

Beyond the Grid

The purpose of this paper was to develop research specifically for the Western Development Museum's exhibits to celebrate the Saskatchewan centennial.

**Western Development Museum/Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre
Partnership Project**

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July 28, 2003

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Introduction:

Beyond the Grid is a paper that has resulted from collaboration between the Western Development Museum and the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre. The purpose of the paper is to create a story of the history of travel in northern Saskatchewan. The intent of the research is to communicate the ways that modern modes of travel have impacted northern communities that have remained relatively untouched for hundreds of years. The northern communities that exist beyond the grid road system that shaped much of southern Saskatchewan have a different history from their southern neighbours.

The information in the following works begins with an introduction to the traditional lifestyle and livelihood of northern Aboriginal communities. The primary focus will be on the traditional methods of travel that were used by individuals in northern Saskatchewan.

The majority of the paper will consist of an examination and analysis of the factors that initiated the opening of the North through air, road, and railroad travel. One of the central points that will be considered is the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation's (CCF) interest in northern economic development.

The effects of the CCF's policies regarding Aboriginal peoples that were implemented between 1944 and 1964 will also be explored. The purpose of this paper is to look at the way travel changed Saskatchewan throughout the 1940's and 1950's. More specifically, this paper is an exploration into whether or not the modernization of transportation in the North has had an advantageous or deleterious effect on the lives of Aboriginal peoples.

Traditional Forms of Transportation:

For hundreds of years the lands of northern Saskatchewan have been occupied. The Aboriginal peoples of Canada were the first inhabitants of the North. The traditional lifestyle of the Aboriginal peoples was centered on the acquiring of supplies and food throughout the year. In order to ensure that there was enough food for each family or band year round, it was necessary that Aboriginal peoples were constantly preparing for the coming season. Families or bands followed the migratory patterns of the game that made up the majority of their diet. Food supplies were supplemented with smaller game throughout the year.¹

If large game was not followed during the year, families or bands would settle in seasonal camps. If a group lived in seasonal camps, the summer was spent hunting large game and small game was trapped in the winter. Trapping and fishing were activities that were depended on by Aboriginal peoples. In the winter small game and fish were extremely valuable to families, especially if food supplies were low. The cold of winter made the preservation of food easier.²

For example, the Dene Nation of the North relied on caribou to provide food and materials necessary for survival. In an excerpt from an interview with Elder Patrick Robillard, he emphasizes the importance of the hunting mainstay of Aboriginal peoples, *“The Dene were always big game hunters depending solely on the caribou for their existence. All aspects of Dene life was wrapped around the idea of survival and*

¹ Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre. WDM Elders Transcripts. Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. June 3-4, 2002.

² Ibid.

dependency on the barren land caribou.”³ Staying close to the caribou guaranteed that even if food levels were getting low, a food source was close by.

Aboriginal peoples had traditional principles that were designed to ensure that the sources of food did not become exhausted. Therefore, excessive hunting did not deplete the number of caribou in the North. However, upon the appearance of Europeans in Canada, northern Aboriginal peoples were not hunting as much caribou. It is possible that the movement away from a nomadic lifestyle was initiated partially by the introduction of the European lifestyle. Patrick Robillard also makes mention of this in the following excerpt, “*A shift from fundamentally nomadic lifestyle of caribou dependency to a more sedentary one marked a time in Dene history, at which time the Dene people began to settle in the interior forest because of the greater abundance of fur bearing animals especially the beaver.*”⁴

In the beginning of the 20th century, Aboriginal peoples had retained their traditional lifestyle and livelihood despite the emergence of an Euro-Canadian lifestyle, which differed from the traditional Aboriginal lifestyle. In southern Saskatchewan, communities were forming, agriculture was emerging as the mainstay economy and the province was becoming modernized. Instantaneous communication was possible, the railway had been completed, and air travel was beginning to emerge.⁵

Bush life continued to provide the items necessary for survival. Throughout the year, families lived on the traplines. The trapline provided food, supplies, and income. The Hudson Bay Company (HBC) had trading posts in the North that had established a

³ WDM Elders Transcripts 2002, Dene Elders Transcript.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Quiring, David M. Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers, and Fur Sharks: CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan. Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 2002.

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system of credit that greatly benefited the trappers year round. The credit system made it possible to remain on the traplines for a long period of time without having to return to the trading post to replenish supplies. HBC allowed trappers to take as many supplies as they needed based on credit.⁶

For the purposes of this paper the important question is; what were the primary methods of travel used by Aboriginal peoples prior to the emergence of aircraft, road and railway travel? The North remained relatively untouched and isolated for hundreds of years. It was just before World War II that the possibility of building a road past Prince Albert was considered. Yet, Aboriginal peoples were able to access isolated and remote traplines year-round. There were methods of transporting freight to and from the traplines. In the remainder of this section the different modes of travel used by Aboriginal peoples such as the canoe, travois, sled, horse, and dog will be examined.⁷

Since time immemorial, Aboriginal peoples have relied on the use of dogs and sleds for travel. Elder Max Smokeday recalls the use of dogs and horses, "*I am eighty-two now. I was ten years old when my dad first had horses. There wasn't much horses at that time, but we had a lot of dogs. We would use dogs to hunt with, pull sleighs and travois.*"⁸ Conveniently, a pack of dogs or a single dog could easily pull a sled or travois loaded with freight. The dogs were able to pull supplies, the meat from a hunt or firewood. Dogs and sleds were taken on hunts to carry the kill back to camp. The use of dogs in the actual hunt did not typically occur. The dogs were usually eager to participate in all aspects of the hunt, but they were only needed to pull the sled or travois.

⁶ Quiring 2002; WDM Elders Transcripts 2002.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Smokeyday, Max. "*Life in the Thirties*" in "...And They Told Us Their Stories" A Book Of Indian Stories. Eds. Jack Funk and Gordon Lobe. Saskatoon: Saskatoon District Tribal Council, 1991, at p. 88.

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Dogs made life much easier for a good dog was able to carry large loads and could withstand all of the seasons including the harsh winter. In fact, it was easier for the dog to work in the winter when it was not extremely hot. Elder James Crowe speaks of his appreciation of the usefulness of dogs on a hunt,

I used to be a hunter. We had plenty of dogs in those days and we made good use of them. I had one that could carry 40 traps on his back. Our dogs chased bobcats and moose. We'd be up north all winter, hunting. The leaves would be out by the time we came back.⁹

Dogs were also used to transport families to and from traplines and seasonal camps. In the North, the dog was highly valued by Aboriginal peoples. A dog was also easier to maneuver across the difficult terrain of the North, which could include passing over miles of frozen waterways. To avoid freezing the dog's feet while travelling in the winter, small moccasins were constructed. Dogs and sleds were used as the primary method of transportation in the winter.¹⁰

Aboriginal peoples were exceptionally mindful of the blessings and benefits that were given to them by the Creator. Families were grateful when they had the benefit of a dog or a team of dogs to assist them while travelling or on a hunt. If a family was able to acquire a horse the benefits were even greater. Elder Solomon Johnstone speaks of the advantage of owning dogs and horses when he was younger,

In the winter, I hunted. I used to kill lots of muskrats and lynx. When I went on these hunting trips, I used to go alone; I left my family at home to look after the house. I had a good hunting dog who was very smart. People tried to buy it from me but I wouldn't sell it. People used to ask me how I killed so many coyotes but it wasn't hard for me. There were lots around on the prairie, and these used to follow each other around,

⁹ Phillips, Donna and Harvey Whitecalf. Enewuk. Saskatchewan: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College, 1977, James Crowe, Keeseekoosie Reserve.

¹⁰ Dion, Joseph F. My Tribe The Crees. Calgary: Glenbow-Alberta Institute, 1979; Mandelbaum, David G. The Plains Cree – An Ethnographic, Historical, and Comparative Study. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1979; WDM Elders Transcripts 2002.

leaving many tracks. I would bait my traps, set it on one of these trails and cover it with snow. Then I would go out on the trapline on horseback, and ride back and forth on each side and around the trap. Coyotes are very smart and curious, and there were a lot of wild horses roaming around then. The coyotes would investigate the tracks around the traps and sooner or later, get caught. I was not a good trapper, I just fooled them. I had to out think those coyotes. With this method I caught 23 coyotes one winter. The prize was \$12 to \$17 a pelt and I got many coyotes each winter.¹¹

When horses were introduced to Aboriginal peoples from the South, the process of moving with the migratory patterns of animals became easier. It was possible to carry large loads using a horse and travois. Hunting was also made easier because horses could be used during the hunt. Unfortunately, the rocky areas in northern Saskatchewan were simply inaccessible by the horse.¹²

The added advantage of the horse to Aboriginal peoples was that individuals who were unable to walk or had difficulty walking the long distances between seasonal camps were able to ride. Overall, the horse and the dog were advantageous modes of travel. The process of hunting and trapping was made easier. Especially in cases like Elder Solomon Johnstone, who was able to leave his family while hunting and still gather enough pelts to provide food and supplies for his family. For many years, horses were used on the traplines to make hauling easier.¹³ Elder Joe Fox shares his experience with using horses in the following excerpt from an interview,

I was just about to leave for my trapline when you people came in, but I am glad to receive your company and talk with you about our way of living. I've always used horses and I don't want to part with them. I like horses. I never used a car long ago. With cars, you put gas in the tank and there goes your money, but when you use horses all you have to do is put some hay on the sleigh for feed and water them well. The

¹¹ Philips, Donna, Robert Troff, and Harvery Whitecalf, eds. *Saskatchewan Indian Elders – Kataayuk*. Saskatchewan: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College, 1976, Solomon Johnstone, Mistawasis Reserve.

¹² Dion 1979; Mandelbaum 1979; WDM Elders Transcripts 2002.

¹³ Dion 1979; Philips, Troff, and Whitecalf 1976.

Indian ponies we had, had lots of life in them. After you got home and unharnessed them, they would be sweating. You could turn those horses loose and they would go and paw in the snow to get their own food. They were always fat.¹⁴

It would not have been possible to use the dog or the horse if there had not been a method of hauling the freight by way of sled or travois. As mentioned previously, the horse and dog pulled supplies, meat, and firewood on an apparatus. The sled and travois were both built using hides and poles. Elder Irene Calliou recalls the use of the travois and horses for hunting and fishing, “[M]y grandfather used to use the travois, that kind I remember him using; when he had made a kill, he used that kind in the bush to bring back the meat. And also a wagon, every time he went to fish (for the lake was far from here where he used to fish), he used to use horses and a wagon.”¹⁵ The travois could be built from the teepee poles that were crossed over the horses back. A similar method of placing poles on the back of dog was also used. If there were a team of dogs available, a sled would be fashioned out of hide and poles that the dogs would be harnessed into.¹⁶

In the North, it was necessary that a method of travel was used that made it easier to transport supplies and food. It was of even greater importance to families who spent the year constantly preparing for the coming seasons. In order to maintain the food supply, the areas where game was located needed to be easily accessible throughout the year in case the food levels were ever low. Aboriginal peoples were able to develop modes of travel that were available throughout the year. It was the ability of Aboriginal peoples to adapt to their external settings that made survival possible.

¹⁴ Phillips, Troff, and Whitecalf 1976, Joe Fox, Onion Lake Reserve.

¹⁵ Ahenakew, Freda and H.C. Wolfart, eds. *kôhkominawak otâcimowiniwâwa – Our Grandmothers’ Lives As Told In Their Own Words*. 2nd ed. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina, 1998, p. 151.

¹⁶ Dion 1979; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and The Natural Museum of Man. *Travois*. Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1979; Mandelbaum 1979.

The final method of transportation that was used by Aboriginal peoples was the canoe. Hundreds of years ago prior to the existence of any type of road, the waterways of the north were the first highways. Travelling by way of canoe was one of the fastest and most efficient methods of travelling. Sometimes, a rudimentary raft sufficed for the job of crossing a waterway. For the most part when waterways were traveled, a boat was required. Obviously, canoes could not be used when the waterways were frozen. It was useful only in the summer.¹⁷

Upon the arrival of Europeans in northern Saskatchewan, the traders and voyageurs adopted the use of canoes for travelling. In fact, the Saskatchewan River connected many of the trading posts in Saskatchewan. By placing the posts along the river route, traders could easily access supplies and bring in furs. Elder Jim Settee speaks of his memory of hauling freight from the traplines,

There were canoes coming all the way from La Ronge, sometimes four or five canoes were used to transport fur bails. Stanley Mission to Montreal Lake, from there ... all the way. Sometimes they hauled 13 bails from over there in one canoe. It was a difficult task doing the delivery.... There would be two men from Montreal Lake taking that freight there ... coming from Prince Albert ... a horse team was used to haul that freight from there to Montreal Lake and from Montreal Lake a canoe was used to haul the rest of the way.... This portage is like four miles long across.... I did not haul but I did use a dog team to cross that portage and that was how I made my way through.¹⁸

When the fur trade emerged in Saskatchewan, the need for an efficient method of transportation was quickly realized.

Aboriginal families used canoes to access traplines and trading posts in the North. Janet Feitz remembers what it was like when boats were used for travelling,

¹⁷ Mandelbaum 1979; Shillington, C. Howard. Historic Land Trails of Saskatchewan. Vancouver: Evvard Publications, 1985.

¹⁸ WDM Elders Transcripts 2002, Woodland Cree "th" Elders Transcript.

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[W]hen the trappers canoed out, when we canoed out (only boats were in use then, you paddled along, there were hardly any 'engines' then, as they are called, almost everyone used to paddle along), and when there was a strong wind, then they used to make sails and sail before the wind, not paddling but, instead, being taken along by Wind.... I am not old enough to have seen them make 'birch-bark canoes' as they are called.¹⁹

The birch-bark canoe was made at the same time each year when families required a means of travelling to their winter camps and traplines.²⁰

Birch bark canoes were usually made at the same sites each year. Did you know that the town, Birch Hills, was named because it was at one point in time a place where Aboriginal peoples made birch-bark canoes? The canoe was built from spruce trees and birch-bark and sewn together using willow roots. The smaller canoes could carry four or five people. The larger freight canoes that were built to suit the needs of the traders, and required for hauling pelts were significantly larger. Absalom Roberts shares his story of the freight canoes used by traders and trappers,

Our people talk about having 6 boats, 8 feet wide. They travelled in these boats to Stanley Mission and Pelican Narrows. The paddles were 16 feet long and the boats about 30 feet long; it took a lot of men to paddle one of these. They used to leave here early in the spring when the leaves were coming out and return in the late fall.... I used to take part in hauling freight this way. First they used dogs and then horses.²¹

The methods of travelling in Saskatchewan used by Aboriginal peoples were suitable for what was required at the time. It was not always easy travelling in the North, especially when faced with the elements such as snow and ice. Aboriginal peoples always adapted. It was necessary for survival. Elder Patrick Robillard recalls what it was like years ago travelling in the North,

¹⁹ Ahenakew and Wolfart 1998, p. 97.

²⁰ MacGregor, James G. Blankets and Beads – A History of the Saskatchewan River. Edmonton: The Institute of Applied Art, Ltd, 1949.

The Dene people had a harsh life but they did not complain. On the journey ... women would walk great distances carrying their babies in the moss bag on their backs and carrying other bundles too. The weather was not always good and the pathway treacherous. I have seen people walk across swampy areas with water up to their knees. The men and women would make a crosswalk through swamps by cutting trees and laying them sideways in order to cross and sometimes they would fall into the swamp with their babies. The men carried the canoes and bundles even the children carried something, the dogs would travel with the people and carry packs also. They would make the same trip again in the spring.²²

Prior to the construction of roads, railway tracks and landing strips, travelling in northern Saskatchewan was more difficult. The Aboriginal peoples that lived in the North had to find ways of surviving and successfully did. The methods of travel that were used suited the needs of the northern residents at the time. As time progressed and the introduction of the European lifestyle emerged, a great transition occurred in the North regarding the economy and the necessity of access. This transition will be explored in the remainder of this paper, beginning with the CCF northern policies that were implemented from 1944 to 1964.²³

²¹ Phillips, Troff, and Whitecalf 1976, Absalom Roberts, La Ronge Band.

²² WDM Elders Transcripts 2002, Dene Elders Transcript.

²³ Quiring 2002.

Where the Roads Do Not Reach:

Envision the North in the 1940's, the land was vastly untouched by the reaches of modernization and development. There were no roads. If someone needed medical services the only hospital was located at Ile a la Crosse. There was a smaller nursing station in Cumberland house. In 1946, the air ambulance system was accessible in the North. There were day schools and residential schools scattered throughout the North, but Euro-Canadian education was not a priority of northern residents. The pursuit of a traditional lifestyle and livelihood was the primary concern of northern Aboriginal peoples.²⁴

There was a struggle occurring between Aboriginal trappers and non-Aboriginal trappers that made pursuing a traditional livelihood much more difficult. During the depression in the 1930's, an influx of non-Aboriginal peoples into the North occurred in an attempt to solve the economic depression. The result was a serious depletion of the resources in the North. In some areas the beaver had disappeared.²⁵

In 1944, the future of Northern Saskatchewan was uncertain. Northern residents had managed to remain relatively isolated from the South and even neighbouring northern communities. There was a large reservoir of natural resources that was largely untouched. The Dirty or Hungry Thirties were becoming more of a memory. Still Saskatchewan residents were desperate for a solution to an economy that was unpredictable because it was subject to the devastating trend of boom-and-bust.²⁶

²⁴ Buckley, Helen, J.E.M. Kew, and John B. Hawley. The Indians and Metis of Northern Saskatchewan – A Report on Economic and Social Development. Saskatoon: Centre for Community Studies, 1963; Quiring 2002; Saskatchewan Education, Northern Division. Wings Beyond Road's End – Airplanes over Saskatchewan's North. Regina: Printwest Communications, 1992.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Friesen, Gerald. The Canadian Prairies – A History. Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 1943; Quiring 2002.

Prior to 1944, the provincial government had taken little to no interest in the North until T.C. Douglas, the leader of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) saw a future for the North. In 1944's provincial election, T.C. Douglas triumphed over the Liberals by way of his vision of the North's future. The CCF's platform was based on northern development – the solution to all of Saskatchewan's problems. Douglas quickly made it to the forefront of Saskatchewan's political agenda through his concept of provincial ownership of Saskatchewan's natural resources. The economic depression that had been experienced for the past two decades would be remedied through the development of the forestry and mining industries.²⁷ The following excerpt from David M. Quiring's thesis, Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers, and Fur Sharks: CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan, is a summary of the development goals that were envisioned by the CCF,

Government would take Aboriginals from the land and move them to settlements; schools would educate them; hospitals, nurses, and air ambulances would lower child mortality and lengthen lives; and roads, regular airline flights, and radio communicators would bring the North into the provincial system. CCF plans for trapping, commercial fishing, and forestry included creating crown corporations and marketing boards and ejecting entrepreneurs whom it thought made huge profits from resources. Mineral riches buried in the rocky Precambrian Shield would help the provincial economy from its dependence on farming. The CCF would return profits to the peoples and the province.²⁸

Saskatchewan had significantly failed to tap into the economic resources of its North unlike the neighboring provinces. The primary obstacles in development appeared to be the lack of roads, airstrips, and railroads beyond Prince Albert. The Aboriginal peoples of the North were not treated as an impediment to development. It appeared that the CCF viewed Aboriginal peoples to be expendable and best dealt with through

²⁷ Ibid.

assimilation and integration policies. In the following section, the roots of development in northern Saskatchewan will unfold through the telling of the policies that were designed to bring about T.C. Douglas' vision of development and implemented throughout the CCF's era beginning in 1944 and ending in 1964.²⁹

T.C. Douglas believed that the natural resources that were located in the North belonged to the entire province and should be shared accordingly. Following the 1930's and World War II, policies of modernization and socialization were implemented with the purpose of accessing the reservoir of northern resources. The CCF's primary goal in development was to effect great change in the North. David M. Quiring states regarding the CCF's goals that, "*Colonial methods served to apply the CCF program of directed change to northerners and extract wealth from the North for the benefit of the South. While the primary goals for Northern Aboriginals were modernization, assimilation, and socialization, while colonialism served as the method to reach these goals.*"³⁰ The means of modernization that were to be pursued was through socialist methodology. Essentially what emerged during the 1940's through to the 1960's was a colonialist method of change.³¹

The CCF had failed to gain northern support. The lack of support did not impact the CCF's electoral win because Aboriginal peoples had not been granted the vote in 1944. In fact, had Aboriginal peoples been allowed to vote it was more than likely that they would have voted the same as the Roman Catholic Church, who supported the Liberal party. Despite the lack of support, CCF plowed forward and implemented its

²⁸ Quiring 2002, p. 20.

²⁹ Quiring 2002.

³⁰ Quiring 2002, p. 21.

³¹ Quiring 2002.

policies regardless of any consequence. Unfortunately, the northern policies proved to be utterly destructive. The CCF failed to develop an economy that consisted of any element of sustainability. In the process of failing to develop the economy, the CCF also brought about changes to the lives of Aboriginal peoples that would also prove to be devastating.³²

The CCF felt that Aboriginal peoples were best dealt with by implementing policies of assimilation. The first step of assimilating Aboriginal peoples was getting all families and individuals from out of the bush and into settlements. Moving Aboriginal peoples off of the land would open up the land for development, and completely alter the traditional lifestyle of Aboriginal peoples. The CCF had absolutely no interest in retaining any of the elements of northern life. The northern society and lifestyle was treated as expendable and worthless.³³

From the start, it was clear that the CCF wanted to change the traditional lifestyle of Aboriginal peoples. The CCF believed that the Aboriginal lifestyle was in direct conflict with the methodology of the CCF, in other words it needed to be regulated. What the CCF wanted to replace the traditional lifestyle with was socialist policy. The Aboriginal peoples of the North were to become integrated into Euro-Canadian society and then work co-operatively for survival in the North. On this point Quiring stated that,

...the CCF visualized happy, sober, educated, healthy, hardworking, and co-operatively minded Aboriginals living in orderly settlements, while participating in what the CCF viewed as “traditional economic pursuits. The CCF accepted the myth that Aboriginals had an aptitude for trapping and fishing while thinking they lacked the aptitude to participate in non-traditional industrial activities such as mining and forestry.³⁴

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Quiring 2002, p. 22.

What T.C. Douglas did not foresee in all of his policy development was that the Aboriginal peoples of the North were proud to be distinct peoples and wanted to remain that way.³⁵

The traditional lifestyle and principles of the Aboriginal peoples would not be forgotten or taken away no matter how hard the CCF fought for it. Unfortunately, the assimilation policies resulted in forming a deeper rift between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. The policies inadvertently created greater amounts of racism and resentment in the North. In addition to the difficulty that the CCF faced in attempting to assimilate Aboriginal peoples with strong ties to their traditional lifestyle and livelihood, the CCF faced even greater difficulty sorting the administrative chaos that ensued from all of the northern policies that were being implemented.³⁶

The assimilation policy was only part of the vision of northern development. The CCF envisioned two areas of economic development; the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal economic development areas. The CCF reserved the so-called “traditional” economies of trapping, fishing, and peasant farming for Aboriginal peoples, while mining, forestry, and tourism were intended to be the mainstay of the non-Aboriginal economy.³⁷

The industry that was to be reserved for Aboriginal peoples as stated previously consisted of three elements. Fishing and trapping were areas that Aboriginal peoples were accustomed to, but with the freedom to choose whether or not they would fish or trap. Quite obviously, peasant farming would face little to no success in the North. There was simply no suitable area for farming to be pursued. Perhaps the appeal of peasant farming

³⁵ Quiring 2002.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

arose from the colonialist mentality that the CCF often possessed, *“In the case of northern Saskatchewan, the CCF was the landlord and visualized Aboriginals in the role of peasants. Aboriginals, like peasants, would farm small plots of land, using horses and unmodern equipment.”*³⁸ The rigid system of economic development faced serious opposition from Aboriginal peoples. Unfortunately, the Aboriginal peoples were not able to voice their concerns politically until 1960. Until then, the residents of the North were nearly powerless in having their concerns heard peacefully. Left with no choice, Aboriginal peoples reacted by way of resistance to the traditional economy that they were forced to pursue.³⁹

The CCF made changes in the North that were intended to encourage Aboriginal peoples to trap. Changes included allocating trapping areas to individuals within close range of the settlement where their families had been relocated. The CCF found that the credit system was unacceptable and took all steps to ensure that it was done away with. The CCF also viewed the credit system that had been established by the HBC as a severe impediment in their vision of northern development. The CCF attempted to turn Aboriginal peoples against HBC. Again, the CCF was unsuccessful for Aboriginal trappers and their families had been assisted by the HBC for many years. The HBC looked after the old people, they allowed for trappers to take supplies for the trapping season on credit, they gave out free food at Christmas time to families. Aboriginal peoples were not foolish enough to be swayed by the CCF. The CCF believed that in order for Aboriginal peoples to become assimilated, it was necessary that they adopt the concept of using cash for purchasing products.

³⁸ Quiring 2002, p. 144.

³⁹ Quiring 2002.

The CCF enforced a compulsory marketing system upon all Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal trappers. The Saskatchewan Fur Marketing Board was created and was claimed to be a necessary step towards conservation. While the system did regulate the fur economy, which had become greatly depleted by trappers, it was at a great consequence to Aboriginal trappers. The compulsory system was intended to raise trapper's incomes, and provide a fixed income that was reliable and sustainable. Overall, the only change that occurred as a result of the system was greater dependency on the government for social assistance.⁴⁰

Aboriginal trappers were no longer able to spend long periods of time on the traplines due to the break down of the credit system. Instead, trappers were required to make shorter trips so that they were able to frequently return to replenish traps and supplies. The problem with the Fur Marketing Board was that trappers were required to purchase everything using cash. Therefore, many trappers spent all of the money from their pelts while awaiting payment.⁴¹

The CCF also decided that fishing was to be part of the Aboriginal peoples' economy, which also failed miserably. Typically, Aboriginal peoples would fish in the winter. The fish would not spoil because the cold made storage easy. Furthermore, the best time for a trapper to fish was in the off-season during winter. The CCF wanted to maximize the amount of fish being caught. Therefore, there was an attempt to alter the fishing season. It is easy to see why the CCF did not succeed in carrying out their plans for the economy reserved for Aboriginal peoples. If Aboriginal peoples were fishing in the summer, they could not trap. Even if there had not been a conflict between the

⁴⁰ Buckley, Kew, and Hawley 1963; Quiring 2002; Saskatchewan Education, Northern Division 1992.

⁴¹ Quiring 2002.

fishing and trapping seasons envisioned by the CCF, there was such a great resistance to the CCF's plans that they had no choice but to make alterations to accommodate to the wants of the fishers and trappers.⁴²

While there was a potential to develop a large commercial fishing market, again the CCF did not attempt to benefit Aboriginal peoples. The Fish Marketing Board and the fish plants that were created by the CCF failed to employ Aboriginal peoples beyond the lowest available positions. Non-Aboriginal peoples were afforded the positions located in the plants. Any position that was higher than the lowest form of employable labour was rarely given to Aboriginal peoples.⁴³

The economy reserved for Aboriginal peoples was internally flawed. The CCF wanted to assimilate Aboriginal peoples yet the economy that they were expected to pursue was intended to be a "traditional" economy. On the surface, the policy appears to be to the advantage of Aboriginal peoples. A closer look tells us that the underlying motivation of the dual economy was for the CCF to use poverty to control Aboriginal peoples. By keeping Aboriginal individuals in a low-income economy there would have to be a reliance on the government. The reliance essentially requires compliance by Aboriginal peoples with government policies if a community or individual was unable to survive on the livelihood of trapping, fishing, and peasant farming.⁴⁴

In order for the great divide in the northern economy to occur, it was necessary that the Provincial government develop an administrative method of keeping the industry separate. Instead of spending time developing a northern economy that was sustainable and would actually serve to equally benefit *all* of the residents of Saskatchewan, not just

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

the South, the CCF may have actually helped the province. Instead the government became consumed with planning, and development until eventually the administrative portion served as a detriment to any development.⁴⁵

In the end, the CCF's inability to resolve the administrative confusion that emerged from this policy resulted in the break down of the separate resource groups.⁴⁶ This point is emphasized by Quiring, "*Trapping, fishing, and agriculture comprised the three primary parts of the economy visualized by the CCF for Northern Aboriginals. All three failed to meet CCF expectations, and it became increasingly clear that its poorly conceived programs would not build a successful new northern economy and society.*"⁴⁷

The result of the dual economy of traditional versus industrial pursuits resulted in greater segregation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. The exploitation of natural resources by non-Aboriginal people did modernize the North, but created two groups of peoples, "*prosperous white and the destitute Aboriginal*".⁴⁸ It was nearly impossible for Aboriginal peoples to seek employment in the mining or forestry even if they wanted to. The immobility experienced by Aboriginal peoples in the industrial economy was furthered when the, "*The CCF hired few hired Aboriginals for better government jobs, adding to the presence of two northern societies. White people held nearly all full time jobs, while the CCF employed Aboriginals primarily for temporary low-paying work.*"⁴⁹

The resource economy that was envisioned for non-Aboriginal peoples was obviously the profitable one. In the 1940's it was clear that the Prairie Provinces had a

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Quiring 2002, p. 159.

wealth of resources in the northern portion of the provinces. Unlike Alberta and Manitoba, Saskatchewan was still in the beginning stages of industrial development in the North. The CCF was the first government in Saskatchewan to show interest in accessing the resources in the North. The interest arose from the desperate need to generate wealth in the province following the Depression. The CCF blatantly excluded Aboriginal peoples from development according to Quiring because,

The CCF accepted and perpetuated the notion that Aboriginals were not ready or suited for industrial occupations. It thought restructured and government supported trapping and fishing, along with subsistence agriculture and improved community functioning should suffice to care for Aboriginal needs. While the northern economy also included the industries of forestry, mining, and tourism, the CCF reserved these primarily for non-Aboriginals and did little to encourage Aboriginal participation in these areas.⁵⁰

Simply, Aboriginal peoples were a primitive people not suited for such work. It also turned out that neither were non-Aboriginal peoples. The CCF was unable to develop a sustainable mining, forestry, or tourist economy.⁵¹

The CCF's greatest failure in developing the North's economy was directly correlated with their greed to export wealth from the North to the South, while leaving the North undeveloped and impoverished. The CCF was unwilling to spend any money on building roads or railways in the North. The lack of investment into the opening of the North was a great obstacle in northern development. If there was ever to be any development of the resource industries in the North, it was necessary that the resources could be exported. For instance there was very little option for growth regarding the tourism industry if the only way of accessing the North was by air or water. Air travel

⁴⁸ Quiring 2002, p. 44.

⁴⁹ Quiring 2002, p. 40.

⁵⁰ Quiring 2002, p. 160.

was very expensive at the time and water travel was time consuming. The residents of the North were desperate for roads.⁵²

Despite the requests of northern residents and industries, the CCF continued to refuse to build roads. The CCF felt that it was a federal responsibility to build the all-weather roads in the North and that small communities were responsible for building roads connecting to the larger roads. The failure to build roads prevented the mining and forestry industries from really developing. Air travel was much too expensive for the purpose of moving freight from in and out of mine sites and logging camps. The first all-weather road that was built past Prince Albert to La Ronge was completed in 1946 with the assistance of the Department of Natural Resources and helped the industrial economy finally take off.⁵³

In regards to the actual industries, the CCF also fell short of any significant contribution. The forestry industry would have greatly benefited and generated large amounts of wealth had the CCF worked towards diversifying the economy. The best way would have been to develop the pulp and paper industry. Although, the CCF did not need to bring an entire industry to Saskatchewan for economic development, if the CCF had only been willing to develop roads past the northern boundary of Prince Albert, the large deposit of commercial forestland would have been easily accessed.⁵⁴

The role of Aboriginal peoples in the forestry industry was also limited by the CCF as told by Quiring, *“For the most part, the CCF did not use the forests for Aboriginal economic development or promote Aboriginal involvement in forestry. CCF*

⁵¹ Quiring 2002.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Buckley, Kew, and Hawley 1963; Quiring 2002.

⁵⁴ Quiring 2002.

*demonstrated that it considered forestry primarily as a non-Aboriginal activity. The lack of roads and railways also limited where a large scale forest industry could operate and most Aboriginal communities had no road or rail access.”*⁵⁵

The mining industry had a similar fate as the forestry industry during the era of the CCF. There was minimal interference with mining as compared to forestry. Instead the CCF took the easy way out of development and simply taxed the mining companies and demanded royalties from the minerals. Though in mining, Aboriginal peoples were given a greater role, they were never employed beyond the bush. The CCF felt that Aboriginal peoples had valuable bush skills, which were used when prospecting or exploring for resources. But the CCF felt that that Aboriginal peoples lacked, *“preparation, skill, and ability for highly structural industrial work.”*⁵⁶

The final policy that was implemented by the CCF was surprisingly of great assistance and benefit to northern residents. T.C. Douglas strongly endorsed the belief that each individual has a right to good health. The CCF made this belief a reality by bringing to the North the Air Ambulance Service. In 1946, the service was official and opened northern access to medical services. In the 1940's there was an airplane emergency service that was operated by the Department of Natural Resources. The airplane service brought patients in and out of their communities. The Air Ambulance Service was an efficient way of bringing medical access to the North. This change will be further examined in the following section.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Quiring 2002, p. 161.

⁵⁶ Quiring 2002, p. 169.

⁵⁷ Campbell, Donald C. Wings of Mercy – A Living History of Saskatchewan's Air Ambulance Service. North Battleford: Turner-Warwick Printers, 1993; Quiring 2002; Saskatchewan Education, Northern Division 1992.

Planes, Trains and Automobiles:

The following section is an exploration into the methods of travel that became accessible to the residents of the North. Transportation by way of aircraft, snowmobile, car, and train will be the focus of the section.

The residents of the North could sense a great change was coming when air travel was first introduced in 1924. Elder Ralph Paul shares his grandmother's story of her first airplane sighting,

My grandmother once told me about a large boat like object that flew in the sky. The first airplane that people witnessed looked like a large boat to them. I asked my grandmother when she had first seen this flying boat in the sky. She said she heard about them by word of mouth but she had never seen one yet until one day she heard a strange sound above in the distance. The people gathered to look at this thing and saw something coming closer, it was getting bigger and it looked like a boat. That is why to this day the Dene of the Northwest call an airplane "flying boat".⁵⁸

The ability to quickly travel to remote locations, bringing supplies, medical treatment, people, or leaving with freight such as fish and furs was one of the first modes of transportation that connected the North with the rest of the world. Up until this point, most northern communities were isolated from one another. Beauval to La Loche, Cumberland House, Saskatchewan River Delta, and La Ronge were communities that had remained untouched by the reaches of the South and even one another. Airplanes made it possible to travel in and out of the North faster than any other form of transportation.⁵⁹

Air travel opened up many opportunities in the North. In Wings Beyond Road's End – Airplanes over Saskatchewan's North, the following is said about air travel,

[W]hen air craft entered northern Saskatchewan in the mid-1920's, they were opening the door to the province's untapped natural riches.... The

⁵⁸ WDM Elders Transcripts 2002, Dene Elders Transcript.

⁵⁹ Saskatchewan Education, Northern Division 1993; Quiring 2002; WDM Elders Transcripts 2002.

This research paper was written as background information for the creation of the 2005 "Winning the Prairie Gamble" exhibits at the WDM and is copyright of the [Western Development Museum](#) and the [Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre](#). 25

airplane brought much that was novel to the province's north, a region where people had long been isolated by geography. In addition to a new means of travel, airplanes also brought technology, ideas and values of the south.⁶⁰

In the early days of development, there were many invaluable uses of the plane in the North. All of a sudden crossing the rocky terrain and forestland of the North was not such a feat. The only drawback of air travel was that it was extremely costly. Airplanes and fuel were not acquired without substantial expense. Therefore, in the beginning, airplanes were mostly of a great advantage to the CCF who used air travel for administrative purposes in the North.⁶¹

Besides using airplanes for government business, airplanes were extremely helpful in fighting forest fires. Planes were also used for aerial photography when Saskatchewan was first being mapped out. If mining and forestry companies were able to afford air travel, then miners and loggers were flown in and out of mine sites and logging camps. The airplane proved to be extremely useful in natural resource exploration. The isolated regions where resources were located went from difficult to access to easy. Air travel met industrial needs and it also assisted trappers, fishers, and outfitters. The remote areas where traplines, lakes, and outfitting camps were located were traveled to much easier by flying. A trapper could be flown to the trapline with family, supplies, and dogs at the beginning of the season and then travel back by dog sled.⁶²

In the beginning of the air medical services, planes were initially used to transport patients. That is if the patient was fortunate enough to be able to be picked up and taken to

⁶⁰ Saskatchewan Education, Northern Division 1993, p. viii.

⁶¹ Saskatchewan Education, Northern Division 1993.

⁶² Ibid.

the doctor or hospital. Elder Pat Robillard recalls the early ways of accessing medical services,

In the old days say in 1950's when someone got sick he/she was sent by airplane to Uranium City, Saskatchewan which was the closest hospital. Most people would travel either by foot or dog team if someone got really sick. The Indian Agent and the RCMP would call for a plane to take the sick.⁶³

There was a definite advantage to being able to fly the sick or injured to receive medical treatment, but it was not always possible to access the air services.⁶⁴ Elder Claudia Petit speaks of the difficulties of accessing medical treatment in her story, Growing Up in Buffalo Narrows, "*There was no hospital, so if you got really sick, you were flown to Ile-la-Crosse, or your relatives paddled forty miles. A lot of people died before they made it to hospital.*"⁶⁵

The Air Ambulance Service has been mentioned once before. The opening up of northern access to medical services through air travel has had extremely beneficial effects. When the Air Ambulance service was developed by the efforts of T.C. Douglas to bring the right to good health to all residents of Saskatchewan, the medical field was revolutionized. The Air Ambulance Service has saved thousands of lives throughout the years. Though the service may be costly, the pay off of providing necessary medical treatment is priceless. In fact, after only three years of service, the Air Ambulance Service had transported two thousand patients.⁶⁶ In the 1950's, the Air Ambulance Service saw the numbers increase to an average of one thousand patients per year!⁶⁷

⁶³ WDM Elders Transcripts 2002, Dene Elders Transcript.

⁶⁴ Campbell 1993; WDM Elders Transcripts 2002.

⁶⁵ Petit, Claudia. "*Growing up in Buffalo Narrows*" in Stories from Kohkom. 2nd ed. Eds, Sylvia Vicq, Louise Dufour, Elsie Keewatin, Violet Lavallee, Lisa Vargo, and Rana Nelson. Saskatoon: READ Saskatoon, 2000, p. 51.

⁶⁶ Campbell 1993, p.57.

⁶⁷ Campbell 1993, p. 207.

It was clear that the system was needed to provide valuable medical treatment in the North. An added advantage of the Air Ambulance Service was that the emergency flights opened up the hospital services of the North. Prior to the service, the hospital located at Ile a la Crosse could only afford to remain open during the summer. Upon the arrival the Air Ambulance, the hospital could remain open throughout the entire year. The Air Ambulance Service has opened up the door to medical access throughout northern Saskatchewan, which is emphasized by Saskatchewan Education, "*Before air transport was widely available, many people who are now treated in hospitals had to treat themselves, rely on friends or relatives to administer traditional remedies, or try to get to help by an arduous journey by canoe or dog sled that might take weeks.*"⁶⁸ The use of air transport saved many lives by bringing medical service during epidemics of diseases, accidents, and at the times when regular check-ups were needed.⁶⁹

Presently, the Air Ambulance Service is still available for northern residents and continues to be as valuable as ever. Now throughout the year, airplanes bring in doctors and dentists for check-ups and specialists if needed. Helicopters are used when airplanes are unable to access the area such as during times of break up and freeze up of waterways. The helicopter has saved many lives during emergency evacuations from accidents that occurred on the frozen waterways.⁷⁰

In the beginning, air travel was used primarily for hauling freight such as fish or mail. Eventually the uses of airplanes became centered on assisting in fighting forest fires, bringing northern residents in and out of isolated areas for purposes of fishing, trapping, and outfitting. Finally, it has been discovered that the most valuable use of air

⁶⁸ Saskatchewan Education, Northern Division 1992, p. 125.

⁶⁹ Campbell 1993; Saskatchewan Education, Northern Division 1992.

travel is in medical access. The use of aircraft in the North has become primarily for medical purposes. Part of the reason that this transition occurred was that in the North, different methods of transportation were being introduced.⁷¹

It was clear to the residents of the North that the key to economic and social development depended on the construction of roads. By building roads in the North, the access to natural resources would become plausible. It was believed that if a resource industry could be established in the North that wealth would be brought in and there would no longer be impoverished conditions in northern communities. The only problem was that the CCF was not interested in investing wealth back into the North. The agenda of the CCF was to rebuild the southern economy using the resources located in the North. Therefore when roads were built, it was to serve the industries purposes. Many Elders recall roads being built upon the discovery of minerals or when forests were being logged. Northern residents made it clear that they needed roads that connected to the all-weather roads. CCF refused the requests of the northern communities.⁷²

In 1946, the all-weather road was completed to La Ronge. This one road made a huge difference in the access of resources and industry development but did little for Aboriginal peoples. At the time, very few Aboriginal peoples owned vehicles. CCF recognized the need for methods of transportation that were accessible by northern residents. CCF was still resistant to the idea of building roads for communities. The need for public transportation was solved by the creation of the Saskatchewan Transit

⁷⁰ Campbell 1993.

⁷¹ Campbell 1993; Saskatchewan Education, Northern Division 1992.

⁷² Quiring 2002; Saskatchewan Education, Northern Division 1992.

Company (STC). The STC offered bus services in and out of northern locations, and continues to offer services.⁷³

The CCF's refusal to build northern roads slowed development in the North down considerably, which is further explained by Quiring, "*At the end of the CCF era in 1964, no road extended to the far North. Most communities lacked ground access and resource development often faltered for want of roads. The low level of CCF spending explains the paucity of roads and other infrastructure. The CCF's road policy contradicted its stated commitment to developing and diversifying the northern economy.*"⁷⁴ It was not just the CCF's refusal to build roads in the North that contributed to the lack of northern development. The CCF also made it clear to the resource industry that they were completely unwilling to build even railroads in the North.⁷⁵

The CCF had the express goal of opening up the North for economic development. Unfortunately, they were not interested in investing any money into the infrastructure of northern Saskatchewan in order to create a resource economy. The resistance demonstrated by the CCF in building railroads required for transporting freight out of the mine sites and logging camps appeared to be unjustifiable. The requests made for railroads were denied, and the industry seriously lagged in development compared to Alberta and Manitoba, places where the railroad was built to connect the North to the South⁷⁶.

There was simply no explanation for the CCF's resistance to the building of roads and railways. The CCF's entire 1944 platform was inextricably connected with the

⁷³ Buckley, Kew, and Hawley 1963; Quiring 2002; Saskatchewan Education, Northern Division 1992.

⁷⁴ Quiring 2002, p. 80.

⁷⁵ Quiring 2002.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

concept of provincially shared resources, yet the CCF was unwilling to take the necessary steps to access the resources. It appears that even if the CCF had developed access roads and railroads, northern Saskatchewan would not have been any further developed. The CCF was unwilling to invest in northern communities despite the great need for social development and would have had no hesitations over exploiting the North's resources and residents.⁷⁷

The final mode of transportation that changed the North that will be addressed in this paper was the introduction of snowmobiles. The use of snowmobiles by trappers made trapping a lot easier. In the winter under the right conditions, a trapper was able to travel to his or her trapline and then return just as easily with freight. The snowmobile easily pulled a sleigh. Thus, the snowmobile replaced the use of dogs when travelling. The only condition was that when using a snowmobile the paths had to be maneuverable. When pathways were too treacherous to travel on, the airplane was one way of accessing remote locations if it could be afforded or else the age-old methods of the dog sled.⁷⁸

It is clear that when transportation became an issue for northern residents, the main reasons for building airstrips, roads, and railroads was for economic development. The government did not appear to be interested in bettering the lives of northern residents. While planes, trains, and automobiles brought supplies, technology, advanced medical access, it also opened the North up to influences such as urbanization, migration in and out of the North and drugs and alcohol. The remaining section of this paper will explore the impacts of the advancement of transportation on Aboriginal peoples.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Quiring 2002; WDM Elders Transcripts 2002.

⁷⁹ WDM Elders Transcripts 2002.

Northern Aboriginal Communities:

In the beginning of this paper, the traditional lifestyle and livelihood of northern Aboriginal peoples was introduced with the hopes that the impacts of the advancement of modes of transportation would be better understood. Hundreds of years ago when Aboriginal peoples were able to pursue a traditional livelihood and prosper from it, the issue of having an all-weather road connecting the North to the South was of little consequence. It was not until the CCF made it their mission to destroy the cultural tradition and lifestyle of Aboriginal peoples that accessing the South became an issue for Aboriginal peoples. The devastating effects of the CCF's assimilation policy, and the breakdown and rebuilding of the traditional economy of the North brought about great change. The following section will examine the effects of this change.

Aboriginal peoples first experiences with airplanes, cars and snowmobiles are generally positive and sometimes even humorous. Elder Pat Robillard shares a story he was told about one man's first sighting of an airplane,

An old man by the name of Louie Benonie from Hatchet Lake once told me a story about a hunting trip he went on, and he heard a strange noise in the sky and when he spotted an object above. The day was very windy and the object was approaching very slowly and when it got closer it looked like a crucifix and so he knelt down and prayed. The plane passed by roaring and he realized that it was this thing that people were talking about and he felt silly and got up. He told us he knelt and prayed for nothing (laughter).⁸⁰

The introduction of transportation from the South was welcomed for it made life easier. A plane, car, and snowmobile did not get tired, they were not difficult to ride, and they were much faster than traditional forms of transportation. Elder Emma Pelly speaks of the change of transportation and living on the trapline,

⁸⁰ WDM Elders Transcripts 2002, Dene Elders Transcript.

Every March we moved to a trapline and stayed until May. My father left first to prepare our campsite. He pitched the tent and gathered enough firewood to last for a while. Then the rest of the families moved together to the trapline. The tents were pitched all in a row. Each year we went to a different place. Back then we used horses and dog teams to help us move, then it was Bombardiers, and now ski-doods.⁸¹

The use of automobiles and snowmobiles made it much easier for Aboriginal peoples to travel around and make a living. For Elder Nancy Munroe selling rugs was her way of earning an income, she shares here story of traveling,

My mother taught me how to make braided rugs, and that was how I kept food on the table. I could make one rug per day, and when we went to Prince Albert to sell them, the dogs were tired out from pulling the heavy load. Later, we used horses, and even later we went by car. It was a full day's trip when we used dogs or horses.⁸²

Not everyone perceived the use of automobiles, planes, and snowmobiles as a great advantage. There were many people that preferred the old way of travelling. Max Smokeyday was not taken in by the novelty of automobiles, "*I got my very first truck in 1952. My oldest son drove it. He was just a boy then. I drove it once in a while, but I didn't like it, so I gave up on it.*"⁸³

There are Aboriginal Elders that saw consequences that would be synonymous with the introduction of modern transportation. Some of the consequences of travel were associated with the vehicles themselves, where as others were associated with what modern transportation would bring into the North. One consequence was that was foreseen by Elders was the increased use of drugs and alcohol. Elder Flora Gladue speaks about the what the Elders use to tell her,

⁸¹ Pelly, Emma. "Trapline" in *Stories from Kohkom*. 2nd ed. Eds, Sylvia Vicq, Louise Dufour, Elsie Keewatin, Violet Lavallee, Lisa Vargo, and Rana Nelson. Saskatoon: READ Saskatoon, 2000, p. 129.

⁸² Munroe, Nancy. "Braided Rugs" in *Stories from Kohkom*. 2nd ed. Eds, Sylvia Vicq, Louise Dufour, Elsie Keewatin, Violet Lavallee, Lisa Vargo, and Rana Nelson. Saskatoon: READ Saskatoon, 2000, p. 18.

The Elders used to talk a lot about the coming of the railroad and alcohol. The Elders would predict the coming of the whiteman and alcohol. I used to think and wonder what the Elders were talking about. The Elders predicted towns would thrive, there would be a lot of drinking and railroad tracks would be all over. The Elders even saw small children would start drinking and get into drugs.⁸⁴

There was also difficulty ensuring that the industrial economy did not greatly interfere with the traditional landscape of the North. Time revealed that the advancement of travel in the North would bring about deleterious effects. Animals no longer followed the same migratory routes. Animals had to avoid the noise of highways, logging camps, and mining camps. The advancement of transportation also included the advancement of the industrial economy. The change in the landscape caused by the pollution of mining and logging sites killed off fish and animals and caused the remainder of animals to move to different areas. It was becoming very difficult to pursue a traditional livelihood upon the change of the landscape in the North.⁸⁵

Elder Joe Douquette felt that the use of modern transportation was the cause of problems for Aboriginal peoples. He states this point in the following,

[T]he people moved camp; when they travelled about, when they went anywhere, they always harnessed their dogs. They used dogs, and their attitude towards them was one of respect. Today the automobiles are killing us off, they travel so fast; we do not know just how many people are killed everyday[.]⁸⁶

There were many Elders who felt that life was made easier by the modernization of transportation but that it was at the cost of the traditional lifestyle and landscape of the North.

⁸³ Smokeyday, Max. "Life in the Thirties". In "...And They Told Us Their Stories" A Book Of Indian Stories. Eds. Jack Funk and Gordon Lobe. Saskatoon: Saskatoon District Tribal Council, 1991, p. 90.

⁸⁴ Groenen, Wilma, Neil Pasqua, and Harvey Whitecalf, eds. All Nations of Saskatchewan Indian Elders. Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 1989, Flora Gladue, Flying Dust Reserve.

⁸⁵ WDM Elders Transcripts 2002.

The first change in northern life initiated by T.C. Douglas was the movement of Aboriginal peoples from off of the land and into settlements. The consequences of implementing a policy of assimilation proved to have a negative impact on northern communities. When Aboriginal peoples were forcedly placed in settlements, the CCF envisioned community members working together to survive. The CCF thought that the plan of integrating Aboriginal peoples in Euro-Canadian society would result in the creation of autonomous and self-sufficient northern communities. Quiring makes note of the fact that the CCF never gave up on attempting to instill socialist values on northern communities, *“The CCF used co-operatives as part of its attempt to introduce socialist ideals to northerners and to solve northern problems. In colonial fashion, the CCF kept paternalistic control, not trusting northerners to run profitable, businesslike operations, and preventing movement of full responsibility to the local level.”*⁸⁷ The result was a community divide between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal peoples were kept impoverished and the non-Aboriginal people permitted to work in the industrial economy profited. Eventually, Aboriginal peoples were no longer interested in pursuing fishing or trapping due to the strict regulations and unprecedented intervention by the CCF in the fur and fish economies.⁸⁸

The result of the CCF’s assimilation policy was displacement and disruption of Aboriginal cultural traditions. Aboriginal peoples were never given the opportunity to participate in the development of the industrial economy. They were never accredited with the capacity to work in the mining and forestry industries. The CCF wanted to

⁸⁶ Douquette, Joe. *“The Old and the New”* in *wâskahikaniwiyiniw-âcimowina – Stories of the House People*. Eds. Freda Ahenakew and H.C. Wolfart. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1987, p. 57.

⁸⁷ Quiring 2002, p. 57.

⁸⁸ Quiring 2002.

ensure that Aboriginal peoples would be unable to advance in the resource economy. Any opportunity to participate in the forestry or mining industry was strongly opposed.⁸⁹

T.C. Douglas' distaste for the Aboriginal concepts of self-government and distinctiveness were clearly communicated to Aboriginal peoples by the CCF's blatant disregard for treaty and Aboriginal rights inherent in the land. The CCF never hesitated to exclude First Nations from future land developments. When Aboriginal peoples attempted to participate in the industrial economy, their efforts were greatly opposed. The CCF did their best to keep Aboriginal peoples in subsidiary positions in the economy. One way of preventing participation was by refusing to build roads that would connect Aboriginal peoples with the all-weather roads.⁹⁰

When the CCF decided that the future of the North would consist of the exploitation of natural resources, Aboriginal peoples were not consulted with. In fact it was of no consequence to the provincial government whether or not Aboriginal peoples opposed or supported the development of the industrial economy. The exclusion of Aboriginal peoples from development was justified by the notion that an Aboriginal person was not endowed with the capacity or ability to participate in such industries.

Looking back at the policies of the CCF, it is apparent that the CCF was incapable of achieving the vision of northern development that Douglas communicated to Saskatchewan residents. The CCF had become entangled in the administration of northern policies and had done next to nothing for northern economic development by the end of the CCF's era. Finally, the lack of support by northern residents was evident in the 1964 election, when the CCF was defeated. Perhaps it is more than coincidence that

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

four years earlier more than half of Aboriginal peoples in the North, the Treaty Indians, were given the right to vote in the provincial election.⁹¹

Aboriginal communities have had to overcome a lot of hardship in the past. After examining the changes that have occurred throughout the last 50 years in the North it really is of no consequence whether or not the impact on Aboriginal peoples has been more detrimental than advantageous. The reality is, what is done is done. There is no going back to the way things were prior to modernization. Aboriginal peoples are well aware of this fact. What has become evident in the North is that the communities will persevere, adapt, and thrive. Ralph Paul communicates this point,

The road to Patuanak was built in 1970, a truck is needed and many people have destroyed cars this way. We have fishing camps on Churchill River called “etthen deze”. There are lots of pickerel in this river and we wanted to set up proper accessible fishing camps to make some money for the reserves, but, there is a problem with the road. We are still on the government about possible funding to pave the road. Money can be invested it is available to us if we try, but first we have to learn that business sense.⁹²

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² WDM Elders Transcripts 2002, Dene Elders Transcript.

Conclusion:

The change that was brought about by the CCF has had lasting impact on northern communities, but it would be unjust lay blame entirely on the CCF. The coming of change in the North was inevitable. Eventually, communities would have pushed to become modernized, it just happened that T.C. Douglas envisioned the modernization of the North earlier than the residents. However, Douglas' modernized North was more than likely different than the vision that the residents of northern Saskatchewan would have likely foreseen. It would have been beneficial to all of Saskatchewan if the North could have been socially and economically developed during the era of the CCF. Unfortunately, the greed of the CCF and their promise to mend the economic collapse of the 1930's served as the greatest impediment to development.

The Aboriginal communities of northern Saskatchewan suffered a great loss of their traditional lifestyle in the North at the hands of the CCF's abhorrently racist assimilation policies. Credit must be given to Aboriginal peoples for having the determination to retain their distinct cultural values in the face of change. The adaptability and perseverance of Aboriginal peoples has gotten their communities through the rough transition of urbanization and modernization.

It is the same persistence demonstrated by Aboriginal peoples in their refusal to lose their cultural traditions that has assisted northern communities in achieving a sustainable economy. First Nations communities have taken the initiative to heal their communities and the landscape of the North so that future generations will be able to thrive in Saskatchewan's North.

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