

## **From the Bush to the Village in Northern Saskatchewan: Contrasting CCF Community Development Projects**

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### Résumé de l'article

L'élection de la CCF en 1944 apporte des changements rapides pour les habitants du nord de la Saskatchewan. Les initiatives de la CCF visent entre autres à inciter les Autochtones du Nord à échanger leur mode de vie semi-nomade contre une vie en milieu urbain. La création de Kinoosao à Reindeer Lake donne un aperçu de la façon dont les planificateurs de la CCF s'y prennent pour établir de nouveaux villages; les procédés pour développer de nouvelles communautés excluent la population locale. Pourtant, malgré une forte résistance, plusieurs mesures incitatives et coercitives aboutissent au déplacement de presque tous les résidents du Nord vers des établissements permanents. Un projet de développement communautaire très différent prend forme à Cole Bay dans les années 1960. Plusieurs centaines de Métis de Canoe Lake, région éloignée du nord de la Saskatchewan, sont oubliés lors des premiers projets d'urbanisation de la CCF. Dans les années 1950, le peuple métis perd l'accès à une grande partie de ses terres à la suite de la création du champ de tir aérien de Cold Lake. Guidée par Ray Woollam – un membre influent de la CCF –, la population locale participe activement à la conception et à la construction de sa communauté.

Cette étude sur l'urbanisation du nord de la Saskatchewan constitue un ajout à la documentation existante sur les déplacements des communautés et sur leur développement dans le Nord canadien et au-delà. En plus, elle fournit de l'information sur les politiques autochtones et sur celles du Nord.

# From the Bush to the Village in Northern Saskatchewan: Contrasting CCF Community Development Projects

DAVID M. QUIRING

## *Abstract*

*The election of the CCF in 1944 brought rapid change for the residents of northern Saskatchewan. CCF initiatives included encouraging northern aboriginals to trade their semi-nomadic lifestyles for lives in urban settings. The establishment of Kinoosao on Reindeer Lake provides an example of how CCF planners established new villages; community development processes excluded local people. Yet, in spite of considerable resistance, various incentives and coercive measures resulted in the movement of nearly all northerners to permanent settlements. A very different community development project unfolded at Cole Bay in the 1960s. Early CCF urbanization projects had missed several hundred Métis people in the remote Canoe Lake area of north-west Saskatchewan. The creation of the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range in the 1950s resulted in the Métis losing access to much of their traditional land. With guidance from Ray Woollam, an influential CCF official, local people actively participated in designing and building their community.*

*This study of urbanization in northern Saskatchewan adds to the literature on relocations and community development in northern Canada and beyond. In addition, it provides information about CCF aboriginal and northern policies.*

## *Résumé*

*L'élection de la CCF en 1944 apporte des changements rapides pour les habitants du nord de la Saskatchewan. Les initiatives de la CCF visent entre autres à inciter les Autochtones du Nord à échanger leur mode de vie semi-nomade contre une vie en milieu urbain. La création de Kinoosao à Reindeer Lake donne un aperçu de la façon dont les planificateurs de la CCF s'y prennent pour établir de nouveaux villages; les procédés pour développer de nouvelles communautés excluent la population locale. Pourtant, malgré une forte résistance, plusieurs mesures incitatives et coercitives aboutissent au déplacement de presque tous les résidents du Nord vers des établissements permanents. Un projet de développement communautaire très différent prend forme à*

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*Cette étude sur l'urbanisation du nord de la Saskatchewan constitue un ajout à la documentation existante sur les déplacements des communautés et sur leur développement dans le Nord canadien et au-delà. En plus, elle fournit de l'information sur les politiques autochtones et sur celles du Nord.*

**I**nexorable pressures that eroded traditional lifestyles swept over northern Canada in the decades after the Second World War. Yet change came more rapidly to Saskatchewan's north than to many similarly isolated regions. Following its election as the provincial government of Saskatchewan in 1944, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) initiated a major redesign of northern society. While other factors also played a part in bringing an end to the centuries old northern way of life, the new provincial government became the primary agent of change. Various motivations, some ideological and some dictated by practical considerations, lay behind the CCF decision to use its authority as the government of the region to remake the northern society.<sup>1</sup>

One major program of the CCF involved directing the movement of northerners from semi-nomadic lives in the bush to settled lives in northern villages. People, who formerly built their cabins and pitched their tents on the shores of favorite rivers and lakes, underwent relocation to settlements. There they lived in unmodern shacks, aligned along surveyed streets. Residents who formerly obtained their food and other necessities from the bounty of the water and land increasingly carried provisions home from the local stores. And instead of learning outdoor survival skills, including how to trap, fish, hunt, and gather edible plants, children spent formative years confined to school desks. The small centres became the focus of life for northern families; they spent most of their time there.

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1 The history of northern Saskatchewan prior to 1944 had followed a similar course to the situation in much of the rest of sub-arctic northern Canada. With few exceptions, governments, both federal and provincial, had not extensively intervened in the northern economy and society. The primary factor that differentiated northern Saskatchewan from other northern regions from 1944 to 1964 was the CCF government of Saskatchewan that held power for those twenty years. No other northern area experienced government intervention in the economy to the extent seen in Saskatchewan during that time period. The introduction of socialist experiments into the aboriginal economy became a defining characteristic of this era.

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In most areas, CCF efforts to relocate northerners to settlements began early in the government's mandate. Residents of other areas, however, found that the province did not introduce its relocation programs until late in the government's twenty-year period in office. The following pages document two contrasting examples of community development projects in northern Saskatchewan. The first example, an account of the creation of the new community of Kinoosao on the east shore of Reindeer Lake in northeastern Saskatchewan, comes from the first half of the CCF era. At that time, in the early 1950s, the CCF still optimistically believed that it could design and build a prosperous village-based northern economy. The abundant underutilized fish stocks of Reindeer Lake and what the planners viewed as an idle human population provided an opportunity to develop a viable local economy. This early project relied on considerable coercion and compulsion to relocate Aboriginals to the new settlement. While officials described their work as community development, the top-down approach did not include local people in the countless decisions, large and small, involved in establishing the community.<sup>2</sup>

The second example comes from late in the CCF mandate, and took place not as part of a larger plan but as the result of a chance encounter between an influential CCF official, Ray Woollam, and a group of destitute Métis who lived in the Canoe Lake area of northwestern Saskatchewan. Several hundred Métis, whose poverty had increased because of displacement by a federal government military project, still lived on the land. Thanks to the insight and persistence of the government official, the province utilized innovative community development methods to explore alternatives for that group of Métis. As a result, the Canoe Lake Métis played an active part in designing, building, and taking ownership of the new settlement of Cole Bay.

The CCF relocation programs formed part of the leading edge of a larger wave that saw governments in Canada relocate scattered populations to centralized villages.<sup>3</sup> The first social democratic government elected in Canada, Saskatchewan's CCF prided itself on its ability to apply rational planning to solve social and economic problems. Government would play a much more interventionist role than under the former Liberal administration.<sup>4</sup> The early,

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2 The term "community development" frequently appears in the archival record of Government of Saskatchewan activities during the late 1940s. At that time, those using the term used it to describe a wide range of government efforts designed to bring change to northerners. It did not necessarily allow for local participation in the process.

3 Prime examples of other relocations come from the Eastern Arctic. Further details of these relocations appear later in this paper.

4 Seymour Martin Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971); Robert Tyre, *Douglas in Saskatchewan: The Story of a Socialist Experiment* (Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1962). The CCF created an extensive new planning mechanism, including its Budget Bureau. Experts charged with redesigning the provincial economy and institutions included Charles Cadbury and other imported persons interested in redesigning Saskatchewan.

aggressive actions of the CCF government in the relocation of Aboriginals became a model for other governments within northern Canada. Those who participated in developing new Inuit settlements in the Eastern Arctic, for example, included several community development workers who honed their skills in northern Saskatchewan.<sup>5</sup> In spite of unforeseen and sometimes disastrous results, governments succeeded in their efforts to relocate Aboriginals to settlements; when one compares the situation after the Second World War with that at the end of the twentieth century, the change becomes obvious. In 1945, the majority of people lived traditional lives on the land; half a century later only a small minority remained outside centralized communities.<sup>6</sup> Community planners and developers visualized benefits for the target populations that included improved economic opportunities and decreased dependence. Centralized populations would also ease the provision of health, education, and social services.

The best known examples of relocations and the establishment of new communities come from the Eastern Arctic, in the territory today known as Nunavut. As early as 1952, Farley Mowat brought international attention to the difficulties experienced by the Ahiammiut of the Keewatin District, west of Hudson Bay.<sup>7</sup> The circumstances surrounding the Ahiammiut relocations to Nueltin Lake, Henik Lake, and Eskimo Point (Arviat) during the 1950s still continue to attract attention. But possibly the greatest ongoing controversy surrounds the relocation of Inuit, also during the 1950s, from the Port Harrison area of northern Quebec to the far northern communities of Grise Fiord and Resolute Bay. Historians and others continue to debate the motivations of the Canadian government in directing the establishment of those communities. Alan Rudolph Marcus in his work and Frank James Tester and Peter Kulchyski in theirs provide insights into those various events.<sup>8</sup>

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5 Edith Iglauer, *Inuit Journey: The Co-operative Adventure in Canada's North* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 2000), 23. Prior to working in development projects in the NWT, Paul Godt worked in northern Saskatchewan. Iglauer documents his work with the Inuit. Another man who went from northern Saskatchewan to working with community development in the NWT was Vic Valentine.

6 Saskatchewan Archives Board (hereafter SAB), C.H. Piercy, *Survey of Educational Facilities in Northern Saskatchewan, Part 1: The Areas in the Remote Northern Part of the Province of Saskatchewan* (unpublished paper, 18 December 1944). Piercy carried out a CCF commissioned study in 1944 of the educational situation in northern Saskatchewan. He documented the scattered nature of the population. Approximately one-half of the population lived outside the reach of the educational system. Similar situations existed across northern Canada.

7 Farley Mowat, *People of the Deer* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1952); Mowat, *The Desperate People* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975).

8 Frank James Tester and Peter Kulchyski, *Tammarniit (Mistakes): Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic 1939-63* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1994); Alan Rudolph Marcus, *Relocating Eden: The Image and Politics of Inuit Exile in the Canadian Arctic* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1995).

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Efforts to relocate scattered populations to villages did not end at Canada's borders. A sample of the international nature of government involvement in establishing new communities comes from the work of James C. Scott. His description of the socialist Tanzanian government's campaign to move peasant farmers to ujamaa villages during the 1970s brings to mind the earlier CCF projects in northern Saskatchewan. Scott lists the three initial purposes for the ujamaa campaign as, "the delivery of services; the creation of a more productive, modern agriculture; and the encouragement of communal, socialist forms of co-operation."<sup>9</sup> If one substitutes the word "fishery" for "agriculture," the passage aptly describes aspects of the situation at Kinoosao. Resistance to the projects of the planners also threatened the success of projects in both locales, although the level of coercion eventually used in Tanzania exceeded that applied in northern Saskatchewan.

Numerous other parallels exist between CCF relocation projects in northern Saskatchewan and those documented by James C. Scott, Alan Rudolph Marcus, Frank James Tester, and Peter Kulchyski.<sup>10</sup> Differences also stand out. For the most part, powerful colonizing states ensured that even remote peoples did not escape their confident development plans. Yet, in the case of Cole Bay, the CCF appeared not to care whether it controlled the local Métis. And when government finally became involved in that case, it shared control of the development process with the local people. In two cases, those of Saskatchewan and Tanzania, the governing states relied on socialist ideology for direction. Yet, at the time of the relocations in the Eastern Arctic, one could not characterize Canada's government as socialist. The purpose of pointing out these and other incongruities is not to challenge the existing literature on relocations and internal colonialism. Instead, this study of northern Saskatchewan adds nuance to the discussion of these matters.

Early during the CCF era, ideology and idealism motivated Premier T.C. (Tommy) Douglas and his elected and appointed officials. The new government wanted to move First Nations and Métis people from traditional lives on the land to modern lives in settlements. While the CCF government believed that relocating northern Aboriginals to settlements would help the local people and ease provision of government services, other motivations also lay behind that effort. Pushing people off the land and into villages went hand in hand with the province's efforts to diversify and strengthen the provincial economy in general, establish a socialist economic model in the northern region, introduce governmental control over formerly unregulated areas, modernize the north,

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9 James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), 230.

10 Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit (Mistakes)*; Marcus, *Relocating Eden*.

and assimilate the region's Aboriginal population.<sup>11</sup> Relocating the northern aboriginal population to settlements became a necessary companion to the other goals. Re-evaluation of the CCF record in northern Saskatchewan is not the primary purpose of this research; that topic has been addressed in other publications.<sup>12</sup> Yet awareness of these larger CCF programs in the region helps provide a necessary context for this examination of northern relocation and community development programs.

The movement to settlements did not proceed at the same pace in all areas of northern Saskatchewan. Since that vast region included more than one-half of the province's total area, the CCF lacked the financial resources to establish a comprehensive development program for the entire northern area at once. Instead, the province adopted a patient yet inexorable approach, moving from area to area with its planners, surveyors, caterpillar tractors, construction crews, and community developers.<sup>13</sup>

Some of the earliest CCF efforts to establish new communities took place at Reindeer Lake and Wollaston Lake, located in remote and undeveloped northeastern Saskatchewan. The CCF government thought that successful fish processing operations there could help improve the image of the party. Premier Douglas and his officials also hoped to create local prosperity by moving the scattered Aboriginal population into employment as commercial fishers and workers in government owned fish processing plants. Instead of living scattered on the land pursuing traditional activities, Aboriginal fishers and fish plant workers would live in the new settlements. Although it meant well, the CCF made that decision without substantial consultations with the northern First Nations and Métis people.<sup>14</sup>

Shortly after assuming office, the CCF exerted unprecedented control over the northern commercial fishery. New legislation eliminated private fish buyers and processors from northeastern and north central Saskatchewan, and the province undertook the construction of its own fish processing plants in

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11 David M. Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan: Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers, and Fur Sharks* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004). This source includes a detailed description of these issues.

12 Laurie F. Barron, *Walking in Indian Moccasins: The Native Policies of Tommy Douglas and the CCF* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997); David M. Quiring, "'The Ultimate Solution': CCF Programs of Assimilation and the Indians and Metis of Northern Saskatchewan," *Prairie Forum* 28, no. 2 (Fall 2003): 145-60; Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan*.

13 Top northern bureaucrats selected both existing settlement and new locations. In either case, surveyors and construction crews laid out lots and roads and built public buildings.

14 SAB, Ministerial Papers, S-M15, Box 6, "Fisheries, 1944-1946, (3)," "Report on fishermen's meeting," 3 November 1945; S-M15, Box 7, "Fish Marketing, 1945-1946," J.L. Phelps to Rev. Father Coady, 17 August 1945.

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*Map of Northern Saskatchewan including road network  
 as during the CCF era.<sup>15</sup>*

15 Map drawn and provided by Saskatchewan Advanced Education and Employment, La Ronge, 2007 at the request of the author. Used by permission of Saskatchewan Advanced Education and Employment.



pre-existing and new communities.<sup>16</sup> Newly created Crown corporations, first the Fish Board and later the Saskatchewan Fish Marketing Service (SFMS), received a monopoly over buying and processing fish in most areas of northern Saskatchewan.<sup>17</sup> The province also controlled the Crown land in the region, which gave it the authority to establish fish processing plants and the related settlements where it chose.

From a business point of view, it made sense to exploit the fish stocks of Reindeer Lake, Saskatchewan's second largest lake, about 230 kilometres in length.<sup>18</sup> The province also had a good reason for selecting a particular spot on the east shore of Reindeer Lake as the site for Kinoosao. That location lay very close to the border with Manitoba. And since no rail lines or roads ran north from southern Saskatchewan, planners wanted the new town site located as close as possible to the rail line that serviced the Manitoba mining community of Lynn Lake. The province of Saskatchewan would, with the co-operation of Manitoba, fund the construction of a new road to Lynn Lake, a distance of about one hundred kilometres.<sup>19</sup> The road and rail line would permit economical shipping of the outgoing processed fish and incoming supplies.

Without a resident labour force, the plans for fishing and fish processing could not have succeeded. The province knew that Scandinavian and other non-Aboriginal fishers lived on various islands on the lake; they had previously sold their fish to private fish buyers. With government legislation prohibiting sales to the former buyers, the fishers would have to sell to the government plant if they wanted to continue fishing. A substantial Aboriginal population, which numbered in the hundreds, also lived near the south end of the lake, although at a considerable distance from Kinoosao. Officials hoped that those First Nations and Métis people would provide labour for the operation.<sup>20</sup>

In spite of the fact that the area population included a large number of First Nations people, usually considered the primary responsibility of Ottawa, the fishing initiative remained primarily a provincial project. Saskatchewan made

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16 Early in its time in office, the CCF passed legislation giving the province a monopoly over fish buying and processing within 75 miles of any of its plants. As a result, private fish buyers and processors no longer operated in most of the northern area.

17 Helen L. Buckley, *Trapping and Fishing in the Economy of Northern Saskatchewan*, Report No. 3, Economic and Social Survey of Northern Saskatchewan (Saskatoon, Sask.: Research Division, Center for Community Studies, University of Saskatchewan, 1962).

18 Most of Reindeer Lake lies within Saskatchewan, although the northeast portion of the lake extends into Manitoba.

19 SAB, Department of Natural Resources (hereafter DNR), S-NR 1/4, 235, "South End – Reindeer Lake," H. Brockelbank to Hon. C. E. Greenlay, 8 October 1953.

20 Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan*, 136-7. Fishing on the lake had undergone a temporary decline after water levels rose as the result of the construction of a control dam on the Reindeer River which flowed out of Reindeer Lake. By the early 1950s, fishing again looked promising.

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the decision to build the settlement and the fish processing plant and provided most of the funding and construction labour. The province did look for help from the federal Department of Public Works, which had funds available to pay for the construction costs of a large wharf, necessary for the fishing operation. In order to avoid endangering federal participation in funding of the wharf, Saskatchewan gave the final say over the exact location of the wharf to Ottawa. Had Saskatchewan insisted on a particular spot, Ottawa might have refused to participate.<sup>21</sup>

Once the federal bureaucrats approved the wharf's location, a survey crew, directed by the provincial surveyor A.I. Bereskin, arrived. By the early 1950s Bereskin and his men possessed considerable experience gained from laying out similar northern communities. They rapidly surveyed the streets and lots that would comprise the settlement of Kinoosao.<sup>22</sup> Saskatchewan's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) personnel took the lead in building the new community. R.N. Gooding, the head of DNR's construction division, brought in the province's heavy equipment and construction crews.<sup>23</sup> The province also hired Aboriginal men who lived a considerable distance away at the south end of the lake as labourers for the project. Construction of a government store and post office, a DNR office, a school, and houses for government employees followed.<sup>24</sup>

Most importantly for Saskatchewan's plan of sustainable economic development for the Aboriginals of Reindeer Lake, DNR provided a new, state of the art fish plant. The department built one of the finest, most modern facilities in the north. While DNR owned the plant, SFMS, the Crown corporation, operated it. Several years earlier, in the late 1940s, the CCF had suffered from considerable controversy when large losses at the SFMS's predecessor, the Fish Board, made for embarrassing news headlines. By the time the CCF killed the Fish Board in 1949, it had accumulated deficits of \$364,264.37, a sizable

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21 SAB, DNR, S-NR 1/4, 235, "South End – Reindeer Lake," A.I. Bereskin, "A Topographical Report on Subdivision E. Side of Reindeer Lake Locally known as Co-op Point," 5 March 1952. The federal government had budgets and some responsibility for providing navigation aids and wharves in inland waters. This funding had nothing to do with the presence of First Nations people in the area. In some cases, Saskatchewan and Ottawa negotiated cost sharing agreements to construct fish processing plants. That occurred, for example, at Pelican Narrows; but the province funded the operation at Kinoosao.

22 A.I. Bereskin oversaw the surveys of most northern communities during the CCF years. He played an instrumental part in carrying out CCF plans for relocation to settlements.

23 R.N. Gooding headed up the DNR construction activities across the north during the CCF era. Work included preparing sites for settlements, building roads, building fish plants, and constructing government offices and residences.

24 SAB, Department of Northern Saskatchewan (hereafter DNS), DNS-1 (GS-201), f. VIII, 7, "History and Culture Report – Kinoosao (Co-op Point)," Laverne Olson, "History and Culture Report – Kinoosao (Co-op Point)," undated. This and numerous other files in the SAB detail developments at Kinoosao.

amount for the time.<sup>25</sup> Under the new arrangement between SFMS and DNR, construction and various other costs associated with the fish processing operations would not appear in the debit column of the Crown corporation's books. Burying those costs in the much larger DNR budget succeeded in helping to avoid negative publicity about the controversial government spending on the Fish Board and its replacement, the SFMS.<sup>26</sup> In the case of the Kinoosao fish plant, the money invested totaled about \$70,000 by late 1952.<sup>27</sup>

A distinguishing feature of the fishing industry that developed at Kinoosao was that the province and non-aboriginal fishers on the lake agreed to use a co-operative model to organize the fishing operation and operate the plant. In spite of heavy provincial involvement in planning and funding the operation, the fish plant became known as a co-operative. And the fishing co-operative that supplied the fish to the plant became the first to operate in northern Saskatchewan. The CCF emphasis on co-operatives corresponded with Tommy Douglas' and other party members' belief that they should eventually convert Crown corporations to co-operatives.<sup>28</sup>

While the economic development effort appeared positive, evidently no consultation took place with the affected First Nations and Métis people during the process of planning the settlement or the plant. Not surprisingly then, their response to the CCF plan for them to live and work in the new community disappointed and frustrated government planners. Most Aboriginals, who lived at considerable distance from Kinoosao, did not want to relocate. Strong resistance to the plan for relocation to Kinoosao came especially from the clusters of people that lived near the south end of the lake, approximately 90 kilometres across the water from Kinoosao. There, Status Indian members of the Pelican Narrows Band (today known as the Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation) resided on an island. Nearby, Métis people lived scattered on the mainland. The province was not interested in relocating the dozen or so non-aboriginal families that lived

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25 SAB, Crown Corporations, (J.H. Brockelbank: Natural Resources), R-907.3, f. 3a, Crown "Statement of Accumulated Surpluses and Deficits of Crown Corps." Of the northern corporations, the Fish Board lost the most money. The losses generated controversy in southern Saskatchewan and raised concerns about the CCF ability to manage its enterprises.

26 SAB, DNR, S-NR 1/4, 137 K (3 files), information about DNR lease to SFMS. This provides one example of a lease agreement. Controversy regarding the various northern Crown corporations extended to southern Saskatchewan. Negative publicity over the government enterprises possibly accounted for the defeat of Joe Phelps, the first CCF Minister of Natural Resources. By the early 1950s, the CCF did what it could to minimize controversy, while continuing on with its various programs.

27 SAB, DNR, S-NR 1/4, 137 K3, C.A.L. Hogg to J.W. Churchman, "ARE: Co-operative Fish Filletting Plant at Kinoosao," 24 December 1952. In this source, the \$70,000 figure refers to the co-op's investment. Most of that money appears to have come from the province.

28 Thomas Hector Macdonald McLeod and Ian McLeod, *Tommy Douglas: The Road to Jerusalem* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1987), 175.

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on islands on the lake, although it expected the white fishers to harvest fish for the processing plant.<sup>29</sup>

Once it became apparent that the area First Nations and Métis people would not voluntarily flood to the surveyed lots and jobs waiting for them in Kinoosao, the province tried to convince potential residents to move there. Despite these efforts, most area residents still refused to move, preferring to remain near their trap lines and in their traditional territory. Those who resisted relocation also cited their fear of negative influences in Kinoosao. Some had worked there during construction of the fish plant, at which time they had contact with white workers. Drinking and gambling took place, which resulted in loss of money by the Aboriginal workers.<sup>30</sup>

Roman Catholic Bishop Lajeunesse supported the Aboriginals' position and went so far as to contact Premier Douglas in an effort to ease the pressure on the people to move to Kinoosao. Local people also petitioned Douglas to intervene on their behalf. In their communications with each other and the premier, provincial officials demonstrated little sympathy for the people who did not want to move to the new town site. The top area bureaucrat, Northern Administrator C.S. Brown, thought that the church wanted to, "keep the natives in isolation and comparative ignorance ... we consider education and assimilation the only ultimate solution to the native problem." Brown's boss, the Minister of Natural Resources John Brockelbank, responded to the Aboriginals' concerns about the bad influences, including the temptation to gamble at Kinoosao, by writing to Douglas: "The only way the native will learn not to gamble is to experience losing his wealth permanently." In spite of the direct appeal to him, Douglas did not overrule his officials' efforts to bring the people together at Kinoosao.<sup>31</sup>

Resistance to the CCF plan for the fishing industry on Reindeer Lake also came from non-Aboriginals. In a case that made national news headlines in 1951, John Ivanchuk, a fisherman on Reindeer Lake, refused to comply with the SFMS monopoly on fish buying. Instead, a pilot who also did not like the legislation flew Ivanchuk's fish to a private fish dealer in Flin Flon, Manitoba. In its report on the case, the *Ottawa Citizen* characterized the CCF law as "vicious legislation." When faced with that and other negative publicity, the province returned goods confiscated from Ivanchuk and dropped charges against him. At the same time, John Brockelbank, the minister of DNR, blamed

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29 SAB, DNR, S-NR 1/4, 235, "South End - Reindeer Lake," A.T. Davidson to L.S. Cumming, 9 February 1954.

30 Ibid., "Reindeer Lake - South End," J.H. Brockelbank to T.C. Douglas, 31 October 1953.

31 Ibid., Petition from South End of Reindeer Lake, Sask., to Premier Douglas, 20 July 1952; T.C. Douglas to J.H. Brockelbank, 24 October 1952; Brockelbank to Douglas, 31 October 1953; C.S. Brown to Churchman, 12 November 1952; "Reindeer Lake - South End," J.W. Churchman to Bishop Lajeunesse, 24 December 1952.

the resistance on, “a fish dealer, a transportation company and some over-zealous Liberal politicians,” who had influenced Ivanchuk to break the law.<sup>32</sup> Most fishers chose not to challenge the province’s authority and sold their fish to the Crown corporation.

By 1953, the province considered Kinoosao a success story, at least partly because a number of Aboriginal families had moved to the community. The fish processing plant paid wages to the eleven Aboriginal men and women employed there. Additionally, the plant paid out \$44,771.62 for fish purchased from about forty White and Aboriginal fishers who belonged to the fishing co-operative. The average Aboriginal trapper in the area earned only \$271.00 annually from trapping, much less than the more than one thousand dollars earned by those who set nets.<sup>33</sup> A report from the following year, 1954, indicated that thirteen students attended classes taught by the newly hired schoolteacher, a storekeeper at the government store sold essential goods to the residents, and two DNR officers delivered a variety of provincial programs.<sup>34</sup> Among their other duties, DNR officers administered the province’s community development programs directed at the Aboriginal population.<sup>35</sup> In subsequent years, population growth at Kinoosao continued at a very modest rate.

This account of the creation of Kinoosao demonstrates a top down approach where outsiders made major decisions that affected the local population. That pattern continued when the time came to name the new village. Before the formal naming of the community, in keeping with its desire to establish a co-operative model there, provincial officials used the name of Co-op Point. But because it controlled the mail service, Ottawa held the right to choose the official name for the community. Provincial officials put forward suggestions, and federal officials in the post office made the final choice of name. They rejected the name of Co-op Point, because of its similarity to the word “coop,” a building used to house chickens. Instead, they chose the name Kinoosao, which means “fish” in the Cree language.<sup>36</sup> That name also aptly described the community, founded to process fish taken by commercial fishers; but many northerners still referred to Kinoosao as Co-op Point. The community continues

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32 Ibid., f. 444, “Prosecutions,” Statement of John Ivanchuk, 4 August 1951; J.H. Brockelbank, Press Release, 8 August 1951; various other documents in file.

33 Ibid., 167 B3, “Northern Region,” F. Clinton, “Commercial Fishing – Reindeer Lake,” N. Dist. Conf., 7 October 1953.

34 Ibid., 235, L.S. Cumming to J.W. Churchman, 4 June 1954; A.I. Bereskin to Churchman, 17 June 1954; “South End – Reindeer Lake,” A.T. Davidson to L.S. Cumming, 9 February 1954; Churchman to Cumming, 11 March 1954; Cumming to Davidson, 2 February 1954.

35 Across northern Saskatchewan, DNR officers worked to implement “community development” programs. With a few exceptions, the community development workers received only a small amount of training in that aspect of their work.

36 SAB, DNR, S-NR 1/4, 235, “Reindeer Lake – South End,” L.S. Cumming to J.W. Churchman, 4 June 1954; A.I. Bereskin to Churchman, 17 June 1954.

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with the unusual distinction of having two names, both widely recognized in northern Saskatchewan. The popular use of the name of Co-op Point reflects the common belief that local people came together and formed a co-operative to fish and process their catch.

More than fifty years after its founding, Kinoosao survives as a remote community, with its main land link still to Lynn Lake, Manitoba. The community now falls within the small (2.4 hectare) Kinoosao-Thomas Clark Indian Reserve No. 204, one of the Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation reserves. Approximately a dozen houses serve as homes for the population of about fifty-four. Two businesses, a fishing lodge that caters to tourists and the co-op store, operate there.<sup>37</sup> Ironically, the dominant role played by the province and the lack of Aboriginal involvement in the original establishment of the community remains absent from the commonly accepted history. The “Community of Kinoosao” website, for example, states: “People who used to live out in the trap lines and fish camps started moving here in the 1950s .... A fish processing plant was built in the community. It was owned by the Cooperative Fisheries Limited.”<sup>38</sup> Another website, that of the Keewatin Career Development Corporation, reports that, “Kinoosao had its birth in 1952, when a fisherman’s co-operative decided to build a processing plant there to serve the Reindeer Lake commercial fishing industry.”<sup>39</sup>

As demonstrated by the situation at Kinoosao, the northeastern area of Saskatchewan received much of the CCF’s attention in the 1940s and 1950s. The new community of Wollaston Lake on the lake of the same name stands out as another prime example of an all new settlement in the area designed and built by the province in the mid-1950s. DNR’s R.N. Gooding chose the site for the village of Wollaston Lake by flying over the area; surveying and construction quickly followed.<sup>40</sup> That and numerous other locations in northeastern and also north central Saskatchewan received new provincially owned fish plants, stores, government offices, and schools during the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>41</sup>

Along with the sale of furs, government controlled commercial fishing and fish processing formed the economic base for most northern communities.<sup>42</sup>

37 “Atiik Askii: *Land of the Caribou* (Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2005), 27.

38 “Community of Kinoosao,” <<http://apisasincap.tripod.com/pageone.html>>, (viewed 11 January 2007). Co-operative Fisheries Limited did not begin operating until 1959. The fish plant at Kinoosao had already operated for most of the decade.

39 Keewatin Career Development Corporation, <<http://career.kcdc.ca/comm/Kinoosao.php>>, (viewed 11 January 2007).

40 Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan*, 137.

41 *Ibid.*, 126-47. La Ronge and Beaver Lake received the first two CCF built fish plants in the mid-1940s. Within ten years, most settlements in northeastern and north central Saskatchewan had government operated fish plants.

42 Until 1955, the CCF also controlled most fur marketing in the north. Trappers had no choice but to sell their beaver and muskrat furs to the Saskatchewan Fur Marketing Service, a Crown corporation.

Always a strong supporter of co-operatives, the CCF replaced its controversial Crown corporation SFMS with the government sponsored Co-operative Fisheries Limited (CFL) in 1959.<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately for northerners, the early optimism about building successful local economies around fish plants faded. It became clear that commercial fishing, even when combined with trapping, produced a lifestyle of extreme poverty and welfare dependence for most participants. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Center for Community Studies, based at the University of Saskatchewan, carried out extensive studies of the northern economy. Researchers concluded that the CCF plan for creating prosperity through interventions in the fishing and trapping industries had largely failed.<sup>44</sup> While a widespread recognition came about that the province's recipe for local economic development did not work, that did not deter the province from continuing to believe that northerners should live regulated lives in settlements. Indeed, DNR officers, trained in community development techniques, continued their key role in directing matters in the communities.

The model applied by the province at Kinoosao became the dominant model employed by the CCF; government officials confidently made life-altering decisions for northern people. Yet, later in the CCF mandate, a very different process led to the establishment of another new community on the opposite side of the northern area. A larger portion of the northern population lived in the northwestern region and it also included more preexisting settlements, such as Beauval, Île-à-la-Crosse, Buffalo Narrows, and La Loche.<sup>45</sup> Those settlements largely owed their existence to the long standing presence of fur traders and missionaries.<sup>46</sup>

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43 Glenbow Archives, James Brady Collection, M125, s. VII, f. 65, "Fisheries," 1957-1965, various items; Helen Buckley, "Working Paper on the Commercial Fishing Industry in Northern Saskatchewan" (Saskatoon, Sask.: Center for Community Studies, University of Saskatchewan, 1963).

44 Buckley, *Trapping and Fishing in the Economy of Northern Saskatchewan*. This is but one of a number of reports written by the Center for Community Studies at the time.

45 Adrian A. Seaborne, "A Population Geography of Northern Saskatchewan," *The Musk Ox* no. 12 (1973): 53. Seaborne provides a summary of the evolution of the northern population numbers. In 1961, the population of Reindeer and Wollaston lakes totaled about 645. In contrast, the Buffalo Narrows, La Loche, Ile-a-la-Crosse, and Beauval area included about 4,050 persons.

46 Greg Marchildon and Sid Robinson, *Canoeing the Churchill: A Practical Guide to the Historic Voyageur Highway* (Regina, Sask.: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 2002). Various fur trade sources mention the area in question. Marchildon and Robinson provide a down to earth and brief description of the history of the area. Since waterways acted as the highways of the north, a study of the formation of communities is closely linked to the Churchill River system. Since the late 1700s, this area of northwestern Saskatchewan served as a crossroads for the fur trade, linking the Mackenzie River system and the southern rivers. Roman Catholic missionaries eventually joined the fur traders; the first missionaries arrived in the 1840s.

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Because of the early and extensive fur trade in the northwestern area, many, if not most, people came from a mixed First Nations and European background. In 1906, the signing of Treaty 10 took place at Île-à-la-Crosse and other locations with the Cree and Dene of the area.<sup>47</sup> At that time, families chose whether they would join the treaty or become part of the self-declared Métis group and receive land scrip or money scrip. Large numbers chose to take one or the other type of scrip, although few converted that scrip into land ownership.<sup>48</sup> Decades later, the Métis still occupied a large area. Some lived semi-nomadic lives or settled at remote locations throughout the northern forest; others chose to reside in one of the four main communities. Status Indians received a number of reserves in the area, although numerous band members preferred to continue living outside the reserve boundaries. As the federal government gradually expanded its services to the First Nations groups, further movement to the reserves took place.<sup>49</sup>

For various reasons, the CCF government did not extend most of its fisheries and other economic development programs to northwestern Saskatchewan. In the words of a former official, the administration “had not got around to the west side.”<sup>50</sup> One provincial project in that area involved a pilot community and co-operative development project at Île-à-la-Crosse, designed and managed by Vic Valentine, the province’s leading expert in community development, in the early and mid-1950s. Unlike most of those who implemented the so-called community development projects in the north, Valentine, a trained anthropologist, appeared well qualified for the work. While Valentine earned wide respect for his expertise in community development, the success of the community development programs at Île-à-la-Crosse depended on his leadership. The initiatives, which included a power co-op, a co-op store, and a co-op fish marketing organization, faltered following Valentine’s departure from the community in 1956.<sup>51</sup>

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47 Arthur J. Ray, Jim Miller, and Frank Tough, *Bounty and Benevolence: A History of Saskatchewan Treaties* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), 170-86.

48 Controversy continues to surround the issue of scrip in this area. While the federal government gave out scrip to hundreds of residents, surveyed homestead land lay far to the south. Not wanting to relocate, most Métis sold their scrip. Allegations suggest that fraud and other irregularities also contributed to the loss of scrip.

49 <[http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/trts/trty10\\_e.html](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/trts/trty10_e.html)>, (viewed 11 January 2007). The records for the signing of Treaty 10, including the writings of Treaty Commissioner James A.J. McKenna, provide a background for the selection of reserves. Ray, et al., *Bounty and Benevolence*, 170-86. Ray, Miller, and Tough provide a discussion of the circumstances at the time of the signing of Treaty 10. The process of reserve selection still remained incomplete in the 1950s. Three way negotiations involving Ottawa, the province, and First Nations took place at that time.

50 Ray Woollam, interview by author, 30 April 2006.

51 Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan*, 159-62.



An extensive commercial fishing industry already operated in north-western Saskatchewan prior to the CCF winning the 1944 election. Unlike in the Kinoosao area, the province chose not to grant its Crown corporations a monopoly over fish processing in the northwestern area. The CCF did not want to spread its limited resources too thinly and it recognized that a private company, Big River based Waite Fisheries, already ran an excellent fish processing operation. Joe Phelps, the first CCF Minister of Natural Resources and Industrial Development, and Len Waite, the owner of Waite Fisheries, developed a close relationship. As long as he could, Phelps protected Waite's interests from those in the CCF who wanted to take over his business. Following Phelps' departure from government in 1948, the province again considered intervening in the fishery of that area. Had that occurred, the provincial presence in the northwest might have substantially grown; but years of indecision followed. While Valentine called on the province to displace Waite, others came to Waite's defence. Ray Woollam, chairman of the provincial Committee on Minority Groups, eventually investigated the situation and recommended that the province should not interfere with Waite, who ran a model operation. Douglas took Woollam's advice.<sup>52</sup>

Possibly because the province did not construct its large fish plants in northwestern Saskatchewan, it also did not build new communities in remote areas to house fishers and fish plant workers. The level of provincial control over area people also remained at a relatively low level. Consequently, unregulated pockets of human activity continued within that region of northern Saskatchewan. Small staff numbers and frequent turnover of personnel in the departments of Health and Natural Resources meant that few became familiar with those who lived in remote areas. That situation partially accounts for the existence of fertile ground for an innovative community development project that took place in the early 1960s.<sup>53</sup>

In November of 1961, likely long before most Canadians recognized his name, Peter Gzowski worked as editor of the *Star Weekly*, a magazine supplement to many weekend newspapers across Canada. Ray Woollam, an acquaintance of Gzowski's, submitted an article to Gzowski about a neglected group of Métis in northwestern Saskatchewan. Woollam had mixed feelings about sending the article to Gzowski. On the one hand, Woollam hoped that the magazine would publish the article, and he felt genuine concern about the plight of the Canoe Lake Métis. On the other hand, Woollam, still a provincial official who worked closely with Tommy Douglas, realized that the article

52 Ray Woollam, interview by author, 18 April 2006.

53 For a fuller discussion of provincial staffing and programs, see Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan*, Chapter Six, "At the Point of a Gun," details fishing policies as they applied to various regions of the north. Data supplied demonstrates that the northwestern area received less attention than most other northern areas.

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could prove embarrassing to the CCF. Predictably, Douglas' office received numerous phone calls soon after the *Star Weekly* item appeared. The article brought pressure on the government to act and helped ensure that the plight of the Métis received immediate attention. In fairness to Douglas, Woollam believes that the premier would have responded to the situation anyway once he heard of it, even without the publicity generated by the article.<sup>54</sup>

Readers of the *Star Weekly* learned about a group of Métis, several hundred in number, who lived at a subsistence level in northwestern Saskatchewan. They survived, separated from modern society, along the maze of lakes and rivers that penetrated the dense forest. What made their situation so remarkable was that they lived year round in their tents and small cabins only a short distance from a "million-dollar pine tree." That technological marvel was one of the radar stations that formed the Mid-Canada Radar defense line. Built in the late 1950s, the radar network stretched across northern Canada to provide early warning of incoming Soviet missiles or planes. Woollam wrote, "It stands within a few miles of 24 Métis school age children, living on the shores of Canoe Lake, who attended no school during the past term."<sup>55</sup>

Earlier that year, while on a recreational canoe trip with his Cree speaking guide Jonas Lariviere, Woollam had encountered the scattered Métis family groups.<sup>56</sup> Unlike the Status Indian people of nearby Canoe Narrows, for whom their reserve served as a service centre and homeland, the Métis continued to live semi-nomadic lives. In many respects, they lived as the "free people" that the Métis had long prided themselves on being. Yet not all felt content with their situation.

As elsewhere in the northwestern area of the province, in 1906 Treaty 10 created a division between the Métis and Status Indians of the Canoe Lake area. Most in that area followed Chief John Iron and the headmen Baptiste Iron and Jerome Couilloneur in choosing Indian status.<sup>57</sup> The predominance of Status Indians partially explains why the province ignored the Canoe Lake area; the misconception existed that only Indians, the responsibility of Ottawa, lived there. Canoe Narrows, the only community marked on a map of the lake, was on the reserve. The federal government offered limited services to its charges there; and by the early 1960s, buildings at Canoe Narrows included a school, various residences, and a Roman Catholic Church.<sup>58</sup>

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54 Ray Woollam, interview by author, 30 April 2006.

55 Ray H. Woollam, "The Million Dollar Pine Tree," *Star Weekly* (25 November 1961), 15.

56 Ray Woollam, interview by author, 18 April 2006.

57 Ray, et al., *Bounty and Benevolence*, 178.

58 SAB, DNR, S-NR 1/4, 235, "Ile a la Crosse," A.K. Quandt to J.W. Churchman, 25 March 1949; R-517, f. XIII, 14, Nursing and Child Health, 1950-1970, A.C. Irwin to Dr. M. S. Acker, "Re: Public Health Services at Canoe Lake," 27 December 1961.

Prior to construction of the school on the reserve, Status Indian children attended school several days travel away, in Beauval. In theory at least, federal regulations required the Status Indians to enroll their children in school, and many of them did so. To take their children to the school, parents either followed the fairly direct cross country route along a sandy trail through the bush, or they paddled the long route down the Canoe River, across Lac Île-à-la-Crosse, and then along the Beaver River to the Roman Catholic residential school at Beauval.<sup>59</sup> The Cree of Canoe Lake felt pleased when an elementary school finally opened on the reserve; but the facility did not serve most area Métis.

While the CCF prided itself on extending basic educational services to even the most remote areas of the north, the Canoe Lake area still had no provincial school at the time Woollam first traveled through the area.<sup>60</sup> Over the years, some Métis parents who wanted an education for their children enrolled them in the Beauval residential school, and a small number of Métis children may have attended the school on the reserve in the early 1960s.<sup>61</sup> Yet the majority of the school age Métis received little formal education during the 1950s and the early 1960s.

In other ways as well, the CCF government demonstrated its lack of interest in the Métis of the Canoe Lake area. Canoe Lake fell within the Northern Administration District, which covered most of northern Saskatchewan. According to its organizational plan, the Métis there should have received services from government offices in Buffalo Narrows and Île-à-la-Crosse. But no road connected Canoe Lake with those communities. While DNR had responsibility for regulating trapping areas and fishing licenses, no conservation officer lived in the Canoe Lake area. Provincial public health nurses also rarely visited there; Métis who needed medical attention sometimes sought treatment from the traveling clinics offered by the federal Indian Health Services nurse, or they paddled or walked long distances for help.<sup>62</sup>

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59 For many of the families that brought their children to the school, considerable sorrow accompanied the education experiences. That occurred in spite of the efforts of the dedicated staff, many of whom devoted their lives to the people of the area. Most notably, a dormitory fire in 1927 killed a number of boys and a nun. And ten years later, an epidemic accounted for the erection of a large new batch of grave stones in the school cemetery. Some speculate that the 1937 epidemic was a late manifestation of the Spanish Flu that devastated much of the western world at the end of World War I.

60 Piercy, *Survey of Educational Facilities in Northern Saskatchewan*. Following Piercy's study, rapid expansion of the basic primary educational system took place in the north.

61 Bernice (née Cunningham) Woollam, interview by author, 19 April 2006.

62 The nearest hospital was St. Joseph's Hospital at Île-à-la-Crosse. For most of the 1950s and 1960s, Dr. Hoffman, hired by the Roman Catholic church, provided medical care to people from a large area. Alternately, people from Canoe Lake could travel to Meadow Lake for health care.

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Even when Métis family groups, which included two hundred or more people, cleared land, pitched tents, and built cabins in clusters near Canoe Lake, the province appeared not to notice. Elsewhere in the north, DNR enforced new regulations that governed building sites;<sup>63</sup> but no officials arrived asking the Métis of Canoe Lake to take out building permits, nor did surveyors mark off the squatters' land into lots. Possibly even more surprising, the province did not attempt to move the people into one of the developing centres some distance away. If not totally unknown to the authorities, the Métis of Canoe Lake certainly remained ignored: in 1960 they may have formed the largest remaining group of unregulated Aboriginal people in northern Saskatchewan.

The families encountered by Ray Woollam had once occupied a much larger area, which extended to the west, up to and even beyond the Alberta border. Living in trapping cabins during the winter and in tent camps on lakeshores during the summer, generation after generation of Métis had trapped, fished, and hunted in an area that extended over thousands of square miles. Even in the early 1950s, they did not depend on government services and lived independently, much as their ancestors had. Canoe Lake and various other area lakes teemed with abundant stocks of fish. Commercially valuable species included northern pike, pickerel, and whitefish.<sup>64</sup> As did the Status Indians, the Métis netted fish and sold their catch to Waite Fisheries and other private fish buyers. Trappers obtained goods by trading furs to the Hudson's Bay Company and other traders at Île-à-la-Crosse or Beauval. Even though they had surrendered their Aboriginal title by placing their Xs on the scrip applications in 1906, that agreement had not noticeably affected their lives or limited their freedom. And until several years before Woollam's canoe trip, little concern existed that their situation would change. Outsiders, other than some itinerant trappers and fishers from the south, had little interest in the area.

A major threat to the viability of the lifestyles of the Métis of the Canoe Lake area came in the early 1950s. In 1951, Canada initiated negotiations with Saskatchewan and Alberta to establish what became known as the Cold Lake Air Weapons Range (CLAWR). The federal government believed that it had found the perfect place for a weapons testing range in the area west of Canoe Lake. Incredibly, the governments in Ottawa and Regina seemed to believe that no one actually lived in the area. Plans quickly went ahead to create the large range. The area set aside measured approximately 185 kilometres from east to west and 65 kilometres from north to south, an area similar in size to that of

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63 Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan*, 180. Numerous DNR files document efforts to have the owners of even remote cabins apply for the required permits.

64 C.P. Ruggles, *A Biological and fisheries survey of Lac la Plonge and Canoe Lake* (Saskatoon: The Laboratory, 1959).

the province of Prince Edward Island. Part of the range extended into Alberta, although the larger portion fell within Saskatchewan.<sup>65</sup>

While no roads, communities, or other indicators of human activity appeared on the maps of the area, hundreds of First Nations, Métis, and white people occupied and depended on the area taken over for the weapons range. With the commencement of operations at the CLAWR in 1954, it became illegal for the former occupants and users of the land to enter the area. This squeezed much of the population into the Canoe Lake area, which was located immediately to the east of the weapons range.<sup>66</sup> One might argue that the Métis had given up the right to occupy the weapons range by signing scrip documents in 1906 and that they had enjoyed nearly a half century of grace before having to leave that area. But few Métis who suffered displacement in the early 1950s benefited from the receipt of scrip; their parents and grandparents had long before sold or otherwise become separated from the scrip issued to them. Virtually all appeared to view their loss of the use of the CLAWR area as an unjust displacement.<sup>67</sup>

By the time Woollam met the Métis, they had lived about seven years without the use of most of their traditional area. Lacking access to their former land and resources, they experienced severe difficulties and even destitution. The reduced size of their usable land base meant that the area resources could not support their population. To make matters worse, First Nations residents of the nearby reserve competed with the Métis for the limited stocks of fish and animals in the off reserve area. The Status Indians' loss of the use of the weapons range area also caused difficulties for them. Although neither group had legally owned the land and waters encompassed in the weapons range, in reality they had lost a large part of the resources that they depended on for their survival. Canoe Lake, a relatively small lake, could not support a large number of commercial fishing operations; and the land that abutted the weapons range could not accommodate all those who wanted to hunt and trap. In the *Star Weekly* article, Woollam described the local population as living, "sparsely on a diet of fish, berries, rabbits and moose."<sup>68</sup>

At least partly because of their lack of formal education, the Métis lacked the skills and knowledge to make the transition from their failing hunter-gatherer lifestyle to another way of life. Yet they recognized that change had

65 <[http://www.airforce.forces.ca/4wing/training/training5\\_e.asp](http://www.airforce.forces.ca/4wing/training/training5_e.asp)>, (viewed 11 January 2007). See map available at this site.

66 The range extends to within several miles of Canoe Lake. Residents and visitors report that they hear loud explosions from the range. The windows of buildings sometimes shake from the explosions.

67 During the 1950s, 1960s, and again recently, the First Nations and Métis people of the area have advanced claims against Ottawa for the displacement. Various settlements have been reached.

68 Woollam, "The Million Dollar Pine Tree," 15.

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to come, and several Métis pleaded with Woollam to help them pursue new options. That provided motivation for Woollam to bring provincial and national attention to the plight of the Métis and then to do what he could to help the people make the transition to settlement life.<sup>69</sup> The Métis people's motivation to look for alternatives and even ask for help distinguished their situation from that at Kinoosao and other northern areas where governments sought to impose and direct change.

Once he returned to Regina from his northern canoe trip, Woollam did not forget about the urgent needs of the Métis of the Canoe Lake area. Unlike most civil servants, Woollam enjoyed direct access to T.C. Douglas. In his position as chair of the Committee on Minority Groups, Woollam reported directly to the Premier. While that position had a fairly broad mandate, it also gave Woollam responsibility for co-ordinating the province's Indian and Métis policies.<sup>70</sup> With the added impetus created by the sensational *Star Weekly* article and Douglas' encouragement, Woollam dedicated himself to working for and with the Métis of Canoe Lake. Woollam personally took on the task of establishing a community development program for the Métis. The initiative operated as a special project outside the control of northern bureaucrats. It proceeded without the usual red tape and lengthy internal deliberations that characterized most government projects. Obviously, Douglas trusted that Woollam would do a better job for the people of Canoe Lake than would his regular officials.<sup>71</sup>

After receiving approval for the project from Douglas, numerous meetings took place between Woollam and the Métis at their remote camps. The man from Regina sat with the Métis day after day, for approximately four hundred hours in total, discussing problems and possible solutions. Unlike most community development projects that operated in northern Saskatchewan, where the developers played highly directive roles, Woollam insisted that the Métis make all decisions. He offered his knowledge of the process of establishing settlements and community life. While Woollam presented options and advice to the people, the Métis determined much of what would happen and involved themselves in carrying out their plans. Leaders also emerged among the Métis. While a number of local people participated in the discussions, Mike Bouvier, one of the Métis men, stood out as an influential leader.<sup>72</sup>

Another southerner also became involved in the process. Bernice Cunningham, a young community development worker, officially worked for the Department of Municipal Affairs. Much of her time had been spent working with the Métis colony at Green Lake, some distance to the southeast. Following

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69 Ray Woollam, interview by author, 18 April 2006.

70 Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan*, 276, n. 16.

71 Ray Woollam, interview by author, 18 April 2006.

72 Ibid. Unfortunately, Mike Bouvier and other Métis leaders who participated in the original discussions have died and cannot be interviewed for this research.

her reassignment to the Canoe Lake project, she moved there and spent the summer living with the Métis people.<sup>73</sup> The closeness that developed between the two outsiders and the local people stands in sharp contrast to the impersonal relationships that existed when officials established Kinoosao.

Prior to their involvement with Woollam and Cunningham, the Métis people of the Canoe Lake area did not appear to think of themselves as a community. The possibility of living together in a centralized settlement evidently had not occurred to the Métis who lived in their scattered camps. But the hardships that resulted from the establishment of the CLAWR provided strong motivation for change. Settlement life might offer better access to medical care, social welfare, and other government services. Some also felt the need to live closer to a school for their children to attend.<sup>74</sup>

At first, not all of the Métis believed that gathering in a new community was a good idea. Heated discussions took place in Cree, while Woollam and Cunningham listened. Although they could not understand all the details, they watched the process. In the end, most of the people agreed that they wanted to live together in a settlement. The consultation process resulted in choosing a location on the shore of a scenic bay located at the south-west corner of Canoe Lake. Cole Bay, the name of the bay, also became the name of the new community. A few buildings already stood at Cole Bay; these included a small store and ice house operated by Waite Fisheries; and several Métis families had cabins there.<sup>75</sup>

Thanks to Woollam's influence, the province rapidly approved the plan to establish a new settlement at Cole Bay. That location would allow the province to deliver services to the people in a relatively efficient manner. The village site also lay very close to the recently built road from the town of Meadow Lake, located about 100 kilometres to the south. Construction of a road to the east, to the closer communities of Beauval and Île-à-la-Crosse, had not yet taken place.<sup>76</sup>

With considerable optimism and excitement, the local people participated in the various steps involved in creating the community of Cole Bay. This clearly contrasted with the earlier situation at Kinoosao, where the province had carried out most of the planning and construction work. That lack of local involvement later resulted in strong resistance from the local people to becoming part of the project at Kinoosao.

Bernice Cunningham and Ray Woollam actively participated in building the new settlement. They worked, ate, and slept at the site. Cunningham helped

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73 Bernice Woollam, interview by author, 19 April 2006.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid.; Ray Woollam, interview by author, 18 April 2006.

76 Saskatchewan Environment and Resource Management (SERM) historical maps, SERM Meadow Lake and Prince Albert offices.

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the Métis women set up a cook stove to cook meals for the group. She traveled to Meadow Lake to buy groceries, ammunition, and other necessary supplies; those who could do so contributed money to make the purchases. At the same time, she learned much from her new friends. In spite of their very different backgrounds, the local people and the newcomers came to like and trust each other. In the case of Cunningham, friendships made continued long after her involvement with the project came to an end. More than forty years later, both Woollam and Cunningham still fondly recall the names and personalities of some of the people that they worked with.<sup>77</sup>

Since the Métis people had very little cash, Woollam pulled the necessary strings to obtain money for new houses, which resulted in a variety of housing materials arriving at the site of the new village of Cole Bay. Assistance also came in the person of Phil Solody, the province's Local Improvement District inspector from Meadow Lake, who helped supervise the project. And the province hired two skilled Aboriginal carpenters to work with and teach the local people the necessary carpentry skills. Bernice Cunningham also contributed her carpentry skills. While they continued to live in tents on the site, the local people provided much of the labour for building their new homes. Although they had little cash to contribute, the province expected the Métis to pay back at least part of the cost of the houses over time. Planners counted on some of that money coming from anticipated payments from Ottawa, compensation to the Métis for their displacement from the weapons range. Construction of the houses went well. Completion of twenty-two new dwellings took place by 1962.<sup>78</sup> The efforts of the local people to build the community brought substantial rewards. The most obvious benefit came when the families moved into their new houses. A new one-room school was in operation by 1963. That achievement alone made their efforts worthwhile in the opinion of many participants. The Roman Catholic Church also built a small church at Cole Bay, overseen by the priest who traveled to various communities in the area.<sup>79</sup>

Building houses and the basic infrastructure of the community formed only one part of the plan. The Métis, as well as Woollam and Cunningham, realized that the villagers would need new sources of income. Although welfare payments from the province had begun a steady climb in northwestern Saskatchewan by the early 1960s, dependency still remained at a relatively

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77 Bernice Woollam, interview by author, 19 April 2006. Details of those ongoing relationships are not relevant to the discussion here.

78 SAB, Department of Health (hereafter DH), R-517, XIII, f. 25, "Construction and Housing, 1961-1965," M.A. Welsh to Regional Health Services Branch, Att.: Dr. M.S. Acker, 3 January 1963.

79 Based on personal observations of the author.



low level.<sup>80</sup> Discussions took place about possible options for creating a viable economy for the community. Commercial fishing, already underway on Canoe Lake, would continue. And the residents and community planners considered establishing a sustainable forestry operation, which would utilize horses to skid logs. A farming operation would grow feed for the horses.<sup>81</sup> However, as time went on, it became clear that building the local economy would continue to present an immense challenge.

In addition, it soon became apparent that the encouragement and attention given to the Métis of Cole Bay would not last. Douglas left for federal politics, Woollam and Cunningham devoted themselves to other assignments, and northern bureaucrats again received primary responsibility for the Métis of Canoe Lake. Possibly because creation of the settlement had taken place outside normal channels, officials from various government departments largely ignored Cole Bay. The pattern of neglect that had existed prior to Woollam raising the situation of the Métis to national prominence resumed.

The local people also may have lost some of their optimism about their future. In 1963, after the Métis received compensation payments related to creation of the weapons range, the province did attempt to recapture money it had advanced for construction of the new houses. But the DNR officer sent out to collect the cash submitted a troubling report. He “reportedly found everyone drunk and the money all spent.”<sup>82</sup> While that incident may have indicated that not all was well with the new community, the province remained quite uninvolved.

The absence of medical care served as a symptom of the ongoing lack of attention. Complaints surfaced when the Métis of Canoe Lake sought to obtain medical services through federal government medical programs at the nearby Indian reserve. The province’s public health nurse responsible for the Métis of Canoe Lake worked from Buffalo Narrows; but the overworked nurse rarely, if ever, came to Canoe Lake.<sup>83</sup> Local people in need of medical services often had to travel south to Meadow Lake, a long distance down the sandy, bush trail.

The province also did not provide telephone service, electricity, running water, sewage systems, or other modern amenities for the residents of Cole Bay. Government expenditures on Cole Bay and most other remote northern communities remained limited, at least partly because the province still wished

80 Buckley, *Trapping and Fishing in the Economy of Northern Saskatchewan*, Center for Community Studies, *Economic and Social Survey of Northern Saskatchewan*, Interim Report No. 1 (March 1961), 34-5.

81 Bernice Woollam, interview by author, 19 April 2006.

82 SAB, DH, R-517, XIII, f. 25, “Construction and Housing, 1961-1965,” M.A. Welsh to Regional Health Services Branch, Att: Dr. M.S. Acker, 3 January 1963; R-517, XIII, f. 21, “Policy – Medical Care,” 1955-1973, Dr. A.C. Irwin to Acker, 8 April 1963.

83 *Ibid.*, f. 14, T. Woollam to Dr. Murray Acker, 21 November 1961; Dr. A.C. Irwin to Acker, 27 December 1961; Dr. S.L. Skoll to File, 24 March 1964.

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to minimize dependency on government handouts. During the CCF era, the province did not offer universal housing or modern infrastructure programs, and special projects that allowed for the creation of villages like Cole Bay and Kinoosao did not include provisions to meet the ongoing needs of the residents. While natives elsewhere in northern Saskatchewan also lived with few services, the Métis of Cole Bay received even less than residents of various other settlements. The level of services appeared directly correlated to the size of the non-aboriginal population. Communities such as Buffalo Narrows and La Ronge, with a mixed population, had to fight hard to receive enhanced services. Predominantly non-aboriginal settlements, most notably Uranium City and Island Falls, readily received facilities comparable to those found in the south.<sup>84</sup>

In spite of later difficulties, the consensus reached by the Canoe Lake area Métis to establish Cole Bay stands out as a positive example of the creation of a new community. The people of Cole Bay participated in initiating, designing, and building their community. And they moved to the community without coercion or compulsion. Two officials believed that local people could and should take ownership of the process of developing their community, which contrasts sharply with the earlier situation at Reindeer Lake, where residents had virtually no input into major decisions made by the province. Following its establishment of the settlement of Kinoosao, the province encouraged and coerced area people to move there. In that case, politicians and community planners believed themselves best qualified to make life-altering decisions for area Aboriginals. The cooperative model chosen by the province for the fish processing operation at Kinoosao largely accounts for the local people eventually embracing the new community and fish plant as their own.

The lack of bureaucratic interest makes the establishment of Cole Bay all the more remarkable. Although the local Métis had the help of two idealistic government employees, the initiative for the movement to Cole Bay came from the people of the area. Unlike those who had gone through forced relocation, the Métis of Canoe Lake came to the realization that they could no longer live their traditional lives on the land. One might argue that the actions of government also lay behind that voluntary participation by the Métis; governments had brought far reaching changes to relevant economic and social circumstances, which meant that life on the land no longer remained viable. That observation

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84 In recent years, as the province has increased budgets and given more attention to northern areas, the standard of living continues to improve. Today, few speak of alternatives to life in the centralized villages. Challenges facing residents resemble those that exist across northern Canada. The success and prosperity of families is no longer primarily determined by the abundance of fish, fur bearing animals, and big game. The viability of communities becomes measured by the quality and availability of education, vocational training, employment, housing, and various modern services.

does not alter the fact that the Métis made a rational choice to leave their traditional lives and move towards embracing new options.<sup>85</sup>

Ironically, the long term results of the contrasting CCF projects that moved Aboriginals to new villages may appear much the same. The province's plan for prosperity through commercial fishing at Reindeer Lake brought only limited success. Similarly at Cole Bay, plans to utilize local renewable resources did not bring economic well-being to the Métis, who so optimistically moved to their new community. There, as elsewhere in the north, vocations based on "traditional activities" proved unable to support the burgeoning population. The 1950s and subsequent decades brought a steady growth in dependence on government support programs for both communities. A ten fold increase in provincial social aid payments for the north took place during the 1950s; payments rose from \$17,020 in 1950 to \$174,181 in 1960.<sup>86</sup> As the traditional economy deteriorated further, dependency continued to increase. Chronic unemployment and low per capita social aid payments meant that poverty became the norm in the new settlements.<sup>87</sup>

Another similarity exists in the histories of Kinoosao and Cole Bay; the origins of both communities have become obscured. Even though the founders of Kinoosao violated virtually all rules of community development, the people there eventually took ownership of their community. The commonly used name for the community, that of Co-op Point, encourages the belief that the local people came together and co-operatively participated in the founding of the community and its primary industry, commercial fishing. Although inaccurate, that story has become a widely accepted narrative. Similarly, the origins of the settlement of Cole Bay are lost in time. New generations do not know the story of how their grandparents and great grandparents met with two white southerners and together worked to implement the dreams of their ancestors.<sup>88</sup>

Half a century later, one could argue that it made little difference whether local people chose their path or whether they reluctantly followed the direction of government officials into a village life style. The economic and social record does not demonstrate a clear advantage for one community development model

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85 One should also note that while top northern administrators lacked interest in whether the project went ahead or not, had the Métis not relocated when they did, it seems certain that sooner or later the province would have strongly encouraged them to give up their unregulated lives on the land. The relocation took place during a temporary weak period in Saskatchewan's efforts to exert control over northern people.

86 Qiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan*, 195-96. Chapter Nine provides a detailed discussion of the rise in social aid costs during the CCF era.

87 *The Indians and Metis of Northern Saskatchewan: A Report on Economic and Social Development* (Saskatoon: Center for Community Studies, University of Saskatchewan, 1963).

88 Based on various conversations of the author with residents and community officials in the area.

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over the other. But that point of view overlooks the importance of the process to the people who experienced relocation to the villages. The generations that went through the initial change from life in the bush to a village life experienced the negative or positive effects of the processes involved. They cared whether officials listened to them or not.

Similarities exist between the earlier mentioned examples of relocations in Canada's territorial north and those in northern Saskatchewan. At Kinoosao as with the relocations in today's Nunavut, governments sought to reduce poverty and create economic independence in the Aboriginal population. Yet, in most situations, governmental paternalism, coercion, and a lack of consultation with the affected populations stand out. That pattern certainly describes the process of establishing Kinoosao.

Yet numerous differences between the various situations become apparent. Notably, in the relocations documented by Tester, Kulchyski, and Marcus, government officials sought to relocate dependant Inuit away from communities with substantial white populations.<sup>89</sup> That motivation did not factor into the situation at Reindeer Lake or Canoe Lake as few whites lived in those areas; segregation of the population, however, did become an issue in northern Saskatchewan communities with predominantly white populations such as Uranium City and Island Falls.<sup>90</sup> The movement to Cole Bay also stands out from the other cases mentioned because of the lack of government compulsion; the Métis of the Canoe Lake area played an active part in choosing and building their community.

Much as occurred elsewhere in northern Canada, the decades after the Second World War in northern Saskatchewan brought a government-directed movement from traditional lifestyles on the land to settlement life. Even though the province failed to anticipate many of the effects of its community development efforts, the shift from life on the land to village life became a major part of the CCF legacy. As demonstrated by the situation at Cole Bay, local people also came to recognize that they could not continue their former semi-nomadic lifestyles. Even when governments did not directly force movement to settlements, changes in the larger economy and society meant that traditional ways of life on the land lost viability. Survival required leaving the old ways behind and embracing new alternatives.

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89 Marcus, *Relocating Eden*, 217-8.

90 Uranium City, a mining town, went so far as to create a zone around the community in which no one could erect a tent. Island Falls became a predominantly white company town created to operate a hydro-electric plant, while the aboriginal population lived several miles away at Sandy Bay.

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