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Pioneers and Police on the Canadian Prairies, 1885-1914

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Article abstract

Encore récemment, et ce, jusqu'à ce que paraisse l'étude de R. C. Macleod en 1976, la bonne réputation de la Gendarmerie royale du Nord-Ouest reposait sur le souvenir d'exploits extraordinaires; en effet, légendes et traditions s'étaient plu à évoquer les actions mémorables que ce corps policier aurait accomplies dans sa lutte contre les Amérindiens et les criminels de l'époque. Macleod, pour sa part, a remis cette interprétation en question et il estime que le succès de la gendarmerie doit plutôt être attribué au fait que ce corps policier était à la fois bien organisé et bien discipliné.

C'est cette récente interprétation que l'auteur de cet article veut nuancer. Il se demande, d'une part, comment on peut la prendre au pied de la lettre quand on sait qu'après 1885, ni les Amérindiens, ni les criminels ne constituaient une réelle menace dans l'ouest canadien et, d'autre part, à quoi il faut attribuer la popularité bien réelle de la gendarmerie si elle ne repose pas sur la lutte contre l'Amérindien et le criminel.

A la lumière d'une source tout à fait particulière, soit celle des rapports quotidiens que rédigeaient les membres de la gendarmerie, l'auteur démontre que cette popularité tient du fait de sa présence constante auprès de la population. La plupart du temps, le policier patrouillait le pays, passant de ferme en ferme; il aidait le pionnier à résoudre certains problèmes et c'était à lui qu'on avait recours en cas de danger ou d'urgence, qu'il s'agisse d'incendies, de disette ou de maladies. Dans ces années de durs labeurs, cette présence du policier et les nombreux services qu'il rendait étaient de nature à faire bonne impression et à asseoir sa popularité auprès de la population locale.

Pioneers and Police on the Canadian Prairies, 1885-1914

CARL BETKE

In the preface to his recent impressive historical analysis of the North-West Mounted Police, R.C. Macleod marvelled at the "consistent popularity" of the mounted police, "particularly in western Canada."[1] His book goes on to support the proposition that their popularity was based upon their success at maintaining law and order. Rather than follow the traditional emphasis on stories of spectacular individual heroism in quelling desperate Indians and criminals alike, Macleod has stressed the mounted police capacity for crime prevention in their military style, discipline, and prestige; their regular system of patrols; and their service to minimize active illegal expression of general or individual animosities against vulnerable minorities such as Indians and immigrants. That the incidence of crime was rare is obvious from the lists compiled in annual reports or from patrol reports.[2] Macleod's conclusion, that the peaceful situation was a result of the police presence, cannot altogether satisfactorily be demonstrated because the police were in the North-West Territories before almost all of the settlers, preventing any useful before-and-after contrast.

In any case, settlers did not, in the main, see any police heroics, whether or not their systematic patrols were effective deterrents to crime. It seems a sensible question to ask what the early settlers did see the police doing. There are at least two possible approaches to finding an answer: to study pioneer correspondence, reminiscences, and local histories; and to study the day-to-day reports of policemen in the rural West. A rapid glance through several local histories in search of references to North-West Mounted Policemen confirms the impression that they were for the most part not linked to dramatic criminal chases in community memories. What follows, then, is derived from the second approach, a study of police records for the period of rapid western settlement.

In a nation which reveres its police force, it is particularly important to probe the origins of the police image. At issue might be a conception of social order or the rule of law. If actual exploits did not create the reputation, then the nature of normal, peaceful service cannot be overlooked, dismissed, or reduced in significance. If the major impression the police created was of benevolent assistance in a host of important areas, that has implications for an assessment of the collective

1. R.C. Macleod, *The North-West Mounted Police and Law Enforcement 1873-1905* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), p. ix.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

national character. Rather than a people riddled with criminal tendencies or overly acquiescent to repressive police authority, Canadians may have been a people particularly susceptible in their pioneer conditions (as were the Indians in their altered circumstances) to the first agents of government welfare. It can hardly be surprising that so mundane an appreciation would be expressed more colourfully in the popular literary imagination. But for the majority of original prairie settlers, there is striking evidence that the police may have been most noticeable for their visits, their assistance to those who were struggling or who felt alien in a strange, new land, their control of quarantine procedure during periods of disease epidemics, their veterinary contributions, or their usefulness in combatting the menace of prairie fires.

I

The first factor in the esteem enjoyed by the North-West Mounted Police was their great visibility. This was not so much a function of numbers as of deployment. Indeed, after the excitement of the North-West Rebellion in 1885 temporarily boosted the establishment of the force to one thousand, its size actually declined, even though the Klondike gold rush in the Yukon drained off several hundred to the North for a few years around the turn of the century. The mounted policemen were well known because of their commitment to regular, systematic patrols, summer and winter.

The patrol system of the police appears to have originated in response to escalating horse stealing in Canadian territory by American gangs after 1884.[3] In 1886 the previous custom of sporadic patrols was replaced by a much more rigorous programme, not without occasional reaction on the part of ranchers unaccustomed to mounted policemen roaming their lands and grazing police horses on their valuable grass.[4] Commissioner Lawrence Herchmer immediately saw a general value to patrols beyond only the border region, and had them extended throughout the West from the numerous, scattered, small police detachments. That Herchmer's primary objective was to prevent horse stealing and other crime by maintaining an obvious police presence and a fund of knowledge about settlement conditions cannot be doubted. Information on "the state of the country, condition of crops, presence of strangers, travellers met" was to be obtained casually, since, of course, the police had no special right to pry. The concentration on crime prevention was all the more notable in occasional admonitions to secrecy stressing, as one confidential order put it, that some "patrols are to be made at uncertain times, so that those intending to smuggle may not be able to

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 44-5; D.H. Breen, "The Mounted Police and the Ranching Frontier", in H.A. Dempsey, ed., *Men in Scarlet* (Calgary: Historical Society of Alberta/ McClelland & Stewart West, ca. 1974), pp. 122-4.
4. Superintendent P.R. Neale to Commissioner Herchmer, 30 August 1887: Public Archives of Canada, Record Group 18, Records of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (hereafter RG 18)-B1.

make out plans to get through."[5] Just before the turn of the century, Commissioner Herchmer was fond of describing his "outpost and patrol system" as "the great cause of the absence of crime on our side" of the border, or of crediting it with convincing "foreigners that law and order must be respected in this country."[6]

It is equally clear, however, that patrol instructions included far more than the requirement to watch for "doubtful characters". The legendary Superintendent Sam Steele issued orders with quite a different emphasis at Macleod in 1889:

> You will collect all the information you can about the settlers in the vicinity of your Detachment; how many new ones have arrived during the past year, how much stock they have and of what kind, where they are settled, what crops good or bad are generally raised, quantity of hay put up, general feelings amongst them as to the fitness of the country for settlement, and if any have suggestions to make as to the revising of any of the Ordinances for the better Government of the District, their feelings on the Prairie Fire law and powers given under it. . . .[7]

Even the "small flying patrols" of a commissioned or non-commissioned officer and two constables, the purpose of which in some cases was to provide a surprise factor in the watch for desperadoes, were often made to isolated ranches and settlements not covered by regular outpost patrols in order to ascertain the same ordinary details of the settlement process.[8] To some extent the continuation of this emphasis was dictated by periodic requests of the Department of the Interior for copies of patrol maps, for crop information to counter detrimental reports circulating in Britain and the United States on crop prospects in light of the growing season and weather, and for detailed information about numbers of settlers moving into and out of the North-West Territories. The last demand was ongoing, formalized after 1896 by the new Liberal minister of the Interior, Clifford Sifton, who desired to know the details of sex, age, and location of origin or destination for the migrants.[9]

Whatever the purposes for patrol reports, the usual effect of the procedure was to provide regular visits to settlers which constituted the only alleviation of monotony not just for many pioneers, but also for the policemen themselves.

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5. See File 511 for 1903, n.d.: RG 18-A1; Macleod, *The North-West Mounted Police*, pp. 45-9.
6. Canada, Sessional Papers, NWMP *Report* for 1890, p. 2; NWMP*Report*, 1898, pp. 13-4.
7. Steele to non-commissioned officer in charge of Porcupine Hills detachment, 14 October 1889: RG 18-C2.
8. Circular memorandum from NWMP Headquarters to Officers Commanding Divisions, 12 April 1890: RG 18-A1.
9. NWMP Comptroller Fred White to Herchmer, 13 October 1892 and 9 August 1897; and correspondence with Interior Department officials, 1894: RG 18-B1; Canada, Sessional Papers, Department of the Interior *Report*, 1891, part I, p. xxiv; Circular memorandum dated 1 June 1895, RG 18-C3; Superintendent A.R. Cuthbert, Battleford, to Sergeant Bird, Duck Lake, 1 June 1901: RG 18-C1.

Many patrol reports perfunctorily listed the observations required but, even among those which contain quite full descriptions of the experience, only occasional incidents broke the tedium of the ride. Difficulties for the police to handle were rarely registered; the police normally received "no complaints" and rode on. References to stray horses, stolen cattle, crop and stock conditions, dotted the thousands of patrol reports which were submitted throughout the Territories.[10] A rancher might complain of a homesteader cutting hay on his land; a settler might report his important lumber stolen; the constable might notice poor grain yields and the possibility of future distress at next year's seeding time.[11] These were the limits of most policemen's excitement. Some remembered in their retirement that the frontier farming situation itself promoted very little criminal tendency. "You take when people had come in there and taken up land," reminisced one, "they were too busy to get into trouble." The settlers, pointed out another, "were all in a small way and they were all looking out for their own business — they were just quiet decent people." His detachment "was the easiest place to work you could ever want. . . . You kept riding your district, you were interested in people in it, you were welcome where you went — it wasn't regarded as police surveyals."[12] In the early years the welcome was conditioned by isolation; in later years it was fostered by the fund of police experience which made their advice good on farming conditions, soil, climate, and winter survival.[13]

The lack of incident is aptly illustrated by some senior officers' reprimands about patrol reports which came in "very scant and uninteresting." The assistant commissioner was moved to enjoin his divisional commander at Battleford in 1900 "not to let your detachments go to sleep, and have the reports sent in promptly." One commanding officer, Inspector Begin, responded to another such missive with the comment that "if nothing at all occurs, and there is [sic] no complaints, he [the patrolman] will have no information to give only regarding the weather, condition of cattle, state of trails and river and whether there are any

10. See, for examples, Inspector V. Williams to Officer Commanding at Calgary, 29 July 1887; and diary report of Sergeant Dee, High River, for week ending 28 January 1893: RG 18-B1; Diary of Constable William Murray, North Fork of Sheep Creek (Calgary Division), for week ending 4 June 1891: RG 18-A1; Sergeant Saul Martin to Officer Commanding Prince Albert Division, 5 May 1892: RG 18-C1; Milk River Detachment Diary, 17 August 1895; and daily journal, St. Mary's Detachment, 14 September 1896: RG 18-C2; Diary of Medicine Lodge Detachment, 13 February 1900: RG 18-C1.
11. Constable A.W. Oaks, North Fork/Fish Creek Detachment, to Superintendent J.N. McIlree, Calgary, 27 August 1891: RG 18-A1; Patrol report of Constable J. Thornton, Ft. Qu'Appelle, 7 February 1895: RG 18-C3; Weekly report of Constable D.L. McClean, Willoughby, Prince Albert Division, 2 November 1895: RG 18-C1.
12. Transcripts of interviews by S.W. Horrall with G.J. Duncan, 17 January 1969, p. 36; and with G.H. Blake, 13 January 1969, p. 53: RCMP Historical Section, Ottawa; G.J. Duncan, "Retrospect", *Scarlet and Gold*, 1964; Macleod, *The North-West Mounted Police*, pp. 46-7.
13. S.B. Steele, *Forty Years in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild, Stewart, 1918), pp. 256-7; NWMP *Report*, 1888, p. 11; NWMP *Report*, 1901, pp. 3 and 85.

American cattle in the sub-district or not, or whether any strangers are passing through. . . ."[14] Not to report much was less serious than not to patrol properly. A commanding officer for a district might notice a paucity of families visited, or a concentration in one favoured direction, or failure to keep up patrolling on Sundays. The occasional complaint from settlers on this last deficiency before the turn of the century would bring a stern response. Superintendent Burton Deane at Macleod, on receiving one of these reports, wanted an immediate investigation by a detachment sergeant. "Send me a complete list of all the settlers in this section, and place against the name of each the date of the last visit paid by a police patrol."[15] Patrols, whether or not significant crime threatened, were not to be neglected, and the settlers evidently derived comfort from them.

After 1900, with the population multiplying rapidly, new conditions reduced the possibility of complete coverage. The development of towns apparently distracted patrolmen from proper attention to more isolated areas, causing civilian complaints which came to Commissioner A. Bowen Perry's attention. It was no part of the "mounted constabulary's" role to protect small towns, ordered Perry in 1901; his was not a "municipal body" but one intended to provide geographically broad protection. The retort by Superintendent Morris at Prince Albert in 1902, that unprecedented expansion of settlement made regular visits to all settlers an impossibility, did not prevent Perry from continuing to insist on patrol efficiency. Despite orders to officers inspecting detachments to detail patrol activities meticulously, Assistant Commissioner McIlree still observed in the Prince Albert district in 1910 a tendency of the detachment men to "hang around the town too much." Patrol slips, which had been regularly signed by settlers along the routes of patrols in the 1890s, were reinstated.[16]

The point is not so much the growing failure just before World War I to maintain the process for every last settler, as it is the insistence on making the effort, so that some proportion of the pioneers undoubtedly did continue to see mounted policemen from time to time. This was so even though the settlement frontier shifted northward. Extended northern patrols taking several weeks each were initiated, and a new division was created at Athabasca Landing. Here distances were greater and even local patrols were matters of at least several days' journey, but the substance of patrol reports was much the same as for those of the earlier settlements.[17] The pattern which had been well established on the

14. Assistant Commissioner, NWMP, to Officer Commanding Battleford Division, 21 February 1900; Begin to Commissioner Perry, n.d., (1903): RG 18-B1.
15. Steele to Constable P_____, 10 August 1889; and Deane to the sergeant in charge at Porcupine Detachment, 16 May 1898: RG 18-C2; Herchmer to Officer Commanding "B" Division, 13 February 1894: RG 18-B1; Circular memorandum to Officers Commanding Divisions, 9 November 1895: RG 18-C3.
16. RNWMP Standing General Orders, March 1901, p. 42: RCMP Headquarters, Ottawa; NWMP *Report*, 1902, part I, p. 67; Circular memorandum #560, 18 February 1908: RG 18-B4; McIlree to Perry, 13 June 1910: RG 18-C1.
17. See, for example, patrol reports from "N" Division, 1911: RG 18-B1.

prairies by the early 1890s would make the North the most notable scene of this particular part of the mounted police legend after the First World War.

II

Rural patrols in a period of immigration encountered many ethnic minorities among the settlers, some quite alien to the Canadian experience. That most of them were treated well had little to do with any individual propensities among policemen for tolerance. It seems reasonable to suppose that most constables and officers would have expected newcomers to adopt the English-Canadian way of life according to its basic British traditions.[18] The requirement of tolerance was dictated by first the federal Department of Agriculture and after 1892 the Department of the Interior in their capacities as colonizers of the Canadian prairie west. During both the Conservative and Liberal periods of government before and after 1896, the singular official demand was for immigrants who would enhance western agricultural production: "capitalists, farmers with capital, farm-labourers, and domestic servants," as Sir Charles Tupper put it in 1893. This was a business-like economic venture, but one inseparable from the prevailing nationalist dream. The deputy minister of the Interior, A.M. Burgess, quoted Tupper again in 1896 on the priority which should be given to the proper filling of the "vacant lands" of Manitoba and the North-West Territories.[19]

The well-known emphasis of the new Liberal minister of the Interior after 1896, Clifford Sifton, and of his Manitoba colleague, Deputy Minister James A. Smart, hardly needs comment. The department's policy, stated Smart at the turn of the century, "was based upon the assumption that it is highly desirable that at the earliest possible moment all the fertile lands of the West should be located, and the country enriched by the general production which will be sure to follow the settlement of a hardy class of settlers." Commerce, other industries, and the general citizen would benefit from "the consequent lightening of our national burdens, such as they are, by the presence of a great number of shoulders to carry them." Smart even transformed the oft-repeated term, "desirable class" of immigrants, into "desirable agriculturalists". This concentration on competent agriculturalists would sanction the acceptance of many East-European immigrants thought by many Canadians to be culturally marginal or unsuitable, and it would condition the response of the police as well.[20]

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18. R.C. Macleod, "Canadianizing the West: The North-West Mounted Police as Agents of the National Policy, 1873-1905", in L.H. Thomas, ed., *Essays on Western History* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1976), pp. 99-110.
19. Department of the Interior *Reports*, 1894, part I, p. xxxiv; part III, p. 13; and 1896, part I, p. xxx.
20. Canada, *Journals of the House of Commons*, 1900, Appendix No. 1, *Report of the Select Standing Committee on Agriculture and Colonization*, p. 308; Department of the Interior *Reports*, 1899, part I, p. ix; and 1901, pp. ii, xv; and for a clear presentation of Sifton's attitudes, see D.J. Hall, "Clifford Sifton: Immigration and Settlement Policy 1896-1905", in Howard Palmer, ed., *The Settlement of the West* (Calgary: University of Calgary/Comprint, 1977), pp. 60-85.

The combination of cultural preference with official economic objectives brought British, American, Scandinavian, and German settlers the best general acceptance (and the least ethnic reference) in police reports. They came with sufficient capital and farming knowledge (especially the Americans), were in most cases accounted thrifty and hard-working (notably the Germans and Scandinavians), and therefore brought themselves almost immediately to reasonably prosperous circumstances. In addition, they shared acceptable cultural values, emphasizing cleanliness and neatness, following similar Protestant religious traditions (for the most part) and, in striving for the comfortable life, accepting the virtue of self-sufficiency. Canadian laws were not very alien to the British and Americans; Germans and Scandinavians respected the authorities. When mounted police officers contrasted alleged American disorder with Canadian law and order, the object seems to have been more to enhance the prestige of the Canadian police force than to complain about lawless American immigrants.[21]

Alien habits, however, could also be overridden by evidence of economic success. There are several striking examples of this phenomenon. The Mennonites established self-contained communities which sometimes seemed exclusive and vaguely threatening. One Sergeant St. George regretted in 1890 the "immense power" of Mennonite elders: ". . .so long as they remain so these people will be what they are today — foreigners in language, customs and sentiments" among whom "the rising generation is growing up as ignorant of the language of the Dominion as those who came some eighteen years ago from Russia." But their prosperity, contentedness, and peacefulness overcame these criticisms. A new Mennonite settlement at Duck Lake in 1891 immediately showed promise of the traditional farming ability and good behaviour; the police therefore discounted critical reports about them by neighbours as a mere reaction to their isolationism.[22]

When Mormons began arriving in southern Alberta in the late 1880s, the moral risk of their presence was at the outset discounted by the Interior Department in favour of their experience with irrigation which would, it was thought, provide an example to far more settlers beyond themselves.[23] Though they quickly established themselves as major food provisioners for mounted police posts, especially at Lethbridge, yet Commissioner Herchmer and Superintendent Steele at Fort Macleod felt constrained to place police detachments among them on watch for titillating evidence of polygamy, their zeal compounded by the "distrust and

21. This is not the point made in, but seems a logical conclusion from, Macleod, *The North-West Mounted Police*, pp. 153-5; and Macleod, "Canadianizing the West", p. 108.

22. Department of the Interior *Report*, 1893, part I, p. 9; NWMP *Report*, 1890; Sergeant H.E. Bierd and Inspector Albert Hirot, Duck Lake, to Officer Commanding at Prince Albert, 22 June 1892: RG 18-C1; Superintendent S.V. Gagnon, Prince Albert, to Herchmer, 15 May 1899: RG 18-A1.

23. Department of the Interior *Report*, 1888; pp. xxi-xxii.

contempt" of surrounding settlers for the Mormon newcomers.[24] Though Steele's men by 1890 produced a few reports of suspected polygamy, no one in Canadian officialdom appeared to take an interest. In fact, Department of the Interior Deputy Minister Burgess confided to the minister, Edgar Dewdney, his opinion that not only was "the evidence on which Mr. Steele's conclusions are based . . . of the most flimsy and unsatisfactory character," but what Steele's reports indicated should be dismissed as merely "a low condition of morality among the Mormons, . . . a matter which it is beyond the power and province of the Government to deal with." Furthermore, "if the progress of a settlement is not the measure of both the intelligence and industry of the settlers, I confess that I do not know what can be," and the great potential value of Mormon irrigation projects had to be kept in mind. The government, and therefore the police, simply accepted a statement by local Mormon leader, Charles O. Card, denying polygamous activity.[25]

Subsequent attempts by Commissioner Herchmer to revive investigations by surveillance were discouraged by Fred White, North-West Mounted Police comptroller in Ottawa, as "unnecessary irritations" to the Mormon people. Thereafter, police records concentrated on the admirable agricultural example shown by the Mormons (particularly in developing irrigation systems and mills) within a peaceful and law-abiding community life. Ironically, most of the police dealings with the Mormons were in the nature of defusing the ill-feeling held for them by neighbours, ostensibly because of sharp or doubtful business practices.[26] When a local constable heard and excitedly reported another embarrassing rumour of polygamous arrangements in 1899, Superintendent R. Burton Deane quickly undermined his enthusiasm: "the less interest we appear to take in the Mormons' customs the better."[27]

While the fascination with Mormons focused on but one aspect of their tradition, the picture presented by the Doukhobors, after more than seven thousand of them arrived in 1899 in what would eventually be east-central Saskatchewan, was much more completely strange to Canadians. It was not just a matter of clothing and language, but also a religious understanding which stressed noncompliance with those government regulations which might restrict their communal commitment (individual land ownership) or register their personal informa-

24. NWMP *Report*, 1888, pp. 22, 58; Steele to Herchmer, 25 August 1889: RG 18-C2; Steele to Herchmer, confidential, 4 December 1889: RG 18-A1.

25. Correspondence on southern Alberta Mormons in RG 18-A1 for 1890, including copy of a confidential letter from Burgess to Dewdney, 16 December 1889; and another from Card to Burgess, 22 February 1890. See also Macleod, *The North-West Mounted Police*, pp. 155-6.

26. Herchmer to White, 19 March 1890; White to Dewdney, 25 March 1890; and Steele to Herchmer, 1891: RG 18-A1; Excerpts about the Mormons in NWMP *Reports*, 1890-1897 and 1901.

27. February and March correspondence, 1899: RG 18-A1; Deane to Herchmer, 17 March 1899: RG 18-C2.

tion (births, deaths, marriages).[28] Early efforts to resist these Canadian government requirements, and attempts to understand and follow the curious leadership of Peter Verigin, included a series of protest marches by ever diminishing proportions of the Doukhobor people. The first, in the late fall of 1902, involved nearly two thousand Doukhobors, unprepared with proper food or clothing to withstand the cold, who got as far as Minnedosa, Manitoba, on foot before being turned back. Later Saskatchewan demonstrations rarely involved as many as one hundred, but their effect was dramatized by the highly embarrassing tactic of public nudity and by occasional violent internal clashes between those determined to maintain a communal lifestyle and the majority reconciled to individual homestead registration and other Canadian laws. The police attitude in all this was unbelievably patient, again not because of any exceptional sympathy for or insight into Doukhobor problems, but because the Department of the Interior desired to retain the remarkable agricultural finesse of these people. The troublesome few were most often escorted back home after their marches, only their most stubborn leaders occasionally being jailed briefly.[29]

The nature of the Interior Department's policy, with its ramifications for the police, was most clearly illustrated by the response to the thousands of Ukrainian immigrants who streamed into the North-West Territories after the mid 1890s. Immigration officials saw the "primitive" lifestyle and "generally ignorant" condition of a "very modest, thrifty and hard working" people to be the formula they were looking for to wring Canadian prosperity from the newcomers' struggles to survive. The same observations, however, led police officers to the conclusion that many would not only have to be fed, but would require assistance in the form of seed and cattle to begin their farming operations. The perspectives were strikingly different: the Department of the Interior expected Canada to benefit from the very desperation of the new alien settlers; the police could not imagine leaving so destitute a people on their own.[30]

The police received their education at the hands of the Interior Department at the Edna settlement north-east of Edmonton. During 1896, the police were providing limited assistance to destitute "Galician" pioneers there, mainly in the form of clothing in exchange for such work as clearing brush. When a police corporal with the aid of an interpreter reported extensive distress in August of 1897, immigration officials accused the police of meddling and of allowing themselves to be naively exploited by shrewd immigrants whose normal living conditions

28. See George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Doukhobors* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1968); Carl Betke, "The Mounted Police and the Doukhobors in Saskatchewan, 1899-1909", *Saskatchewan History*, XXVII (Winter 1974), pp. 3-5.
29. Betke, "The Mounted Police and the Doukhobors", pp. 4-12.
30. Department of the Interior *Report*, 1895-96, part IV, p. 120; NWMP *Report*, 1896, p. 12. For fuller treatments of the exploitive expectations of Canadian immigration policy, see Hall, "Clifford Sifton"; and Donald Avery, *"Dangerous Foreigners"* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1979).

might easily appear as destitution to Canadian observers.[31] Following reception of a stiff reprimand to leave the Ukrainian settlers to their own devices, the mounted police reduced their alleviation of distress, and concentrated on educating a people of alien habit to cope wtih the unusual dangers of prairie fires in the new land and with the quarantine approach to epidemic disease. In the meantime, of course, the police acquired a much more benevolent reputation among Ukrainian immigrants than did immigration officers.[32]

Subsequent mounted police reports reaching the Department of the Interior must have been gratifying, stressing as they did the commendable speed with which young Ukrainian men and women went out from their homesteads to work as railway construction navvies and domestic servants in order painfully to raise the money to launch successful farms. As early as 1902 they admired the fine buildings which were replacing the earliest huts of the Ukrainians. They were not to be moved by unfounded criticisms from English-speaking neighbours, who found the alien newcomers' lifestyle distasteful, even on the occasion when those complaints were registered through the member of Parliament for the Edmonton area, Frank Oliver. Oliver claimed in 1899 that "Galicians" were responsible for rampant theft, but a special investigation by Inspector J.O. Wilson concluded that a fundamental anti-Galician prejudice underpinned the rumours.[33] The initial police dismay at the poor prospects of Ukrainian immigrants was transformed into a positive response first by Interior Department policy and then by evidence of agricultural success.

It was certainly not engendered by first impressions of Ukrainian social habits. Police reports early associated Ukrainians with violent acts, many of them in connection with their entertainments which allegedly featured heavy drinking. Confirmation for the police of the reputation for violent crime among the "Galicians" (generalized on occasions to apply to all East Europeans) was the incidence of murder arising from family quarrels. To commissioned officers of the police, the simple explanation in that era was that "some of these foreign races hold life very cheaply and will commit murder on slight provocation," particularly when, in 1912-13, mounting unemployment increased the "large floating population" mainly composed of out-of-work railroad construction navvies. Violence was, like the "shocking depravities" of "incest and defiling girls under 14",

31. Superintendent A.H. Griesbach to Herchmer, 2 November 1896; and A.M. Burgess to White, 12 November 1896: RG 18-A1; Assistant Commissioner, NWMP, to Griesbach, 10 December 1897: RG 18-B1. See also the account in Macleod, *The North-West Mounted Police*, pp. 151-2.

32. Correspondence, August 1897 to February 1898: RG 18-A1; Telegrams between Superintendent S. Gagnon, Prince Albert, and Herchmer, 1 May 1899: RG 18-B1; Gagnon to Corporal St. Denis, Rosthern, 12 September 1899: RG 18-C1; RNWMP *Report*, 1911, p. 151.

33. Department of the Interior *Report*, 1902, part II, p. 119; Inspector S. Crosthwait to Officer Commanding at Fort Saskatchewan, 12 February 1902: RG 18-B1; Oliver to Fred White, 1 June 1899; and report of Inspector J.O. Wilson, 21 June 1899: RG 18-A1. See also the account in Macleod, *The North-West Mounted Police*, p. 151.

simply associated with ethnic character compounded by idleness in time of unemployment.[34] There was no calculation of the connection between the pressures leading to family quarrels on the one hand and the causes of transience among East-European job seekers on the other; even as there was no insight into the reasons why "foreign labourers" crowding into Edmonton in 1912 should be susceptible to the militant industrial unionism of the Industrial Workers of the World.[35] Though their understanding was not sophisticated, however, from first to last the police paid close attention, some of it kindly, to what they could only consider worrisome difficulties of adjustment by a most alien immigrant population. Perhaps the police constituted too much the first agency to be contacted about those problems ever to accept without reservation the Department of the Interior's complacent self-satisfaction with the remarkable agricultural advances against substantial economic and cultural odds of East-European peasant immigrants.

The contrast which proves the economic basis of mounted police approval for certain alien immigrants is to be seen in their disparagement of those groups which were not only foreign, but agricultural failures to boot. A collection of "old country French" settlers who entered the St. Louis de Langevin district near Duck Lake from 1893 through 1895 never received police accolades for their farming ability. Inspector D'Arcy Strickland labelled them from the beginning "a very undesirable class of people" because they arrived "with little or no money and are quite unable to buy machinery or make improvements on their locations." Two years later, a pair of patrolling sergeants still did not consider them "a class intended to be much of an acquisition to the country" for, although they had built "very fair houses", yet "they had not the least idea of farming in this country." The superintendent commanding the Prince Albert district concluded that their previous experience did not suit them for frontier trials.[36] There are several unfavourable references to the lifestyle and lack of progress among Jewish settlers. Some Roumanian Jews at South Qu'Appelle in 1902 were characterized as a "lazy, dirty and lousy" people who would "not do a hands turn to help themselves." A neighbour attributed their troubles to the financial cheating of the New York agent for the colony but, whatever the reason, the combination of strangeness and ineptitude deprived them of police sympathy.[37] Interestingly enough, another group judged equally inept, the English Barr colonists, were nevertheless accounted desirable acquisitions whose

34. RNWMP *Reports*, 1907, p. 87; 1908, pp. 38, 103; 1909, pp. 67, 83, 87; 1910, p. 75; 1912, pp. 74-5, 157; 1913, p. 9.
35. RNWMP *Report*, 1912, p. 83.
36. Reports of Inspector D'A.E. Strickland, Duck Lake, 19 December 1893, 8 May and 2 June 1894; of Sergeant H. Keenan, Duck Lake, 22 June 1895; and of Sergeant I.W. Weeks patrolling to Fishing Lakes and Boucher, 28 September 1895: RG 18-C1; NWMP *Report*, 1895, p. 115.
37. NWMP *Report*, 1892, p. 49; Report of Constable G.T. Howdey, South Qu'Appelle, 17 May 1902: RG 18-A1; H. Bolocan to Laurier, June 1904: Public Archives of Canada, Sir Wilfrid Laurier Papers, microfilm C-813, pp. 87430-8.

survival should be ensured to encourage more of the same immigration.[38] Point of origin did count, but negatively only if accompanied by failure at the essential western business of farm production. The majority of settlers, therefore, were in good position to benefit from mounted police help.

III

Although Clifford Sifton was eager to induce agriculturalists to settle in prairie Canada, he was loath to provide them much material assistance once they arrived, lest the result be a new nation of subsidized paupers.[39] This official reluctance to guarantee the welfare of farmers who ought to be independently establishing their own security and Canada's wealth left the North-West Mounted Police as the sole agency available in the early settlement stages to supply at least the services which were deemed unavoidable. That the Department of the Interior conscientiously eschewed being soft on the pioneers actually helped to create a situation in which the police gained the glory along with the work. This can be understood by reference to urgent problems of great collective concern to prairie settlers: contagious animal diseases, contagious human diseases, destitution, and prairie fires.

Of crucial importance to western agriculturalists, whether homesteaders or cattle ranchers, was the veterinary service of the police, and the medical work performed had a far vaster significance for everyone whose domestic animals were thus protected from epidemic disease. Until 1896, when total responsibility for domestic animal health was given to the federal Department of Agriculture, both the Territorial and the Dominion governments relied heavily on police veterinarians, and on the force itself, to fend off potentially disastrous contagious diseases.[40] There were two branches of this work. One was quarantine and inspection of immigrant domestic animals at the Canadian-American border, and the other was identification and eradication of disease which despite border precautions appeared within the country.

At the particular locations (five after 1893) where cattle could legally enter Canada and be subjected to quarantine procedure, special police detachments, which might have removed some fifty men and four officers from regular duty, were required to labour on behalf of the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior. This peaceful cowboy work for policemen was justified on the basis of its lesser cost than the alternatives and at the same time its provision of an extra reserve force of police available for emergencies which might arise, say, with re-

38. White to Perry, 15 April 1903; to Interior Deputy Minister Smart, 25 August 1903; and to Perry, 6 and 20 November 1903: RG 18-A2.
39. Hall, "Clifford Sifton", pp. 74-5; and see Donald Avery, *"Dangerous Foreigners"*.
40. Franklin M. Loew and E.H. Wood, *Vet in the Saddle* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978), pp. 26-8, 49-51, 88-93; Canada, Sessional Papers, Department of Agriculture *Report*, 1893, pp. xii-xiii; "A Precis of Orders in Council Relating to Cattle Quarantine Regulations" (Department of Agriculture, 30 January 1894) in Public Archives of Canada, John Lowe Papers.

spect to Indians. Before the turn of the century, presiding veterinary surgeons were for the most part police personnel. In order for the quarantine system to work, of course, the police detachments undertook daily border patrols to ensure that it was evaded as little as possible. Department of Agriculture delight with the arrangements was matched by Commissioner Herchmer's unhappiness. At the Wood End quarantine station near Estevan, he complained in 1895, not only the police veterinarian but also most of the "police herders" were doing no other but quarantine work: their salaries might just as well be paid by the Department of Agriculture. Nevertheless, police stationed at those detachments continued to have far more contact with "lumpy jaw" (actinomycosis) in cattle and with "sheep scab" than with criminals.[41]

Rather than being reduced, the police role in both border quarantine and general detachment detection of animal diseases was formalized by the 1896 legislation consolidating the service under the federal Department of Agriculture. The commissioner of the North-West Mounted Police became the chief veterinary official of the Department of Agriculture and his veterinary surgeons automatically became inspectors of contagious animal diseases. As for the involvement of the regular policemen, in 1897 the public was informed that "in all suspected cases of contagious diseases, such as Glanders among horses, Tuberculosis and Lumpy-Jaw among cattle, scab among sheep or Hog-cholera, the nearest Mounted Police Constable should at once be notified, when the necessary steps will be taken to prevent spread of the disease."[42] While the ultimate authorities were the commissioner and his veterinary surgeons, first resort was to the multitude of constables on detachment. After several years of experience with this "excellent system", Agriculture officials found control of animal contagious diseases "performed much more economically and effectively than would be possible under any other arrangements" by a police force distinguished by its mobility and "knowledge of the country and its conditions."[43]

Even before the 1896 changes, however, regular detachment procedures became quite as systematic as border quarantines. All detachments were instructed to watch for diseases as part of normal patrol duty, no small order considering that Commissioner Perry's list of most significant diseases after the turn of the century included mange, tuberculosis, anthrax, actinomycosis, and eye disease among cattle; scab in sheep; swine plague and hog cholera in hogs; and glanders, typhoid fever, and *maladie du coît* in horses. Veterinarians, who could not possibly conduct this kind of close supervision alone, were therefore dependent on the perceptiveness of the policemen, even though on occasion settlers themselves were unwilling to trust a constable's judgement. The reason was simple: identifi-

41. John Lowe, "Report on Cattle Quarantine . . . November 27, 1895", in John Lowe Papers; Department of Agriculture *Report*, 1896, pp. viii, 91.
42. Loew and Wood, *Vet in the Saddle*, pp. 50-1; NWMP General Order 11602, referring to Privy Council Order of 22 October 1896: RCMP Headquarters, Ottawa; Circular Memorandum #237, 5 April 1897: RG 18-B4; Commissioner Herchmer's press release, 9 July 1897: RG 18-B2.
43. Department of Agriculture *Report*, 1904, p. 71.

cation of disease meant at least a quarantine corral on the spot, and perhaps immediate destruction of animals, something settlers were unwilling to accept needlessly. They wanted a veterinarian's judgement in every case, something for which neither level of government would provide extra funds. Usually, though, neighbouring farmers who first reported such cases had good reason to appreciate police intervention, especially if the owners might "contend that their respective beasts are not afflicted with lumpy jaw and that the animals have either defective teeth or are suffering from the effects of a blow." As the prairie population multiplied after the turn of the century, the demands for inspection put an immense strain on the police capacity to prevent immigration of diseased stock or to deal with all outbreaks as quickly and effectively as formerly. In the circumstances, actual veterinary inspection continued to fall behind while regular police attention became even more vital.[44]

The veterinary experts would be brought in to make final diagnoses and prescriptions, accompanied on their journeys by the ever-present detachment policemen. Only the veterinarian could sometimes quell opposition to destruction of valuable animals. Destruction was always the ultimate answer in cases of anthrax (or "black leg"), and sometimes of glanders, mange, "lumpy jaw", and tuberculosis. Anthrax was so dreaded that settlers themselves could be entrusted with the recommended shooting and cremating procedure even though there was no government compensation forthcoming, but the others required judgements about the stage of disease advancement. It was police business to enforce the orders. Any attempt to treat rather than destroy animals with contagious diseases still involved the order (and sometimes the supervision) for quarantine. After 1894 the designation of quarantine districts of several square miles gradually became a standard practice for dealing with widespread outbreaks. In 1904 and again in 1905, the government found yet another onerous task for the police: the compulsory chemical "dipping" of all North-West Territories cattle each fall. This was a major undertaking, necessitating separation of the untested from the tested by fencing and close quarantining.[45]

In 1899 Commissioner Herchmer expressed pleasure about the general lack of friction between the police and owners of diseased animals. Some early complaints in the Maple Creek area suggested very great interest indeed in this aspect

44. Herchmer to Commissioner of Dominion Lands H.H. Smith, 25 October 1893; and report of Sergeant Blake, Graburn Detachment, 28 June 1895: RG 18-A1; Circular Memorandum by Inspector J.D. Moodie, Macleod, 20 March 1901: RG 18-C3; Constable H. Thompson to Officer Commanding at Prince Albert, 21 December 1897: RG 18-C1; Department of Agriculture *Reports*, 1901, pp. 114-7; and 1906, pp. 130-3, 196.

45. Loew and Wood, *Vet in the Saddle*, pp. 106-7; Department of Agriculture *Reports*, 1892, part II, p. 49; 1905, p. 126; and 1906, p. 130; Telegram, Superintendent J. Cotton, Prince Albert, to Herchmer, 20 June 1892; Lowe to White, 21 July 1892; Robert Evans to Herchmer, 12 February 1894; and Perry to Herchmer, 15 February 1894: RG 18-B1; Lowe to White, 20 April 1894; and White to Herchmer, 24 April 1894: RG 18-A1; Circular memorandum #458, 16 March 1904: RG 18-B4.

of police assistance: these referred to alleged negligence by detachment policemen not responding quickly enough to requests for veterinary investigations, apparently with the result that disease spread. Obviously, the majority found the veterinary service of the police most valuable; even the occasional reluctance to cooperate was actually a sign that the system worked, for without the police presence it was those very people who would have constituted a danger to their neighbours. Contagious disease, in animals as well as in humans, was one of those conditions which could not but emphasize the cooperative element in the agrarian lifestyle. The mounted police were the available agents to foster that cooperation. But by 1906 the number of stock being imported or drifting into the country annually and the heavy demand for investigation of suspect maladies overstrained the manpower of the Royal North-West Mounted Police, so that the next year the police relinquished those and border quarantine duties to the relevant provincial and federal departments of agriculture.[46]

Before World War I, a fair number of contagious diseases constituted an ever present menace in western Canada to the settlers themselves, but escalation to epidemic proportions was unpredictable. When these emergencies arose, the police were valuable for establishing initial quarantine procedures until the proper authorities could take over (in early years, local boards of health; in later years, medical health officers). Even when others directed the operations, policemen were best able to enforce quarantines and to transport doctors or provisions.[47]

Eighteen ninety-seven was an epidemic year for diptheria and German measles (a deadly disease at the time); police assistance warranted special files on the subject. A good example of the standard procedure concerned an outbreak of diptheria in and near Saskatoon, at that time a tiny village. Sergeant George Will first reported the odd case being watched, then found himself in a dilemma, for according to custom he was expected to provide both quarantine control at Saskatoon and transportation for the police physician to the neighbouring settlement of Dundurn to check reports of diptheria there. Reinforcements were both sent and recruited for special constable duty. At infected houses Sergeant Will posted yellow flags and placards on the doors announcing "Diptheria". Notices at "conspicuous places" warned people to stay away from specified houses. No "ingress or egress" was allowed in an area defined by an eight-mile radius around Saskatoon. A less extensive quarantine procedure involving the service of a special constable was put in place at Dundurn. Sergeant Will drove the doctor around on visits to the sick; when the doctor was absent, Will himself conducted the visits to check the condition of the afflicted, to take them supplies, and to ensure that the quarantine was being observed. At the end, release from quarantine was accomplished with a final sulphur fumigation of the infected residences.

46. See, for example, J.M. Cosgrave to Herchmer, 4 August 1893: RG 18-B1; Department of Agriculture *Reports*, 1906, pp. 132-3, 196; 1908.

47. See examples of smallpox, diptheria, and scarlet fever reports near Macleod, the Beaver Hills, and Battleford in RG 18-B1 for 1892 and 1897; NWMP *Report*, 1894, p. 109.

Whether or not medical experts were present, then, the police were important to epidemic control procedures and, in this case again, the force was absolutely essential to cover the period before a board of health was properly constituted.[48]

The spread of any contagious disease was in itself serious enough to deserve reprimands for sloppy enforcement of control procedures, but in some circumstances the importance of the police must have escalated considerably in the perceptions of those receiving their assistance. As Inspector A. Ross Cuthbert reported from Prince Albert in 1902:

> As you are aware a very large portion of the inhabitants of this District are very poor and to many of them enforced quarantine is tantamount to starvation unless assisted. There are at present upwards of thirty cases of smallpox, this has entailed in addition many persons being quarantined as suspects from contact with affected persons in the same house or camp, and the issue of necessary relief is becoming a very considerable item of expense.

That Cuthbert would have liked to saddle federal Agriculture Department agents (then responsible for health regulations) with the task of relief provision did not alter the fact that, in such emergencies, it was the police who were seen to act with kindness. In another similar case of smallpox, a police report indicated that of "26 persons . . . quarantined for smallpox, 6 are sick, 25 [are] drawing relief."[49]

Clashes of jurisdiction serve to illustrate the continuing mounted police prominence in actual operations. In July of 1903, Commissioner Perry was still trying to obtain repayment of expenses incurred in May of 1902, when two special constables were placed at the disposal of a quarantine officer of the Dominion Immigration Branch to control a diptheria outbreak among newly arrived Roumanian Jews at South Qu'Appelle. The Territorial government refused to pay the bill, naturally, since the service was performed for immigrants. Yet the Department of the Interior also hesitated to accept responsibility. Before it was resolved, the issue finally involved Territorial MP Walter Scott, to whom Comptroller Fred White remarked in October 1903:

> It is only one of many instances where an emergency arises, the Police have to step in and do what is necessary, and then the other Departments squabble about paying little bills amounting to but a percentage of what the same service would have cost if performed through the proper Department.

White went on to cite the case of about a dozen "foreign immigrants" who were dropped off by the CPR at a wayside station with measles or some other contagious disease, which had already killed a child among them. A mounted policeman who happened to be present "acted the friend in need" and rented shelter. No other government department would reimburse the cost of the police, even

48. Correspondence among Sergeant G. Will, Superintendent S. Gagnon at Prince Albert, and Herchmer, October 1897: RG 18-B1.

49. Cuthbert to Sergeant Bird, Duck Lake, 26 August 1902; and to Perry, 15 April and 31 August 1902; Superintendent W.S. Morris, Prince Albert, to Perry, 30 January 1903: RG 18-A1.

though a failure of the policeman to act might easily have resulted in "several other deaths, and a lot of correspondence adverse to our Canadian Immigration system."[50]

The police response fulfilled an expectation among other officials which exasperated at least one commissioned officer, whose very objection betrayed the extent to which police assistance had become common practice. "I think I understand your views," wrote Superintendent P.C.H. Primrose to Commissioner Perry in 1907. "We are cheerfully to assist any branch of the Government if requested to do so, with a view to furthering the best interests of the country." But Primrose rebelled against what he perceived as the growing attitude that any official could

> say to the nearest Policeman 'Here you go and do this' and that it then becomes that policeman's *duty* to go and obey these orders. . . . Fancy asking us to go out and fumigate or assist in fumigating houses; that surely is no part of our duty, nor considering our duties to the general public is it fair to ask our assistance.

He resented that policemen might "be ordered around at will by any rural practitioner who may happen to be in charge of a case," and he thought Alberta communications sufficiently advanced to eliminate any necessity for temporary emergency police help in the absence of medical authorities.[51] At least until the war, however, police assistance of that sort proved unavoidable. Although they were described primarily as duties on behalf of the provincial health departments,[52] they must have confirmed an impression of the mounted police as first on the scene to prevent potentially catastrophic epidemics.

The most lasting impact of the police on the average settler's consciousness might have been made by the police response to the desperation caused for otherwise healthy and thriving immigrants by the sudden deprivations so characteristic of the pioneer experience. One major crop failure in the early stages of his business could cripple a farmer's capacity to recover in the next crop year. The main answer to this form of destitution was "seed grain relief" — that is, advances of seed grain to stimulate a revival of independent agricultural production — and in the early years, especially, the mounted police provided much of the identification and distribution. Failure to recover from economic setbacks or separate climatic disasters led to countless cases of the next level of want: the actual inability to secure sufficient food, fuel, or clothing. Here the requirement for relief was immediate, personal, and dramatic. Repeated hundreds of times, generous assistance through the agency of the mounted police could not help but enhance their reputation among the population at large. The effect was strengthened by two extreme winter-time episodes which brought epic proportions to the story of the mounted police battle against the elements on behalf of the new settlers.

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50. Perry to White, 3 July 1903; and White to Walter Scott, 13 October 1903: RG 18-A1.
51. Alberta Provincial Health Officer L.E.W. Irving to Superintendent P.C.H. Primrose, Macleod, 8 July 1907; and Primrose to Perry, 12 July 1907: RG 18-B2.
52. *Ibid.*, vol. 50; RNWMP *Reports*, 1910, p. 80; and 1911, p. 87.

For their relief service to agrarian immigrants, the police had been prepared by the extreme suffering and need of Indian peoples prior to the North-West Rebellion. After the Rebellion, moreover, the police frequently reported and responded to the needs of "half-breeds" right up to the First World War. But the police did not take up this work simply out of the goodness of their own hearts. One of the prevalent attitudes about relief for any destitute people was expressed already in 1888 in a reference to "half-breed relief" by Superintendent (later to be Commissioner) Perry.

> Free issue of rations must, of course, be made, to prevent actual starvation, but where the Government thus act in a paternal manner great care must be exercised to prevent the recipient from deeming as a right what is given in pity. . . .
>
> A free issue of rations does not promote industry nor encourage independence in any community. Its demoralizing effects spread rapidly, and too quickly taint those attempting to preserve their independence and self-respect.[53]

He went on to recommend that work be required in exchange for aid. Nor were the indigent welcomed into Canada by the police. In 1904 a Minnesota woman whose husband was a cripple appeared at North Portal without money and seeking police assistance. She was informed that the mounted police had no authority to relieve destitute immigrants and that, if she did not return to the United States she would be arrested as a vagrant.[54] Again, in the Medicine Hat region early in 1912, a corporal patrolling during extremely harsh and dangerous winter conditions avoided visiting a reportedly needy family because "it was also the unanimous opinion of every one that their improvidence was caused by utter laziness and that their dwelling was in a lousy condition." His superintendent noted in the margin that these were subjects the Immigration officials would on investigation likely deport.[55]

Charity was to be extended to the deserving; the police demonstrated no special talent for sympathy beyond the norm of the day, but frontier circumstances nevertheless ensured that this part of their work would be large. For one thing, as the commissioner noted about one case near Yorkton in 1892, unrelieved distress as a result of crop failures among American immigrants would be very poor advertising to the delegations from various states coming to estimate prospects. On this occasion, he recommended provision of temporary railway construction grading work, even if completion of a line was not projected for the area immediately.[56] Public works were recommended in other situations as well, but the more common practice was to assist those in dire circumstances by supplying es-

53. NWMP *Report*, 1888, p. 96.
54. Corporal H. Lett, Estevan, to Officer Commanding at Regina, 17 August 1904: RG 18-A1.
55. Corporal Wiedeman, Irvine Detachment, to Officer Commanding at Medicine Hat, 18 January 1912: RG 18-A1.
56. Herchmer to White, forwarded to Department of the Interior, n.d., (1892): RG 18-A1.

sential food and fuel. One example involving a French immigrant family was designated "extreme destitution", warranting emergency relief on the grounds that the children were dying of starvation.[57] When, as in 1895, the Department of the Interior decided a more general policy of seed grain distribution was in order, the NWMP got the extra work, sometimes having to set up temporarily at points where no detachment existed. The police were reported to be far more efficient than those who previously had administered such programs.[58] During the winter of 1895-96, the general policy of relief was extended beyond seed grain to such basic provisions as flour. In the two districts most affected, in the vicinities of Edmonton and Prince Albert, the amount of police time spent receiving, investigating, and satisfying immigrant claims scattered over wide regions left Commissioner Herchmer a trifle grumpy, for relief work superseded what he regarded as proper police work.[59]

The necessity for such a widespread relief policy dissipated after 1896, when some settlers at least were already actually able to pay back their advances.[60] Relief measures returned to the standard form of individual cases treated on their merits. After creation of the new provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan in 1905, applications for relief provisions were directed to the federal Immigration Branch, to local rural municipalities where they existed, or to the provincial boards of health, according to each applicant's status as immigrant or resident of more than three years.[61] While those were the authorities and the sources of funds, the mounted police continued to do the work, filling in the appropriate application forms, then distributing the relevant items upon authorization. In emergencies, the police would often supply fuel (coal) or work until empowered by the proper agency to do more. With the elimination of great distances between farms during the immigration boom, and especially with the introduction of telephone communication, the traditional mounted police role showed signs of erosion just before the Great War. Settlers began to apply on their own, without waiting to be discovered; while the police detachments were still the points of contact, their patrols were no longer essential or possible in the same way as they had once been.[62] Nevertheless, Immigration authorities, at least, were still happy to receive general reports by district on the likelihood of destitution during impending winters.[63]

57. Strickland to Herchmer, 16 February, 2, 16 March 1895: RG 18-C1.
58. A.M. Burgess to White, 27 March 1895; and telegram, Herchmer to White, 31 March 1895; and Herchmer to White, 16 May 1895: RG 18-A1.
59. See 1896 correspondence in RG 18-A1, Files 70 and 151.
60. Will to Officer Commanding at Prince Albert, 22 December 1896: RG 18-C1; Department of the Interior *Report*, 1899, p. xxi.
61. See examples in the thick file 132 of 1912: RG 18-B1. In the same file, see Perry to Commissioner of Public Health for Saskatchewan, 31 January 1912; and a circular memorandum by Perry, 28 February 1912.
62. A case of this sort appears in correspondence following an initial report by Constable H. Moorhead, Stirling Detachment, 27 March 1913: RG 18-B1.
63. Perry to Commissioner of Immigration, Winnipeg, 17 November 1913: *Ibid.*

A pair of emergency actions in those later years, however, reinforced the impression of mounted police omnipresence to relieve suffering. The winter of 1906-07 was known for its "fuel famine", an extreme shortage of coal. In those places, mainly in Saskatchewan, where coal could not be obtained, settlers were forced to find and haul wood, not always an easy task for novices having to travel long distances in very cold weather and deep snow. Rumours of distress spread, often in newspapers. "A farmer named Radcliffe with his wife and three children have been found frozen to death," reported the Estevan *Evening Journal* in February. "Radcliffe was a homesteader, who came here for coal about a fortnight ago. A neighbour called at Radcliffe's during his absence and found his wife and children frozen solid and no fuel or wood in the house." But the police found this to be irresponsible conjecture: though isolated by a snowstorm, the family survived very well.[64] Although Commissioner Perry continued to be convinced that "the casualties resulted from want of knowledge of the country, drunkenness, or other preventable causes,"[65] now and then frozen bodies were indeed found, and some settlers did experience considerable anxiety over the fuel problem. Many worried about their families should they lose their way in search of wood. In at least two cases, south of Battleford and near Moosomin, patrolling policemen reported available bush nearly exhausted for farmers coming for the green wood from some distance.[66]

The severity of the rumours was enough to stimulate action directed by the new minister of the Interior, Frank Oliver, "not only from the humane point of view," as Comptroller White put it, "but also to prevent reports being circulated injurious to Canadian Immigration interests."[67] At first Immigration officials concentrated on the region south of Battleford, where heavy snowfalls made trail breaking difficult. Fuel, seed grain (later), and other provisions were hauled to Tramping Lake some sixty miles south of Battleford. Mounted policemen patrolled the vicinity to record the extent of suffering and to advise settlers of the provisioning opportunity, then were authorized to carry out the actual distribution as well. On occasion, police constables themselves hauled provisions to families isolated and in distress.[68] As a precaution, the police were soon instructed to patrol every newly settled district in Alberta and Saskatchewan in search of any who

64. Clipping from Estevan *Evening Journal*, 22 February 1907; and report of Sergeant H. Lett, Estevan, 24 February 1907: RG 18-A1.
65. Perry to White, 6 March 1907: RG 18-B10.
66. Inspector Generaux to Officer Commanding at Battleford, 24 December 1906; Inspector A.M. Jarvis to Officer Commanding at Regina, 11 February 1907; and a report of Saskatoon detachment on a found frozen body beginning to be eaten by wolves, 19 March 1907: RG 18-A1; W.D. Scott, Superintendent of Immigration, to Frank Oliver, 1 February 1907: RG 18-B10.
67. White to Perry, 5 February 1907: RG 18-A1.
68. Constable R.C. Bright reporting a Tramping Lake patrol, 19 December 1906; memorandum to Sergeant Adams, Regina, 1 February 1907; W.D. Scott to Oliver, 1 February 1907; and General Colonization Agent C.W. Speers, Battleford, to Assistant Commissioner McIlree, 17 February 1907: RG 18-B10; Constable W.H. Burke to Officer Commanding at Battleford, 8 January 1907: RG 18-A1.

might urgently require relief. Prime Minister Laurier himself was kept informed of the results. As it turned out, there was little exceptional suffering to be alleviated anywhere else, except at another new settlement region north of Swift Current.[69]

Though the extent of the problem proved not to be dismayingly widespread, the publicity was enormous, the reports came from mounted policemen, and the burden of work fell on their shoulders. A similar flurry of attention occurred in 1910-11, when exceptionally deep snowfalls in southern Alberta and Saskatchewan created difficulties for feeding stock and prevented many settlers from travelling at appropriate times to obtain food and fuel. By this time the federal immigration policy was to treat aid as an advance, repayable with 5 per cent interest per annum but, when urgency dictated immediate action, the police were to issue relief and work out financial responsibilities later. Patrols were made in terrible conditions, through snow drifted six or seven feet deep, constables frequently persevering despite dangerous exposure. One froze the skin of his legs to his pants during an errand of mercy, but most were more sensibly prepared.[70] "Settlers are great in the praise of a Government that will send patrols throughout the District in such weather in order to prevent loss of life," reported Lethbridge police, "and freely state that they would be permitted to freeze to death in any other country before anyone would visit them. . . ." Settlers from the United States in particular were most appreciative. This comment was forwarded to senior Immigration officials by Comptroller White, again "not as showing what the Mounted Police are doing, but as furnishing another link in your chain of evidence of the satisfactory manner in which immigrants are treated in our Canadian North West."[71] White here indicated not only the standard businesslike motivation for government compassion, but also the perception of settlers as to the agency which was most responsible for it.

The summertime problem of prairie fires proved that there were limits to the assistance which could be expected even from the mounted police. Prairie fires were of course less controllable hazards before the major settlement influx; hence the Territorial government was eager already in the 1880s to "secure more fully the services of the North West Mounted Police Force" to prevent and extinguish them. Police officers followed up with "the most stringent orders" both to assist

69. White to Laurier, 8 February 1907; and telegram, Perry to White, 11 February 1907: Laurier Papers, microfilm C843, pp. 119475-6 and 119599.

70. See file on winter destitution in the vicinities of Lethbridge and Maple Creek: RG 18-B1. See another on relief issued during 1910-11; RG 18-A1, including Circular Memorandum #600 of Commissioner Perry, 27 January 1911; and a patrol report by Constable A.P. White, Pendant d'Oreille detachment, 4 February 1911.

71. Extract from monthly RNWMP report from Lethbridge for January 1911, enclosed with letter from White to W.D. Scott, 2 March 1911: RG 18-A1.

in the suppression of prairie fires and to arrest their perpetrators.[72] The insistent demands made on the police to be the main force responsible for actually putting out the fires were aggravating because they were so impossible of fulfilment, though perhaps understandable among so widely scattered a populace. The investiture of police in charge of detachments as "fire guardians" as of 1889 gave them the added power and responsibility for turning out "all male persons within ten miles of a prairie fire" to proceed immediately to help extinguish it, but the spotlight was not removed from the mounted police when action was required, nor were dangerous practices among settlers effectively curtailed.[73] It would be years before settlers were sufficiently packed together on prairie land that the self-interest of many would stimulate their own response to each fire which threatened their homesteads.

In the meantime, the mounted police were subjected to criticism on this account at a rate to which they were not otherwise accustomed. The terrific extent of damage a prairie fire could do flared tempers. The Calgary *Herald* in 1890 claimed that in one situation the police did "not appear to have stirred a finger until the fire had burnt itself out," even though the editor was persuaded that there were many mounted policemen "in barracks in Calgary not over-burdened with serious duties, and on the whole, passing life easily." A settler at Turnip Lake near Edmonton wondered in 1897 what these "paid servants of the government" were supported for if not to prevent destruction of his homestead by prompt attention to raging fires. The Battleford *Star* in 1899 excoriated a police force that waited on civilians to show the first initiative in stopping fires. These protests were of course uttered in the heat of the moment, sometimes without much foundation, and there were also balancing commendations, but they show that public expectations from this particular police force were very great.[74]

The police thought such expectations unrealistic if not grossly irresponsible. Commissioner Herchmer in 1893 outlined the differences between the police and the public understanding of the duties of fire guardians. For him they meant "to turn out all settlers in the locality when a fire is running, to put it out, and to investigate the cause of the fire, and lay information against the parties guilty of set-

72. Copy of resolution of NWT Council, signed by A.E. Forget, Clerk of Council, 24 October 1887; Herchmer to Commanding Officers, 25 October 1887; and Lt. Gov. J. Royal to Herchmer, 17 August 1889: RG 18-B1; NWMP General Order #1863 in 1887: RG 18-B4; Perry to detachment commanders, "F" Division, 27 October 1887: RG 18-C1; Superintendent A.H. Griesbach to Corporal McLellan, Peace Hills, 27 August 1889: RG 18-C7.

73. See, for example, J.G. Gordon to Herchmer, 18 September 1888; and Inspector C. Constantine to Herchmer, 22 September 1888: RG 18-B1; North-West Territories, *Revised Ordinances*, 1888, chapter 20.

74. Clipping from *Calgary Herald*, 14 November 1890; Inspector A.E. Snyder, Edmonton, to Officer Commanding at Fort Saskatchewan, 29 May 1897, enclosing clipping from *Edmonton Bulletin* of 17 May; Clipping from *Battleford Star*, 12 May 1899; J.W. Ings of Rio Alto Ranche, Lineham, to Superintendent R.B. Deane, Calgary, ca. August 1910: RG 18-A1.

ting it, after first submitting the evidence to their Commanding Officers for consideration." The public in most areas (except in ranching regions) seemed to feel that "police should be scattered in small parties throughout the country, and that they should be employed in putting out the fires, and that the settlers should not be called upon, at any rate until the efforts of the police have failed." He cited examples of cases in which extensive police efforts to apprehend those responsible for setting them either failed (as neighbours were reluctant to testify unless they had suffered damage and were angry), or were nullified by fines of less than three dollars, often when serious damage had been done. An example of the result, complained Herchmer, was that settlers would carelessly burn stubble and, if the fires got out of control, "callously let them go believing that if found out it will be cheaper to be fined than to devote their time to putting them out." He saw no alternative to fixing fines at "deterrent sums", despite possible occasional injustices, with a view to enforcing greater settler vigilance and self-help.[75]

Eventually the police were relieved of a good deal of the pressure of coping with prairie fires, which had always been exaggerated by the necessity to handle concurrently a great deal of other business and by civilian fire guardians' unwillingness to discharge their duties because they were "either too lazy or too afraid of making enemies to do anything."[76] Under the jurisdiction of the provincial attorneys general, "Fire Commissioners" and an associated officialdom were established in 1912, and in the matter of investigation of "the cause, origin and circumstances of every fire . . . by which property has been destroyed or damaged," the Mounted Police were not designated.[77] Simultaneously, a long-term aggravation, the exemption of the Canadian Pacific Railway from Territorial and provincial prairie fire ordinances, was eliminated by a 1912 order of the federal Board of Railway Commissioners that railways were required to plough fireguard strips at least sixteen feet wide on both sides of the railway track, except where utterly impracticable. No longer did the police have to beg railway officials to do something to prevent engine sparks from igniting the surrounding countryside.[78]

IV

Even in the sporadic criticism endured by the police about their inability to crush the fearful threat of prairie fires, a basic pioneer attitude to the mounted

75. Herchmer to White, 13 January 1893: RG 18-A1.
76. Constable T.G. Coventry, Castor Detachment, to Superintendent A.R. Cuthbert, Edmonton, 25 April 1910 and Cuthbert's appended note: RG 18-B1; Constable W.C. Jackson, Kinistino, to Officer Commanding at Prince Albert, 24 September 1894; and Constable R. Beatty to Officer Commanding at Prince Albert, 3 April 1895: RG 18-C1.
77. *Statutes of Saskatchewan*, 2 Geo V (1912), Chap. 23, pp. 97-9: "The Fire Prevention Act".
78. Correspondence involving one Walter Simpson of Greendyke, the Superintendent at Regina, and the Assistant Commissioner of the NWMP, and C.W. Milestone, CPR, Moose Jaw, 16-23 October 1901; and correspondence about railway matters, 1909-1912: RG 18-B1; Inspector Baker, Maple Creek, to White, 21 November 1901: RG 18-A1.

police stands out, though it was usually expressed more positively. They were there to provide settlement (one might even say colonization) services. Prairie fires were aspects of the environment, like climatic extremes, which were not susceptible to individual conquest. Collective responses coordinated by a government agency were hardly avoidable. The same approach was essential for combatting animal and human contagious diseases. Though they had not originally been placed in the prairie west to ensure anything more than legal security, in the absence of any other government initiative the mounted police temporarily filled the need for external aid beyond the settlers' own resources precisely when the settlers were most vulnerable: when they were first establishing themselves. The police therefore inadvertently provided an early example in a particular region of Canada of public responsibility for individual welfare, not to be confused with the judgemental condescension implicit in the old tradition of private charity. Though prime ministers and western parliamentary representatives frequently referred to these services in justification of the force's existence, the way this role was given legitimacy over several decades of pioneer experience undoubtedly made its greatest impact in the West. It is difficult to imagine how the mounted police could fail to earn the gratitude of those they served.

But if Department of the Interior officials left the basic welfare of the settlers to the police, they stubbornly maintained the criterion of agricultural progress as the foundation for estimations of immigrant suitability. Early mounted police scepticism about some foreigners was frequently overcome by this Interior Department preoccupation; later evidence of success stimulated natural admiration. The result was to place the policemen at the side of the alien sometimes against great economic and cultural odds. And for all settlers of whatever origin, the presence of a patrolling police force was the most obvious (sometimes the only) sign of that limited degree of government care which did exist for pioneers thrust into the imposing prairie frontier. It does seem appropriate to conclude that a significant factor contributing the mounted police popularity in prairie Canada was the force's role in the first faint stirrings of the Canadian welfare state.