

## **Indigenous-Settler Relations**

(Addendum to Component 2.3.1 Early Farming by Indigenous Peoples, 1905-1920)

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Winning the Prairie Gamble 2005 Exhibit

March 2004

Closely tied to the topic of “Early Farming by Indigenous Peoples” is “Indigenous-Settler Relations.” Much of the material on the early development of the prairie region results in the perception of two solitudes. The isolation and separation of Indian and non-Indian communities is a remarkably prevalent myth found within works that document the development of the prairie west. The assumption is that Indian peoples were confined to reserves while immigrant towns simply sprang up around them, each, it appears, operating in complete isolation from the other. However, the presence of not only interaction, but also positive, mutually reciprocal and co-operative relations was in fact the case in many instances.

Indian people provided vital knowledge, skills and assistance to incoming settlers. In terms of agriculture, Plains Indian peoples knew a great deal about their environments – vegetation, rainfall and frost patterns, availability of water, care of horses, knowledge of summer pasturage and winter forage requirements – and passed this information on to settlers. The medicinal properties of various plants, roots, and herbs were also known and shared by First Nations peoples. Reserve residents also provided goods and services. Indian people supplied firewood and willow posts, hay, wild meat, berries, and clothing such as moccasins; they were also an important source of labour, often threshing, harvesting, and cutting brush on non-Indian farms. Economic relations were in fact equally advantageous, with First Nations providing goods and a source of labour, and settlers supplying a market for Indian products and labour.

**Sources:**

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