit in doing a study such as this. Little has been done to evaluate Native initiatives during the post-buffalo period and what has been done generalizes a sorry state of affairs. Detailed site-specific studies are few and during the latter years this field has been largely abandoned, especially as regards western Canada's prairies. Consequently, much of the literature is dated, with the most significant ground-breaking studies, such as Fisher's and Samek's, now needing a broadened contextual environment. There are recent studies such as Brownville and Shewell, but these generalize and are focused on administrative generated and directed policy rather than on Native responses to immediate life issues. Brown's and Peer's recent study is specific to the Bloods but is an investigation into the methodology of inquiry and its interpretative implications.⁹³ Elofson and Evans have crafted significant studies of western prairie ranching history but these deal with Native issues only peripherally.⁹⁴ Subjugation of Natives when they encounter non-Natives may be but a temporary condition rather than inevitable and permanent and the assumed economic displacement may be limited. The relationship forged from the encounter is likely much more complex and varied than formerly allowed.

The belief in the sustained detrimental effect of the loss of the buffalo on the Plains Natives is a natural extension of the fallacy that the Blood and Blackfoot dependence on the buffalo was absolute and hence both

their economy and culture were determined by that animal's abundance and utility. To say that the devastating impact of the destruction of the buffalo is a myth is not to argue that it was negligible. Indeed, it was severe in its impact and absolutely devastating in the short term. However, when historians have emphasized the dire consequences of the collapse of the buffalo as an exploitable resource, the focus has usually been on the attendant starvation and the miseries of reserve existence to the neglect of evidence of a tradition of ready economic and cultural accommodation.

There is ample evidence that economic and cultural reorientation was not new to the Bloods or other First Nations of the Treaty 7 area. Blackfoot scholar Betty Bastien considers the propensity for change as entirely natural and observes, "environmental and other natural changes were incorporated within the context of creation." Change and adaptation were rooted in Blackfoot being and should not be considered as surprising and unexpected.⁹⁵ Indeed, Blackfoot peoples in general reacted to "cosmological validation of adaptation and change."⁹⁶

The acquisition of the horse and firearms clearly pointed out the adaptive economic strategies of the Blackfoot in general. Once the 'whites' and their trade wares arrived, the buffalo transcended its use as what Shepherd Krech III referred to as "a tribal department store."⁹⁷ Elizabeth Vibert has pointed out that from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries, the Blood were involved in contests over "territory in the mounting struggle for horses, firearms, hides and furs." The Blackfoot, in a determined effort to protect their good economic fortune, achieved ascendancy on the western Plains by the 1780s and 1790s. Blackfoot fortunes, however, fluctuated as rival groups also acquired guns and horses.⁹⁸

It was keen adaptation to the horse in particular that changed Blood and Blackfoot trading strategy. Ray points out that during the early eighteenth century the Blackfoot made the long trip to York Factory on Hudson's Bay, an arduous thousand-mile journey that lasted three months, to trade.⁹⁹ Bloody confrontations between the Blackfoot and Cree centred on horses, and the ebb and flow of control was based on a continuous supply of both horses and guns.¹⁰⁰ As historian Olive Dickason has perceptively pointed out: "Apart from its usefulness for hunting and transport, the horse both extended and altered trade routes. Consequently, it became a symbol of wealth in its own right and, as always with the growth of affluence, polarized economic status both between individuals and between tribes."¹⁰¹ It was the horse that occasioned the last great adaptive economic, social, and

spiritual change in Blackfoot Indian culture until the collapse of the buffalo in the late nineteenth century.¹⁰²

The Bloods, as did other Plains groups, made economic adjustments in response to the increased commodity value of buffalo robes and engaged in increased raiding and warfare to maintain their enhanced economic status. Buffalo robes became the focus of the Blackfoot hunt, producing up to 100,000 per year for the HBC and Fort Benton trade. Kennedy argues that when Plains Natives fully grasped the importance of the buffalo to the fur trade, it truly became an exploitable resource. Through trade it could be turned into other desired commodities.¹⁰³ Fur trade historian John Foster argues that as a consequence of the buffalo robe trade “consumerism had become institutionalized in their [Native] cultures ... inextricably linked with cultural ways which identified individuals and families of social and political consequence.”¹⁰⁴ It has been pointed out that, aside from buffalo, antelope, deer, and elk hides, wolf pelts were “an important element of the furs exchanged to whiskey traders,” and according to one census wolves amounted to one tenth of the number of buffalo killed by Blood, Blackfoot, Peigan, and Sarsi.¹⁰⁵ The southern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan trading network was composed of over fifty posts, and no fewer than seventeen of these were in the area where the Bloods later located their reserve.¹⁰⁶ All of these posts did not exist concurrently but do highlight sustained economic activity in the area over time. It seems likely that the Bloods’ choice for a reserve was, in part, based on varied economic activities occurring immediately before the Treaty 7 period.

Evidently the Bloods possessed great ability for economic accommodation in the face of dramatic change, and had successfully done so, well before being faced with the altered circumstances caused by the demise of the buffalo as an exploitable species. Raiding fur trade posts and theft and resale of the goods were at times important economic activities. Dickason observes that war too became an economic measure, a means to wealth and its attendant status.¹⁰⁷ Clearly the buffalo were not the sum total of Blackfoot and Blood economic or cultural activities. Just as they successfully adjusted to the arrival of Europeans, to the acquisition of the horse and gun, to the ascendancy and decline of rival nations and to continually altering trade routes and patterns, so they altered their economic behaviours in the face of the loss of the buffalo. Their economy and culture had been profoundly transformed by earlier events, as it would be by the latter. True, the ‘golden years’ of Plains culture disappeared with the destruction of the buffalo and in the short term a great deal of dislocation was

evident.¹⁰⁸ In the long term, however, a certain resilience came to the fore. The collapse of the buffalo did not just have an economic dimension and as with other aspects of culture the possibility existed for adaptation to relieve the stress of that loss. Jill St. Germain has pointed out that during the negotiations for Treaty 7 the Blackfoot were as much concerned about their land and the protective presence of the North West Mounted Police as they were about the preservation of the few remaining buffalo.¹⁰⁹ It is difficult to believe that the Bloods were not well aware that in the future great adjustment on their part would be required. In the words of Chief Earl Old Person of the Blackfeet, “Our ability to adapt to the environment and to changes is infinite and assures our survival.”¹¹⁰

Adaptation in the face of tremendous and traumatic change was broadly based and more complex than has been previously realized. Macleod and Rollason argue, “there is quite a lot of evidence that the Natives adopted an instrumental approach to the law; experimenting with it and using it where it seemed useful” even for resolving “inter-band and familial conflicts,” which in earlier times would have been settled more traditionally.¹¹¹ Spindler and Spindler have observed that the Bloods have been able to “retain traditional cultural features ... and at the same time make a viable adaptation to white culture and society.”¹¹² Brown and Peers sustain the argument for successful adaptation “from a nomadic to a settle lifestyle” because of the tenacity and adaptability of the population and strength of its leadership.¹¹³

The predisposition to shift economic strategies was evident in the terms of Treaty 7 and revealed in the subsequent relatively hasty selection of reserves and calculated move to a sedentary existence. Clearly the treaty clauses regarding education, cattle, farming, and implements, to name but a few, reinforces the fact that the Bloods had accepted reality and determined to move on. They most assuredly lamented that the buffalo were gone but looked to a post-buffalo period in which the beneficence of the government and the money economy offered different prospects for wealth and well-being. The fact that they had the intention of sharing and not selling the land and that elders claim that surface rights were never surrendered lends some credence to claims that they were in time, if not immediately, prepared to creatively meet new challenges.¹¹⁴

Maureen Lux, in her study *Medicine That Walks*, has pointed to the non-buffalo economy in which the Blackfoot traded for foods in order to maintain a balanced diet. Among the sought-after foods were onion bulbs, blue camas, and cow parsnip or ‘Indian celery,’ and prairie turnip. Besides

these roots, wild fruits and berries comprised an important element of the diet as the Blackfoot are reported to have used some forty plant species in all.¹¹⁵ Binnema observes of both the pre-equestrian and equestrian periods that gathering activities, as well as the exploitation of alternate species such as elk, deer, and bighorn sheep, occurred in conjunction with the pursuit of buffalo.¹¹⁶ The severe food crisis following Treaty 7 likely prompted hasty attempts at modifying approaches to satisfying dietary needs that harkened back to earlier food-gathering traditions. Both John C. Ewers and Binnema point out that trade on the northern Plains was more than just a fur trade and was likely carried on for centuries before the arrival of Whites. Accordingly, Ewers suggests that there is no evidence that the purpose of Blackfoot warlike behaviour was to expand hunting territory, and that indeed the reasons for inter-tribal warfare were varied. Binnema suggests war was a reaction to stress and was undertaken reluctantly because of the few tangible rewards to be gained.¹¹⁷

Ranchers, and later settlers, entered this region with preconceived notions about its climate and about how the environment could best be made to serve their various interests. The Bloods too were forced to rethink their strategies regarding the utility of the land and the bounty it offered as “part of an internally validated process of adaptation to new circumstances.”¹¹⁸ Precipitation, temperatures, water resources, and soil ultimately determined that without artificial assistance such as irrigation, the area was best suited to ranching. How many cattle to how much land, however, remained problematic even while providing the Bloods with employment and income opportunities. The abundant resource of coal did much to determine the economy of the region and the Bloods’ place in it. Reserve, ranch and farm, town and village were adaptations to a common environment that required and encouraged co-operation. Beneath the veneer of the frequent expressions of Natives as a race in the process of extinction, there was subtle recognition of Native persistence accompanied by the realization of the need for neighbourly accommodation. The subsequent relationship between the Bloods and their neighbours was not without its tribulations, but it endured despite fracture and fissure because its benefits were necessary to the well-being of both. The glue for this paradigm was the need to adapt and the desire to acquire a modicum of economic security, however limited in its realization.

A matter requiring some attention is the problem for the modern reader to appreciate dollar values for the period under study. How does one, for example, translate turn of twentieth-century dollars into a meaningful

value? Although it is not possible to be exact in this regard, it is possible, fortunately, to achieve some appreciation for changes in the currency values over time. James Powell's *History of the Canadian Dollar* is a fitting place to start. Powell states, for example, that one dollar in 1914 (the first year for which consumer price data are available) had the purchasing power of \$17.75 in 2005 dollars. He notes that even with a modest inflation rate of 2 per cent "a dollar will lose half of its purchasing power in approximately 35 years." However, by using the gross domestic product deflator and the Consumer Price Index, which "tend to move together over time" Powell calculates that one dollar in 1870 is roughly equivalent to \$26.70 in today's money.¹¹⁹

Powell offers a glimpse of purchasing power for the Canadian dollar during much of the period of this study, illustrating that the purchasing power of the dollar decreased from 1900 to 1929 but increased in 1933 and had declined again by the mid-1940s. The cost of a dozen eggs, for example, increased from twenty-six cents in 1900, to forty-five cents in 1914 and to sixty-five cents in 1929. In 1933, however, the cost of a dozen eggs had declined again to forty-five cents. There were similar changes in prices for other basic foods such as meat, bread, butter, and milk.¹²⁰ This brief elucidation should provide the reader with some sense of the cost of items and the value of money and wages for the period under discussion. Those wishing a more sophisticated economic analysis should consult the *Historical Statistics of Canada*, edited by Urquhart and Buckley.¹²¹

This book is arranged thematically rather than chronologically, although each separate chapter is generally chronological within itself. This seemed the most sensible approach as each chapter's topics is best dealt with as a self-contained unit. It was also the most effective and least confusing way to deal with the transitions from one topic to another given the lengthy timeframe of the study and the diverse topics dealt with, for example, the lease of reserve land and the Bloods' initiatives regarding commodity sales such as hay and coal and their relations with local businesses.

