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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE INITIAL AGRICULTURAL SETTLEMENT OF THE
MORINVILLE-WESTLOCK AREA, ALBERTA

by



Robin Russell Vogelesang

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
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OF MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF GEOGRAPHY

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL 1972

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled THE INITIAL AGRICULTURAL SETTLEMENT OF THE MORINVILLE-WESTLOCK AREA, ALBERTA submitted by Robin Russell Vogelesang in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Bruce Boydston
Supervisor
R. S. Macleod
R. S. Ironside

Date 30 May 1972

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the initial period of settlement in a small part of the Canadian West, the area between the present towns of Morinville and Westlock in North Central Alberta.

Through detailed examination of the Homestead Files, it was possible to gain some insight into the characteristics of the pioneers in the study area. The observations were based on a ten per cent stratified random sample of 198 quarter sections, which were later reduced to 74 quarter sections due to lack of available data.

The early settlers were of many different ethnic origins although the majority of them in the study area were of British and French descent. The average age of the settlers was 33 years. In the sample, 60 per cent of the settlers were single and 40 per cent were married. Family size had little or no effect on the success to patent the land, nor did ethnic origin.

Although it was initially thought that ethnic origin would have been influential in the setting up of a homestead, this later proved to be of minimal importance. Of the various factors examined none seem to be dominant, although vegetative cover proved to be somewhat influential in the location of homestead. Generally speaking, those areas with the least amount of forest cover were settled first.

Of the 15 interviews conducted with residents of the study area, only two were original settlers. The remaining ones were sons and daughters of the original settlers. The information derived from the interviews was valuable in gaining an overall view of pioneer life, although the replies must be viewed with some skepticism. Some of the more salient points brought out by the interviews were the difficulties experienced by the farmers in shipping their produce to market before the advent of the railroad, as well as the influence of the railroad in the direction of settlement.

The conclusions of this thesis are necessarily limited by the lack of sufficient and reliable data. However, personal factors seem to have been especially important, for many settlers succeeded on land on which others had earlier failed.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Historical geography demands regional specialization. Viewing an area as it appears today is meaningless without previous knowledge of the land's occupants. One must try and visualize the land as it once was when the first settlers came, although this is not always possible. Rhetorical questions such as why did people settle here, how did they adapt to the environment, what changes occurred as a result of the settlement process must be answered. Slowly one is able to reconstruct events in the past and postulate what in fact happened.

The tools of historical geography cover a wide range. The principal and probably most reliable source of information is the archive. Written documents often survive over a long period of time and more important, they survive unchanged. In Western Canada, land survey records note the character of the vegetation, the nature of the soil and the so-called "improvements" made by man. Factual data of enumerations, land titles, settlement processes, tax assessments, production and personal correspondence prove invaluable in the attempt to view the past history of an area.

Although most of the information is gained from archives and libraries, field work is an essential part of the study. One of the main tasks in field work is to simply observe and visually familiarize oneself with the area. Then, taking into account what the earlier records

show of the area, observe what is present today and attempt to speculate on the processes that caused the changes. Where former cultural remains once stood, other forms may have replaced them. Gradually, the researcher becomes aware of what has actually happened over a period of time in a particular location.

In studying historical geography, there are basically two approaches. The first is to look at the past from a single incident or major event in time and study the subsequent processes of change. Relating to settlement, for example, one might take the time at which a road was built into an area and the subsequent effect the road had on the settlement process.

The second approach is a cross-sectional approach analyzing the past from a wide spectrum rather than from isolated incidents and attempting to identify the salient features.

This particular study will focus on the second approach since there is a variety of causes rather than a major single event leading up to the settlement of the area. It will rely upon data gathered from a wide variety of historical sources. It is hoped that after all the information has been put together, a satisfactory reconstruction of the past will emerge.

AIMS AND DEFINITION OF STUDY AREA

This study shows the changes that have taken place during the initial settlement period in a northern agricultural area in Western Canada. More specifically, the area analyzed lies roughly between the towns of Morinville and Westlock, in North Central Alberta (Figure I). The exact dimensions of the area are Townships 56-60 inclusive in addition to part

LOCATION OF STUDY AREA IN ALBERTA

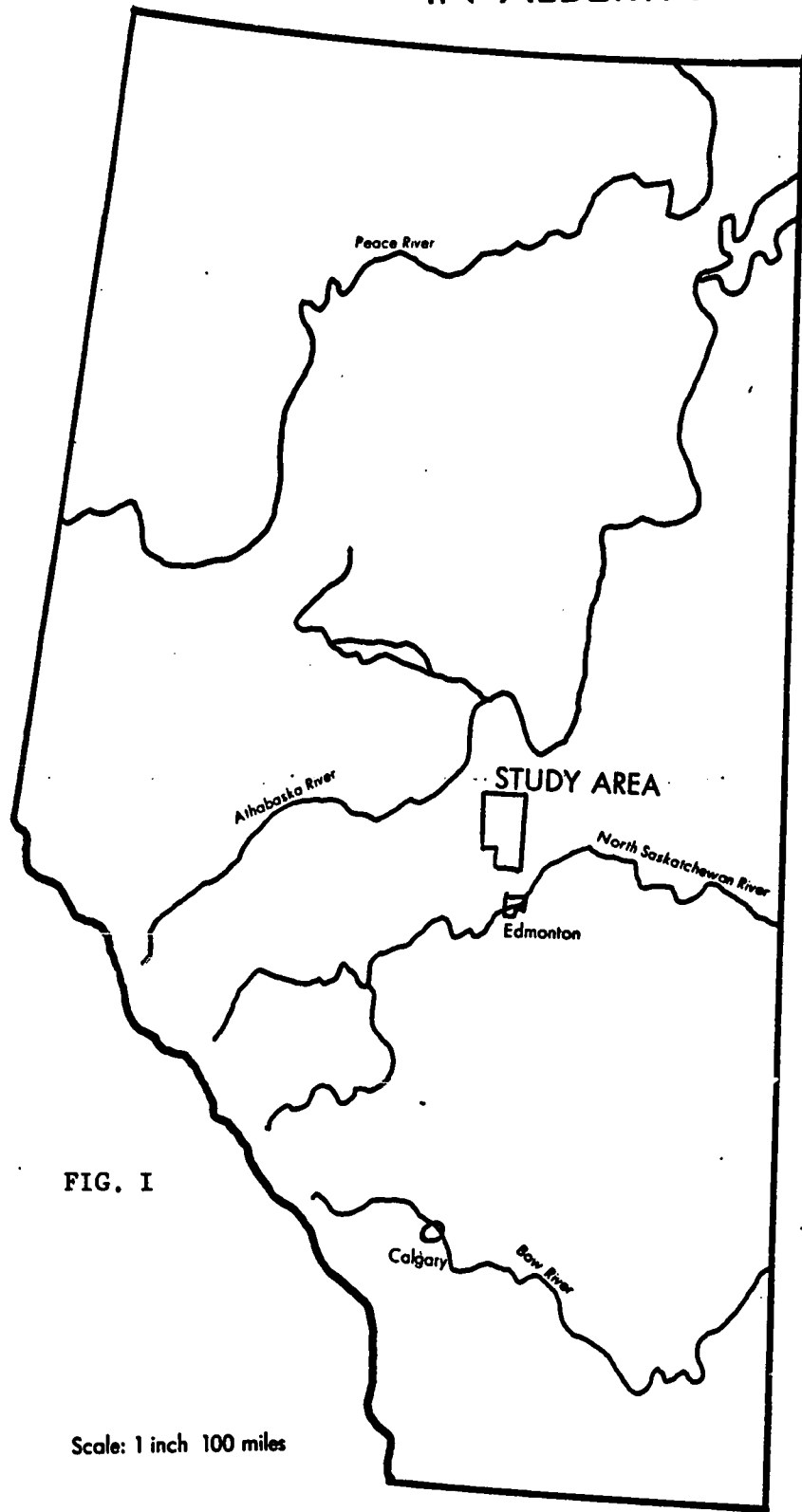


FIG. I

Scale: 1 inch 100 miles

of Township 55. and Ranges 25-27 inclusive, west of the fourth meridian (Figure II).

This particular area was chosen because it was suited to studying the settlement process in a marginal northern agricultural area and was easily accessible for study. The main purpose is to isolate the various factors that contributed to the success and failure of the individual's struggle in initially settling a virtually unknown land. These factors include physical and cultural features as well as governmental and private settlement schemes. Much can be gained by analyzing the problems and successes encountered by initial settlers into a new area. Future settlement programs may gain valuable information from those attempted in the past.

METHODOLOGY

Most, if not all of the initial homesteaders settled on a tract of land containing 160 acres, commonly referred to as a quarter section. It is because of this that the present study utilized the quarter section as a basis of investigation. The entire study area contains 1,967 quarter sections. Out of this total it was decided to take a ten per cent stratified random sample. The framework used for the random sample was the Provincial Department of Pedology's "Soil Capability for Agricultural Ratings" (Table II). The soils are ranked according to crop growing limitations into seven categories. The study area, however, only incorporates five of the seven categories.

Each quarter section was classified according to the dominant soil rating with the following results:

STUDY AREA

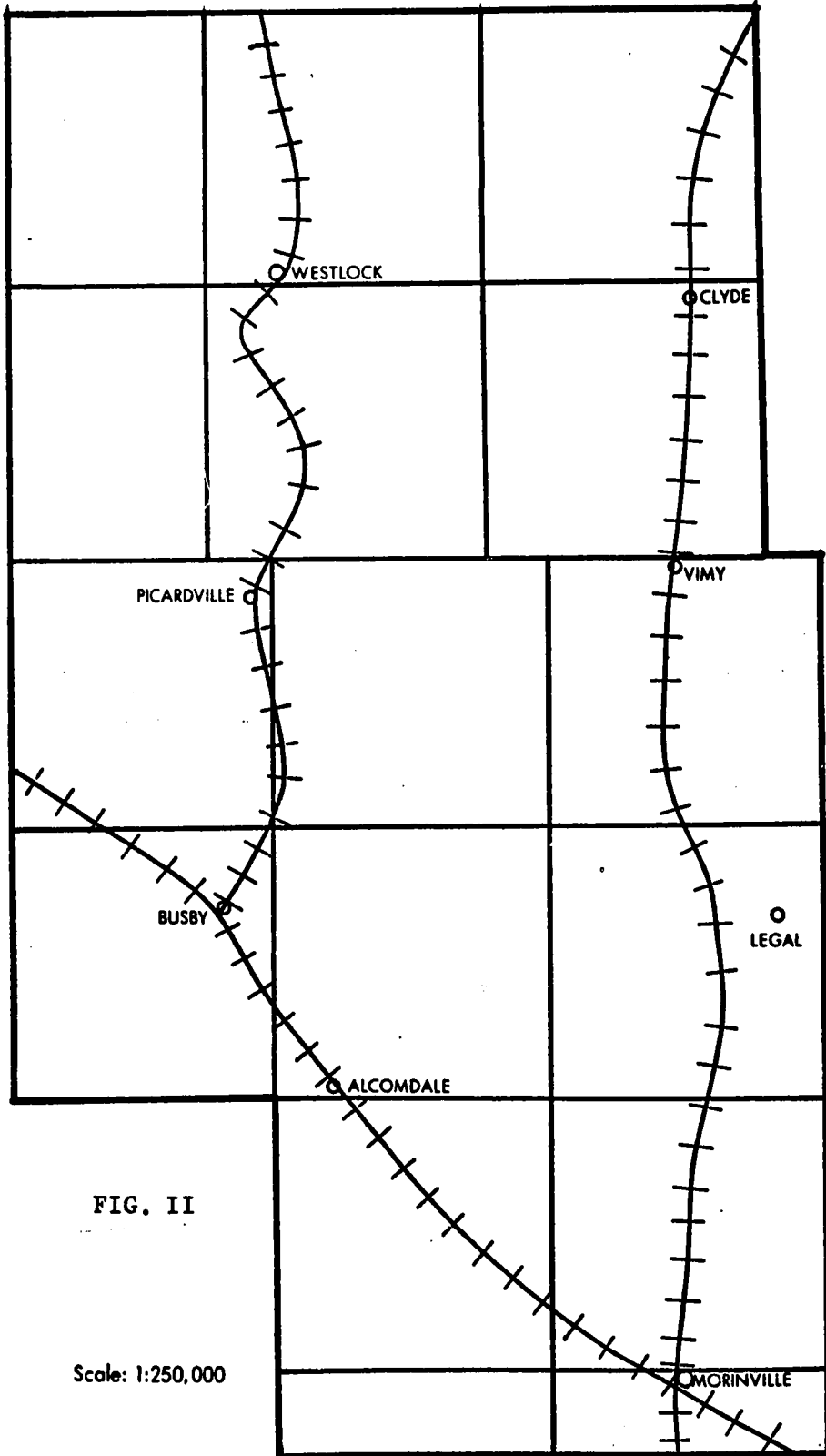


FIG. II

Scale: 1:250,000

TABLE I
NUMBER OF QUARTER SECTIONS BY SOIL TYPE

	Total Number of Quarter Sections In Study Area	Total Number of Quarter Sections In Sample (10%)	% Frequency in Total Area
Class I	508	51	25.8
" II	445	45	22.6
" III	671	67	34.1
" IV	335	34	16.7
" V	8	<u>1</u>	.8
		Total 198	

The primary sources of data were the Homestead Files, located both at the Provincial Archives and the Alberta Department of Lands and Forests. The files include a wealth of information such as the age of the homesteader, family size, place of birth, date of entry, date of patent*, acreage cropped and broken by year, amount of stock, improvements (including size and cost of house, barns, fences, wells) and residence requirements by year.

* Term used to denote the transfer of legal ownership of the land to the person occupying it on provision that regulations have been met.

TABLE II
SOIL CAPABILITY FOR AGRICULTURE*

Class 1	-	no significant limitations.
Class 2	-	moderate limitations requiring moderate conservation practices.
Class 3	-	moderate, severe limitations to range crops.
Class 4	-	severe limitations restricting range of crops and requiring special conservation practices.
Class 5	-	very severe limitations that restrict capability of producing perennial forage crops. Improvement tactics are feasible.
Class 6	-	capable only of producing perennial forage crops, and improvement tactics are not feasible.
Class 7	-	no capability for arable agriculture or permanent pasture.

* Canada, Department of Regional Economic Expansion, Canada Land Inventory. Classification by the Alberta Soil Survey.

Bearing in mind that the total sample contained 198 quarter sections, it was found after detailed investigation, that not all of the land was open to homesteading. Large numbers of quarter sections were either owned by the Canadian Pacific Railway or simply had no record of files. The railway land grants are not open to investigation using the sources utilized in this study nor are those quarter sections without files. Thus, out of an original total of 198 quarter sections the final number resulting was 74. Although this number is considerably less than the original total, it was believed that this study, due to the nature of the stratified random sample of ten per cent, would still be a valuable and valid undertaking. For a comparative study of soil types in the remaining 124 quarter sections of original random sample, the following table was constructed (Table III). Because of the qualitative nature of the Homestead Files and the difficulties of clearly categorizing the data, extensive quantitative testing of the data were not practicable.

To ascertain whether the sample of 74 quarter sections was in fact representative of the area a Chi-Square Test was performed between the 74 quarter sections, those quarter sections held by the Canadian Pacific Railway and those quarter sections which had no records in the Homestead Files. Since the Class I and Class IV soils seemed to differ significantly as far as percentage of area was concerned, it was decided to use the Chi-Square Test to determine if the areas were significantly different. The results are shown in Table IV.

TABLE IV
COMPARISON OF SAMPLE QUARTER SECTIONS WITH OTHERS BY SOIL TYPE

<u>Observed Frequency of C.P.R. Land</u>	<u>Observed Frequency of No File Land</u>
Class I - 26.4	Class I - 30.8
Class II - 25.0	Class II - 21.2
Class III - 33.3	Class III - 36.5
Class IV - 13.9	Class IV - 11.5

$$x^2 = \frac{[(O-T)^2]}{T} \quad \text{where } O = \text{Observed frequency and} \\ T = \text{Theoretical frequency}$$

Theoretical Frequency of Sample Land

Class I - 21.6
Class II - 23.0
Class III - 32.4
Class IV - 23.0

(A) Calculation of Observed Frequency of C.P.R. Land and Theoretical Frequency of Sample Land

$$x^2 = \frac{-4.8^2}{26.4} + \frac{-2.0^2}{25.0} + \frac{-0.9^2}{33.3} + \frac{+9.1^2}{13.9} = 6.9613$$

d.f. = 3

Therefore $0.10 < p < 0.05$

The probability is very high: 99.999

(B) Calculation of Observed Frequency of No File Land and Theoretical Frequency of Sample Land

$$x^2 = \frac{-9.2^2}{30.8} + \frac{-1.8^2}{27.2} + \frac{-4.1^2}{36.5} + \frac{+11.5^2}{11.5} = 14.862$$

d.f. = 3

Therefore $0.005 < p < .001$

The probability is very high: 99.999

The sample of 74 quarter sections does not in fact differ significantly from the total random sample of 198 quarter sections (including C.P.R. land and No File land).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Since 1670 Public Land, in what is now the Province of Alberta, has been under the control of three agencies. The first of these was the Hudson's Bay Company. This company controlled much of Western Canada including Alberta from 1670 to 1870, a period of 200 years. Thus the other two controlling bodies, since 1870, the Federal and Provincial Governments, have only exercised control for 100 years between them.

The Hudson's Bay Company was given a charter by King Charles II in 1670 granting absolute territorial rights to colonize and trade the area known as Rupert's Land. This area included the present provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, the Northwest Territories, the Yukon Territory and part of Ontario and British Columbia.

Because the company was primarily interested in trade, not colonization, it offered little encouragement to prospective settlers. However, without railways, markets and law enforcement not many settlers were likely to come in any case.

When Rupert's Land was sold to the Dominion Government in 1870 many problems arose. Under the agreement, the Dominion Government was to grant the Hudson's Bay Company 1/20 of all the land located in the fertile grasslands of Western Canada, south of the North Saskatchewan River.

Fearing "invasion" from the United States, the Dominion Government ordered the building of a railroad linking British Columbia with the

East. Also, in order to consolidate the huge area of Canada the Dominion Government promoted many settlement schemes not only to utilize the land to its best advantage but to create consumer markets for Eastern Canada.

The method whereby settlement in Western Canada could be promoted and encouraged was the implementation of the Homestead Policy. The Homestead Policy was based on the assumption that a 160 acre plot of land, or with a pre-emption, every 320 acres of land, would be an economically viable unit for a family.

Rigorous regulations were set down for persons wishing to apply for a homestead. The following excerpt from the Daily Mail Handbook for Settlers,¹ 1885 illustrates the procedures that had to be followed:

Edmonton Dominion Lands District:

- Area - that portion of Alberta lying north of township 42.
- Homestead - 160 acres (1/2 mile square) with the option of obtaining an additional 160 acres on adjacent land.
- entry fee is \$10.00
 - six months is allowed a homesteader to perfect his entry by going into active occupation of the land.
 - if regulations have been met, patent may be applied for after three years.
 - those eligible must be 18 year old males, or widows having minor children to support.
- Regulations - requires a homesteader to reside six months in each of the three years on the homestead.

¹Government of Canada, Department of Agriculture, A Guide Book Containing Information for Intending Settlers, 1885, Ottawa.

- the erection of a habitable house, the breaking of 30 acres and the seeding of 20 acres, before patent may be applied for.
- requires those eligible to be British Subjects or naturalized British Subjects.

In 1930, public lands came under Provincial jurisdiction. For a small period of time the Provincial Government continued the same policy regarding homesteading as the Dominion Government. Some areas, however, were limited in regard to settlement, especially in Southern Alberta. In the late 1930s, during the last of the Depression Years, the Provincial Government began to experience many problems. Most of the good land was already settled leaving little or no land open that was suitable. Especially in Southeastern Alberta many of the homesteads reverted back to the Government in lieu of payment of taxes. Consequently, many people were forced to go on relief.

This situation lasted until 1939 when Alberta discontinued the Homestead Policy in its old form. In its place an agricultural lease policy was implemented which later became known as the Homestead Lease Policy. Under this policy a person could lease up to 320 acres of land for 20 years. After completing five years of cultivation and residence requirements, the prospective homesteader was allowed to purchase the land.

After World War II the Alberta Government designated the land to be classified into two zones, namely the settlement zone and the non-settlement or forestry zone.

STUDY AREA

After discussing the history of public lands in Alberta in a gen-

eral form, it is now possible to look at the study area in more detail.

Whereas settlement on the southern grasslands of the Great Plains and Central Alberta took place at a relatively fast pace, settlement initially grew more slowly in the study area. The speed of settlement that characterized the southern grasslands was due to two main factors: (1) the absence of heavy forests which would hinder breaking and settling the land and (2) the completion of the transcontinental railway which could transport the cash crop, wheat, very quickly and efficiently to export markets. It is because of the relative ease of access of the southern areas that the northern fringe areas were generally settled later. However, by 1914 when all the good dark brown and black soils had been taken up in the southern part of Alberta, settlers began to look northward. Although groups of pioneer farmers had penetrated northward prior to 1914, these regions were still sparsely populated. After the First World War settlement on a large scale began to take place in North Central and Northern Alberta. Large settlement schemes offered by the main railroad companies and assistance from both the Provincial and Federal Governments greatly encouraged settlement in the new areas.

Most of the early settlers in the southern part of the study area, that is, the Morinville District, were of French-Canadian descent (Figure III). Proximity to Edmonton is reflected in the fact that the sections south of Morinville were settled first. The area immediately east of Morinville was also attractive to the early settlers since it was easily accessible and the vegetative cover was scattered scrub and thus was more easily cleared for cultivation. After the initial settlement subsequent settlement growth continued further east reinforcing the

trend described above. Gradually, as the eastern edge was being filled up, settlement began to swing westward during the second and third decades of this century.

Whereas most of the early settlers in the southern part of the study area were French-Canadian in origin, the northern part, especially the Westlock District, reflected a strong British background. Many of the early settlers here came either directly from Great Britain or from Ontario and the United States. As in the case of the Morinville area, the Westlock area filled up eastwards of the town first towards the village of Clyde. The areas adjacent to the villages of Alcomdale, Busby and Picardville were generally settled at a later date. Initial settlers in the Westlock area found the soil to be more productive and the vegetative cover less demanding in terms of clearing than the areas mentioned above. In fact, much of the country between Picardville and Westlock, along the railroad, had been cut over and burnt off. The cut timber was processed in nearby lumber camps. The few tree stumps that remained proved that the spruce had been of high quality.

After this brief historical introduction, subsequent chapters will deal with a more detailed description and analysis of the area. The land will be studied from both the cultural and physical point of view. The conclusions drawn will hopefully add to a better understanding of pioneer life in North Central Alberta.

EXTENT OF FRENCH CANADIAN SETTLEMENT IN THE STUDY AREA 1921

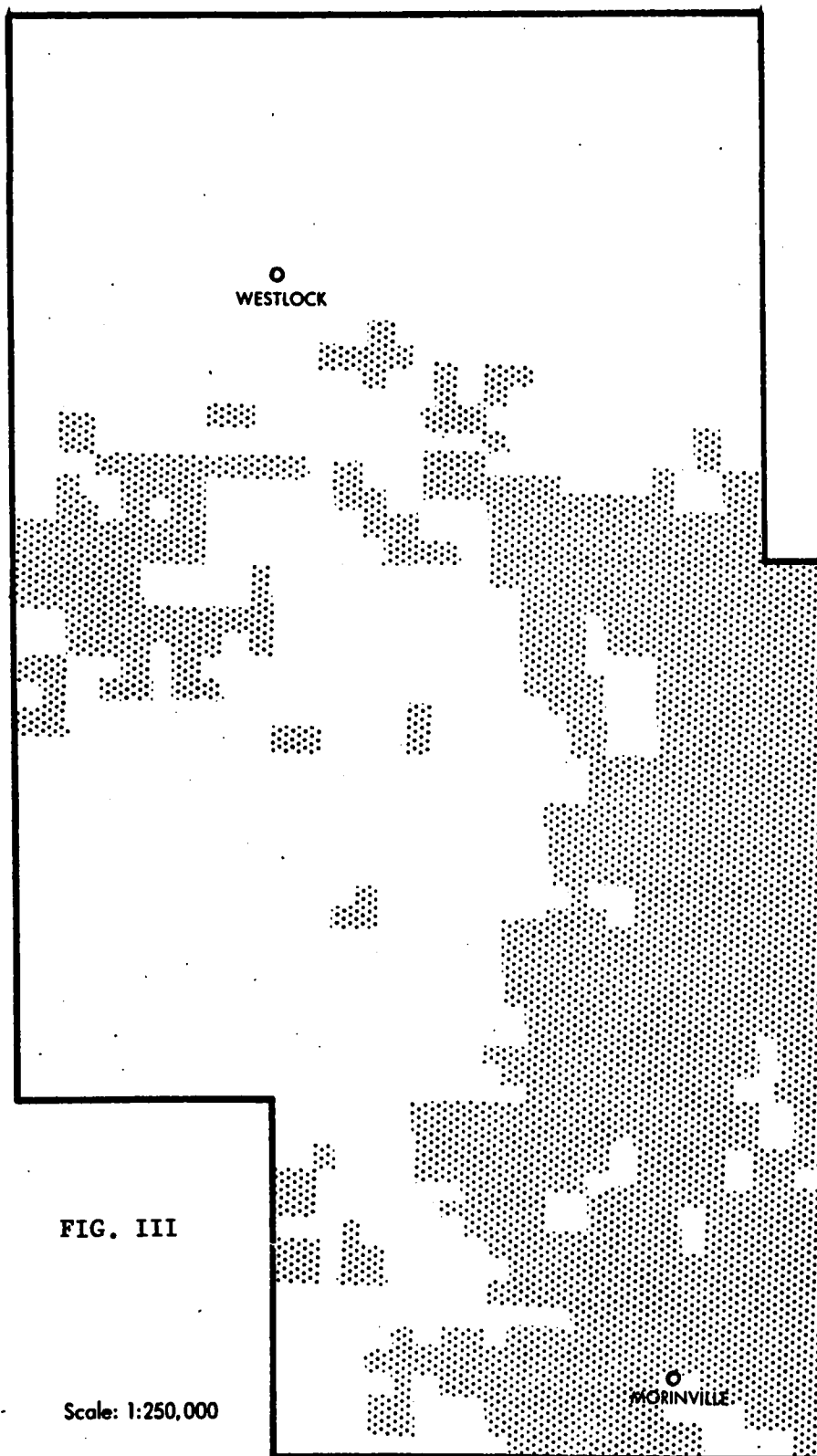


FIG. III

Scale: 1:250,000

CHAPTER II

THE ENVIRONMENT

In order to comprehend the problems that faced the homesteaders when they first viewed the new land, it is necessary to study the physical characteristics of the area including soil, climate, vegetation and the general topography, as well as the settlers' perception of the environment at that time.

In some areas of homesteading the physical barriers often proved to be insurmountable. Often homesteaders entering into an area subsequently found the task of cultivating the land too difficult and failed. In most cases it was not due to any one single factor but rather to a combination of factors. For example, despite a soil of good quality, without the right amount of precipitation and an adequate number of frost-free days, the soil is useless for crop production. However, a soil of lesser quality, could, under favourable growing conditions, such as long hours of sunlight and adequate rainfall in the growing season produce more than adequate crops.

The nature of the forest cover was also an important factor to homesteaders. A heavy, dense bush cover proved very difficult to clear, whereas a light, thinly spaced tree cover could be cleared without too many problems and in much less time.

CLIMATE

Perhaps the two most important and influential factors of climate are temperature and precipitation.

Generally, the study area reflects a typical continental climate with cold winters, warm summers and relatively little precipitation. Most winters average at least one month below 0°F and five months of below freezing temperatures. The mean summer temperatures usually range from 55° to 60°F.

Possibly the greatest single hazard that the farmer faced in regards to raising crops was the "killer-frost" and the short frost-free period. Although the meteorological data shows frost occurring during the summer months, the damage resulting was negligible over a long period of years. The hardier varieties of wheat, the cash-crop in the study area according to interviews with old farmers, usually mature successfully on the average. Some years may be particularly difficult but others produce bumper crops often resulting in a large surplus.

Within the study area itself there are no meteorological records but according to early surveyors' notes there was climatically little difference between this area and the town of Athabasca, some 50 miles northeast. Table V indicates the incidence of early and late frosts at Athabasca at the beginning of the century when many settlers were attempting to homestead the land.

At these northerly latitudes, long hours of sunshine are extremely beneficial and important to the raising of crops. Supplementing the long hours of sunshine the majority of the precipitation falls during the early summer, resulting in ideal growing conditions.

TABLE V
FROST RECORDS AT ATHABASCA*

Year	<u>Late Frosts</u>			<u>Early Frosts</u>		
	Month	Date	Temp. (°F)	Month	Date	Temp. (°F)
1902	June	30	30.3°	-	-	-
1904	July	3	33.0°	August	5	33.0°
1905	June	23	33.5°	August	23	33.0°
1910	June	14	33.0°	August	11	32.0°
1911	June	7	29.0°	August	7	33.0°
1912	June	6	25.0°	July	14	29.0°
1913	June	26	33.0°	August	30	33.0°
1914	June	9	33.0°	August	25	32.0°
1915	July	1	30.0°	September	7	32.0°
1917	June	13	27.0°	August	8	33.0°

* Based on records compiled by the Meteorological Service, Ottawa, published in The Athabasca District, Alberta, Hotchkiss, J., Dominion Land Surveyor, 1922.

Taken over a period of 22 years (1900-1922), the mean annual precipitation in the Athabasca District was 15.82 inches. Sixty-four per cent or 9.99 inches of the precipitation fell during May, June, July and August. Out of this total of 9.99 inches, 5.10 inches fell during May and June, critical months with regards to the growing of crops. Thus, it can be said that although the overall annual precipitation does not appear to be very high it does occur at an optimum time of the year for plant growth.

The mean annual precipitation of the study area is difficult to calculate since no meteorological stations exist in the area. One can assume that the figures recorded at Athabasca are generally indicative of the amount of rainfall in the study area. Only on a very gross basis can an approximate figure be given for the study area. Using the recently compiled general climatic maps for Alberta the study area has a rainfall of some 16-18 inches.¹

Precipitation in the form of snow seems to show some discrepancy if early accounts are compared with recent records. Hotchkiss, a Dominion Land Surveyor, wrote in 1922 "The winters, although clear and cold, are invigorating and are usually accompanied by about two feet of snow."² It is not known, however, whether Hotchkiss meant two feet of snow on the ground or two feet of total snowfall.

¹Longley, R.W. ed., Climatic Maps for Alberta, The Alberta Climatological Committee, Department of Geography, University of Alberta, July 1968.

²Hotchkiss, J., Dominion Land Surveyor, The Athabasca District, Alberta, A Guide for Intending Settlers, 1922.

Records for the period 1900-1922 prepared by the Meteorological Branch - Department of Transport, Canada, show the annual snowfall at Edmonton to be about four feet which could, in fact, be comparable to Hotchkiss' observation. Reliability of early data derived from personal observation must be viewed with some skepticism, as it is often very subjective.

Snowfall taken over a number of years often does not appear to have been very great. However, individual years of high snowfall often proved disastrous to homesteaders. In the winter of 1905-1906, for example, there was seven and one-half feet of snow. Where heavy snowfalls were accompanied by high winds they often proved fatal for both man and beast. Newborn calves often became separated from the herd and perished. Also, if a homesteader was unable to erect some form of snow fencing, huge snow drifts could virtually isolate a family from the outside world.

Climatically, conditions were often unfavourable, especially during the early years on the land when little or no shelter had yet been erected apart from the natural shelter already present in the form of trees. Even though the winters were long and cold, settlement persisted and gradually the early homesteaders brought the wilderness under cultivation.

Superficially the obvious barrier to agriculture and settlement in a northerly location, such as the study area, would be the climate. Although climate plays a very important role in influencing agricultural practices, it is not the sole determinant. Early homesteaders initially came in search of new land often unaware of the severe climate. Thus,

the topography, the nature of the soil and the type of vegetation became of prime importance when selection of a site for a homestead was being made.

TOPOGRAPHY AND DRAINAGE

Topographically the study area can be described as level to gently undulating. While the average absolute elevation is approximately 2,200 feet, the relative relief is only 100 feet. The only marked change in relief is the Pembina River Valley which flows due north immediately west of the study area. Because of the limited relative relief much of the runoff is internal emptying into numerous sloughs found throughout the area. This presents serious problems of snowmelt flooding each spring, but this is partially offset by the relatively free-draining loam soils. Some of the surface streams include the Egg River, Riviere Qui Barre, the Wabash and Redwater. It must be noted, however, that these streams are very small and often flow intermittently due to lack of available water.

Based on the Homestead Files that had improvements made on the land listed, many if not all of the homesteaders drilled one or more wells. The depth of the wells ranged from six feet to 107 feet, although the average depth was between 15 and 25 feet (at an average cost of \$2.00 per foot). It would appear that those homesteads not having a well obtained their water supply from surface water. As was noted above the study area contains a plentiful supply of surface water which could be used at least by cattle and other animals if not for human consumption. Availability of water, both surface and underground,

appeared to have had a minimum effect on the success of patenting the land. The actual quality of the water is difficult to estimate especially in the case of groundwater. Lack of sufficient data on individual wells makes it impossible to draw any conclusions.

VEGETATION

Because most of the land in the study area is now under cultivation, it is difficult to assess accurately what type of vegetation was present in the pre-settlement period. Some indication of forest cover at the time of initial settlement can be derived from diaries and early surveyors' reports. The following excerpt is from a speech given by J.W. Judge recollecting the time he was a transit man working for the Edmonton Dunvegan and British Columbia Railway between 1912 and 1916.³

Next morning (December 30, 1911), we were on the line at daybreak and the location of railway from Mile 30 was underway.

(It must be remembered that Mile 0 was the starting point of the railway, located in Northwest Edmonton).

The settlement was thinning out here and it was only on rare occasions that we encountered anyone. Between Mile 45, where Picardville now stands, and Mile 52, where Westlock is located, the country had been cut over and burnt off. The remains were seen of the McInness' lumber camp, which had been abandoned when the timber became exhausted, halfway between Picardville and Westlock. From the stumps it was apparent there had once been a fine stand of spruce, but camp and forest were now the scene of desolation.

³Alberta Historical Review, Volume 6, number 3, 1958.

Although the brief quotation cited above is subjective (that is, a "fine" stand of spruce) it serves to indicate how one of the first settlers perceived his environment. Moss,⁴ seems to suggest that the groves of aspen poplar found in the Edmonton area, including the study area, were established in comparatively recent times. He goes on to suggest that the periodic burning of trees (observed by J.W. Judge) was one of the main deterrents to the establishment of trees. From a recent vegetation map (1965) published by the Alberta Department of Lands and Forests, most of the study area could be classified as aspen poplar although there is some evidence of spruce (black and white) and sphagnum moss. The vegetation as it is found today could not be classified as continuous since more than 50 per cent of the land is cultivated.

Some indication of the vegetative cover at or before the time of initial settlement of the study area can be derived from the notes of the first Dominion Land Surveyors describing the area. All of their early observations were compiled and published in book form.⁵ Later publications were published separately in individual books based on townships.

On the whole, the extreme eastern part of the study area was relatively heavily timbered according to the surveyor reports of 1882. Describing Township 56, Range 25, just north of the present town of Morinville, Simpson,⁶ a surveyor, states the "eastern part is heavily timbered

⁴Botanical Review, Vol. XXI, November, 1955, pp. 493-567.

⁵Descriptions of the Northwest Territories, Dominion of Canada, compiled and arranged from the field notes, plans and reports of the surveyors. Ottawa, 1886 (currently held at Alberta, Department of Highways, Surveys Branch).

⁶Loc. cit.

with spruce and poplar up to 14 inches in diameter. In the west, dense willow brush and poplar bluffs are found." Simpson's observations of another Township, namely 55, Range 25, also indicated a heavier timber cover along the eastern border of the study area. He stated that the timber in the eastern part of the township was large enough for building purposes while timber in the western part of the township was only suitable for fencing. The eastern part of the study area contained a variety of vegetative cover. In the southernmost portion of Township 55 the cover was said to be small willow and poplar, suitable only for fencing. Further northward, in Township 56, the cover was predominantly dense willow scrub. Township 58 showed signs of heavy burnt over areas. In the burnt over areas, scrub and small poplar had begun to grow. Poplar, cottonwood and small spruce were found in the middle part of the township. In the remaining two Townships, 59 and 60, the land is described as containing large tracts of scrubby prairie. Some evidence of green willow was also found but not large enough for building purposes.

The central part of the study area appears to have been less forested, at least in the sense of heavy timber. Simpson describes the land as he found it in 1883 as being "unbroken prairie with bluffs of willow and poplar". The west central area was covered with grey willows, small poplar bluffs and small scrub. Immediately north of Township 55, in Township 56, the land was covered with heavy poplar bluffs and grey willows among which was considerable quantity of fallen timber. Progressively moving northward the vegetative cover changed from unbroken prairie with scattered poplar to heavily timbered areas of poplar, spruce and tamarac. In Township 58, the vegetation was described as large

spruce, good for timber purposes as well as sections of heavy poplar and dense willow scrub in the southern portion of the Township.

The two most northerly Townships in the study area, 59 and 60, in Range 26, contained large areas of blue grass and poplar and willow in areas where the land had been severely burnt over.

The western part of the study area, like the extreme eastern part was again more heavily timbered. Spruce and poplar seemed to be the dominant species. The northerly part of the western sector contained some muskeg and much of the land was burnt over.

According to the surveyors' reports, much of the study area was during the initial settlement period relatively heavily timbered, especially in the peripheral areas. The central and eastern part were less heavily timbered, containing poplar bluffs and prairie scrub. Also in evidence were large areas of land that had been burnt over, resulting in spruce giving way to poplar and small willows. Spruce was more prevalent in the area before settlement than after the land had been brought under cultivation.

Although some parts of the land were more difficult to clear than others, settlers in the study area did not for the most part experience major difficulties as indicated by the relatively short time taken to patent the land (details to follow in Chapter IV).

SOILS

Soils are an integral part of an agricultural economy and as such must be treated with careful consideration. So often farmers attempted for years to grow a crop on land that was simply not suitable for crop raising, ultimately ending in failure and bitter disappointment.

Pioneers who settled the study area were blessed with very good quality soil, namely black and dark grey wooded. The black soil, or chernozem, covered the eastern part of the study area, whereas dark grey wooded soils predominated in the western part of the area. The parent material for these soils was mainly glacial till with slight variations in local areas. Although both soil types were suitable for mixed farming practices, the black soil was more extensively used for the raising of wheat.

The dark grey wooded soils of the western part of the study area are dominantly solonetzic soils, that is, a type of clay pan soil developed on saline parent material. Solonetzic soils are also found in the eastern part of the study area but much less frequent.

The actual composition of the soil is basically a loam or clay loam. The black loam soil are rich in organic matter and relatively unsusceptible to drought since the subsoil contains much clay. The grey wooded soils are poorer in organic matter and when developed on sandy material are more susceptible to drought.

The extent of the black soil is very much reflected in the Soil Capability for Agriculture ratings for the study area (Figure IV). The eastern part of the study area, the area of predominately chernozem soil, is given ratings of I and II which correspond to little or no significant limitation in the cultivating of crops. Most of the western part of the study area, occupied by dark grey wooded soils, is classified as Class III, requiring moderate to severe conservation practices.

STUDY AREA BY SOIL CAPABILITY CLASSES

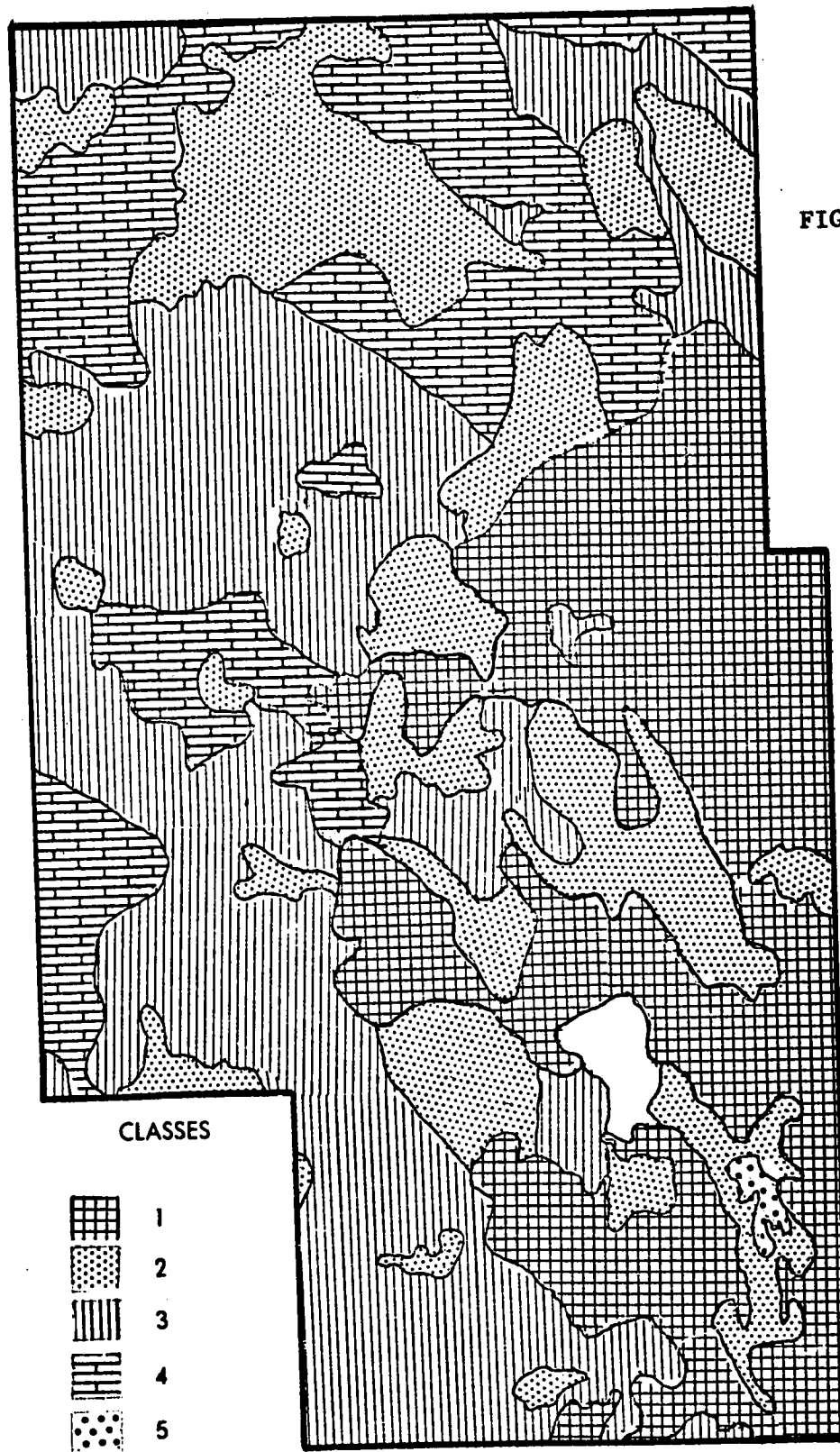


FIG. IV

Out of the total study area Classes I, II and III of the Soil Capability for Agriculture ratings account for over 80 per cent of the area (Figure IV). If soils were viewed independently of all other factors that influence successful farming, the study area would lend itself to almost ideal growing conditions. Since it has been shown that the soil in the study area is of superior quality, any unsuccessful attempt at homesteading is not likely to be a result of poor soil, rather a result of the individual's farming methods, climatic factors or small scale difficulties such as poor drainage.

Because most of the initial settlers who came out west were to a great extent ignorant of physical features such as soil types, vegetation, climate and topography, their perception of the land changed with time. Where land in the western prairies was first thought to be suitable only for ranching, after actual crop results the initial viewpoint often changed. It must be remembered that many initial agricultural practices were by trial and error. As farmers gradually became aware of their new environment, their methods of farming became more scientific.

Often, too, promotional companies attempting to attract new settlers failed to give conditions as they really were, rather they painted a picture of a land of "milk and honey". Although these companies did not tell outright lies, they did stress the more favourable aspects about the land.

Only after many years on the land did the settlers begin to appreciate conditions as they really were. If some arrived in the midst of winter, they were often so discouraged that they gave up the idea of farming on the spot. However, most settlers arrived at a favourable time

of year, spring, which gave them time to erect a suitable shelter and begin clearing the land before winter again set in.

Actual travel across the land was relatively easy in the study area. Topography offered little hindrance to travel except for the occasional fording of major rivers such as the Pembina. The main direction of settlement was from south to north as the frontier was gradually pushed back. The only real barrier to travel was the immensity of the land, remembering that the mode of travel was initially a horse and wagon until the railway came.

In regards to actual selection of homestead sites in the study area, it was found through examination of the surveyors' reports that the areas with the least amount of tree cover were selected first. Often, though, the initial homesteads were located close to woodland for building purposes. Even though the prospect of clearing the land of trees seemed an almost impossible task to the homesteader, he often forgot that the real hazard was not the tangible clearing of the trees but an intangible factor such as climate over which he had little control. However, the homesteader who cleared a tree covered area often felt a sense of accomplishment which renewed his desire to farm as opposed to one who settled a treeless plain in which the results of his success had to be measured on a long term basis, that is, crop results.

Whatever the physical features offered, both positive and negative, the final measure of success rested with the individual. His perseverance often meant success or failure, regardless of the seemingly hostile environment. Those settlers coming from comparable areas such as the Russian Ukraine, parts of Scandinavia and parts of Eastern Canada pro-

bably found the transition less of a hardship than those coming from a completely different environment, such as Spain or Greece.

Discussion of the physical features of the area will be followed by an examination of the extent to which these contributed to the problems encountered by the homesteaders.

CHAPTER III

INFLUENCE OF GOVERNMENT AND RAILWAY ON SETTLEMENT

After the Hudson's Bay Company relinquished Rupert's Land to the Dominion Government in 1870, settlement proceeded at a much faster rate since the Hudson's Bay Company openly discouraged settlement while it had control over the land. Both the Dominion Government and the Canadian Pacific Railway Company implemented settlement promotional schemes.

The Dominion Lands Act of 1872 was based on the American Homestead Act of 1862. This Act stated that Western Canada would be divided into units called townships. Each township consisted of 36 sections of one square mile each. After the surveying had been completed, the sections were numbered from 1 to 36. Number 1 was located in the southeast corner of the township and the remaining 35 sections were numbered alternating from east to west and vice versa ending with section 36 in the northeast corner of the township (see below). Under the agreement signed by the

			North		
31	32	33	34	35	36
30	29	28	27	26	25
19	20	21	22	23	24
18	17	16	15	14	13
7	8	9	10	11	12
6	5	4	3	2	1
			South		

Hudson's Bay Company and the Dominion Government, the former was granted right of ownership over sections 8 and 26 in each township. The Dominion Government controlled all the remaining even-numbered sections. The Canadian Pacific Railway was granted all the odd-numbered sections south of the North Saskatchewan River with the exception of numbers 11 and 19 which were designated school lands. Since the Dominion Government had no power over land owned by the Hudson's Bay Company and the Canadian Pacific Railway, these lands were sold privately and as such are not recorded in the Homestead Files.

The completion of the transcontinental railway in 1885 supplied the necessary link which facilitated relative ease of access to the west from the east. This is also reflected by the number of settlers coming west, as shown by the increase in population (Table VI).

TABLE VI
POPULATION

	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921
N.W.T.	-	-	-	20,129	6,507	8,143
Alberta	48,000	56,446	98,967	73,022	374,295	588,454
Saskatchewan	-	-	-	91,279	492,432	757,510
Manitoba	25,228	62,260	152,506	255,211	461,394	610,510

Source: Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, Census 1951, Volume 1, Population, Table 1.

As the table suggests, few settlers came west before the railway as compared with the number that came after the transcontinental rail link was

joined in 1885. Before the Canadian Pacific Railway track was completed, large promotional schemes were already underway in Europe, Great Britain and the United States. Settlers were encouraged to come out west and begin a new life. Thus, in the decade following 1881 over 42,000 migrants came west, not including Manitoba or British Columbia. This figure increased fourfold in the next decade and reached remarkable proportions between 1901 and 1921. The first two decades of this century saw almost 400,000 migrants come to Alberta alone, largely due to the efforts of companies such as the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Dominion Government.

Although the promotional schemes advertised by both the Dominion Government and the Canadian Pacific Railway attracted many settlers, they were not always strictly honest and truthful. The often quoted "testimonies" of those already settled here or those who had visited Canada, rarely told the whole truth. In a book published as a service to intending immigrants by the Canadian Pacific Railway and sanctioned by the Government of Canada entitled A Guide Book Containing Information for Intending Settlers¹ a very optimistic and bright picture about agriculture in Alberta was presented.

The Canadian Pacific Railway Company during the past season (1884) caused a series of experimental farms to be tried without any special selection of site, the places being chosen for convenience near the railway stations, which are placed at certain fixed distances from each other. The results of these experiments in every case, without excep-

¹Government of Canada, Department of Agriculture, A Guide Book Containing Information for Intending Settlers, 1885, Ottawa.

tion, was luxuriant crops of wheat and other grains, and vegetables of every kind put down.

The above cited quotation seemed to imply that wherever one chose to settle, the future would be guaranteed. Numerous other quotations like the one above were published and, regardless of the methods used, they were an effective means to an end, that is, settlement of the West.

In its formative years, the Canadian Pacific Railway was somewhat reluctant to build branch lines into Northwestern Canada, including the study area, partially due to lack of finances. The Company argued that settlement and immigration into the Northwest was "too scattered and too uncertain to justify the projection of enough branch lines in that territory".² However, the Canadian Pacific did state that should settlement and immigration become more stable in the Northwest, branch lines would be built under one condition, some form of guarantee of land in the north. The Dominion Government was persuaded by the Canadian Pacific and other private companies to reserve land in the north for railway land grants. This reserve, between 52 and 54 degrees of latitude and 104 and 116 degrees longitude, contained valuable agricultural land. It was estimated that the odd-number sections in this reserve would amount to some 19,000,000 acres, although a large amount would be unfit for settlement.

The study area, although not wholly contained within this reserve, is at least partially included as far north as the present town of Legal.

²Hedges, James B., The Federal Railway Land Subsidy Policy of Canada, Harvard University Press, 1934.

Thus in the 1880s, the Canadian Pacific was assured of land in Northern Alberta. By the Dominion Government's action of reserving land for the railway, the future of branch lines was secured as the steel rails slowly progressed northward. Settlement in Western Canada, and particularly the northern areas, would not have progressed as rapidly had the railway not been granted land only along its main line.

The land owned by the Canadian Pacific Railway was sold to private individuals at reasonable rates. The cheapest price the land sold for was \$2.50 an acre and increased as the quality of land increased. In the study area, in what is now the Westlock area, the price of the land was generally \$5.00 an acre,³ in 1903. An added bonus provided by the railway was a rebate of \$1.25 an acre for every acre cultivated within four years.⁴

The need for the railway in the study area is reflected in an interview with Miss Daphne Garrison, whose family settled near Westlock in 1903. Describing the need for transportation of agricultural produce she said, "There was no use in trying to raise crops on our excellent land in the area. To haul grain 50 miles to Edmonton elevators and probably to have it refused on the particular day of arrival, was a painful experience for the few who did so before 1911 (the date the railway reached the present town of Westlock). Cattle could be driven in, not without expense. There was no sale there for dairy products or

³Pers. Comm. with Miss Daphne Garrison, an old-timer of the Westlock District.

⁴Government of Canada, Department of Agriculture, A Guide Book Containing Information for Intending Settlers, 1885, Ottawa.

practically none. Our few storekeepers did buy farm butter, but only for local resale. It was of doubtful quality at best. So with eggs and chickens if they escaped the coyotes. Hogs had to be hauled to market and when the distance was 50 miles over roads little better than trails there could be hardly any profit, often a loss."

In 1908 the railway reached the town of Morinville. Thus, for three years, the farmers of the study area had at least a shipping point even though it was still 30 miles away from the northern limit of the area. It was a better situation but it still did not change the local economy much. The settlers still raised products primarily for their own use or local sale.

When the railway (Edmonton Dunvegan and British Columbia line, E.D. & B.C.) reached the present site of Westlock in 1911, changes began to occur. Local hamlets, not located on the railway line, tended to disappear.⁵ One of these hamlets, four miles east of Westlock and six miles west of Clyde on the present Highway 18, disappeared because the rail line did not come through the centre. The post office, blacksmith shop and church were moved to Westlock, leaving no evidence today that there ever was a settlement at that particular site.

Whereas formerly Clyde was the centre of the district, Westlock assumed dominance when the railroad came through. Although Clyde was located on a railway line too (the Athabasca Line, Canadian National Railways) the surrounding land to the north and east was rougher and less productive.⁶ The land surrounding Westlock was generally of better

⁵Pers. Comm. with Miss Daphne Garrison, old-timer and long-time resident of the area.

⁶Loc. cit.

quality and thus the farmers began to look to Westlock as a service centre. One factor that assured Westlock of dominance over Clyde, was the establishment of a creamery in that centre. Thus, the surrounding farmers brought their dairy products to Westlock and since they sold their produce there it seemed inevitable that they began to buy their goods in Westlock also. Slowly, this centre began to grow and reached town status in 1916. Being overshadowed by Westlock, Clyde, the older settlement of the two, began to decline in importance until it exerted virtually no influence over the hinterland at all.

It is interesting to note that the railway, despite its impact on settlement in the study area, was a hindrance to the regional development of the area at first. When the Dominion Government granted some 25,000,000 acres to the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, much of this land lay idle for a period of time. Relating specifically to the study area, much of the railway land did not contribute to the prosperity of the area simply because it was untaxable land. The Provincial Government attempted to have a tax levied on railway lands in 1915 but to no avail.⁷ In fact, the case was brought before the Privy Council but was defeated. The law stated that the only time railway lands could be taxed was after the aforementioned lands were "designated", that is, sold to private companies or individuals. In the Westlock district, some land was sold by the Canadian Pacific Railway to the Western Canada Land Company which was subject to normal taxes.

⁷Premier's Office, Attorney-General Department, Provincial Archives, Item Number 200-18, Box 7, 1921-1934.

Soon after, the railway began to notice a growing need for land by homesteaders coming north. As the land was sold to private settlers, the region began to develop as a community interested in producing a solid agricultural base for a livelihood. Because the cash crop of the study area was wheat, some mode of transportation had to be utilized to ship the products. Thus, those wheat farmers who misjudged where in fact the rail line did run, often found themselves either forced to move closer to the tracks or accept having to haul the grain over a larger distance. The Canadian Pacific Railway provided transportation services in a rather offhand manner. The initial route chosen for the railway was designed to serve the lumber industry, rather than the agricultural markets. Initially, the railway needed freight producing revenue which the homesteader, having only a few acres in production at that time, did not provide. The lumber industry, however, meant a source of revenue which the railway was quick to realize. Thus, the rail line followed the route along which was the most abundant timber. Even today, Chisholm still serves as a centre of wood production. It was by accident, then, that the route chosen by the railway company coincided with a route well suited to the agricultural industry. The homesteader did benefit greatly from the railway as did settlement generally, not only through land grants and transportation services, but also as a source of employment in the off-season.

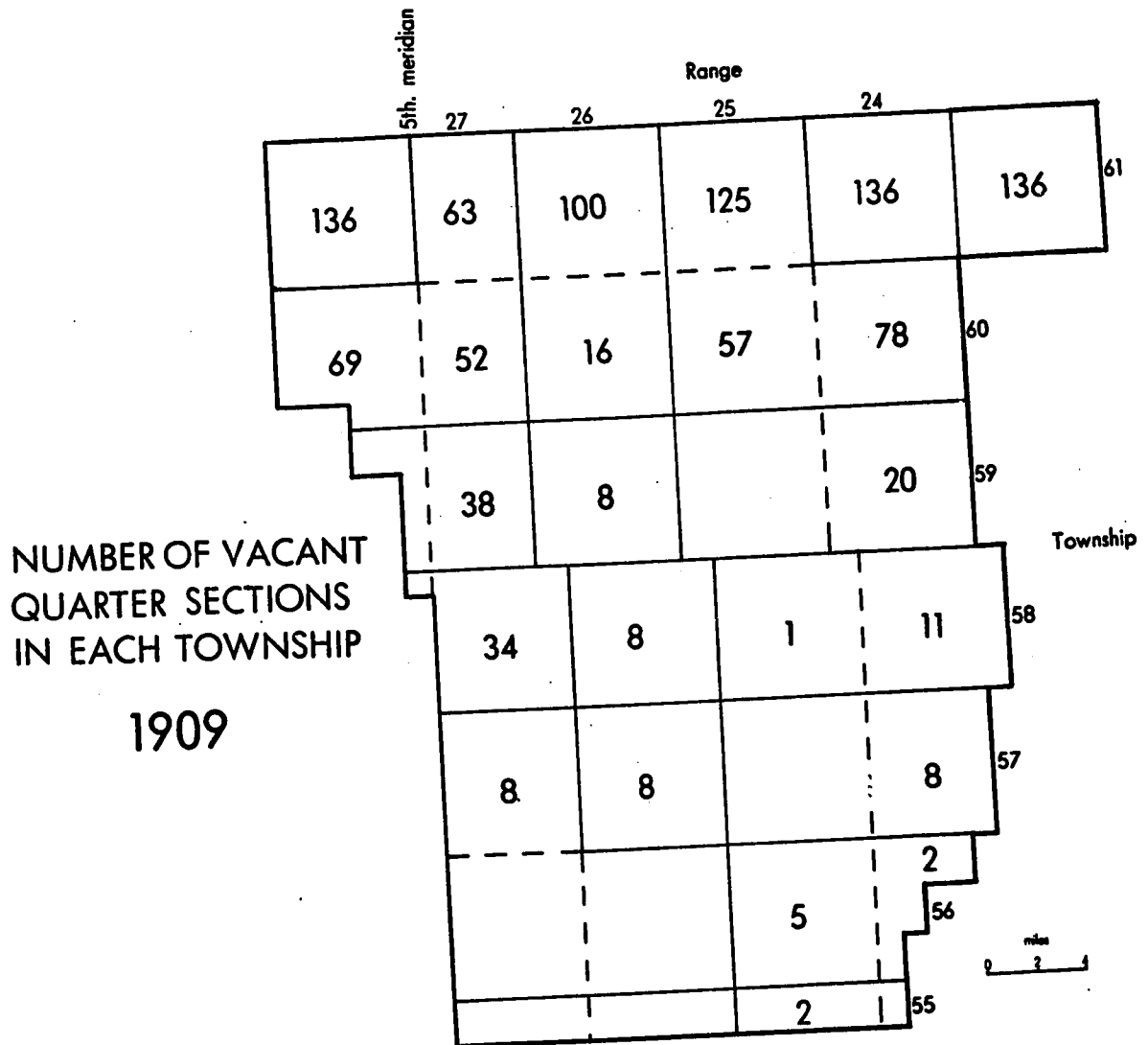
Department of Interior maps of three periods in time, namely 1909, 1916 and 1929 (Figures V, VI and VII respectively) show the gradual up-take of the land. The maps indicate all the unoccupied and surveyed agricultural lands, whether odd-numbered or even-numbered sections,

that were not reserved or had not been disposed of, which were, therefore, open to entry for homesteading. In 1909 (Figure V) the northern limit of intensive settlement appears to have been at Township 61. The Westlock area seems to have been taken up earlier than the land to the west or east. This might have been due in part to the anticipated route of the railway. The Morinville area is almost wholly settled by 1909. Settlement along the Athabasca line, Canadian National Railways, also indicates the preference of settlers to be located near a rail line. In 1916 (Figure VI) five years after the railway had reached the town of Westlock, the number of available vacant quarter sections was considerably less. The area around Westlock was gradually being filled up with the advent of the railroad. Whereas prior to the coming of the railway the land south of Westlock still had vacant quarter sections only two now remain. Also, land north of Westlock was rapidly being taken up. Thirteen years later, in 1929, (Figure VII) all the land in the study area was either occupied or at least sold. The number of available quarter sections north of Westlock was even more limited as more settlers came north. Gradually the boundary of continuous settlement pushed north, particularly along the railway lines.

Based on the findings above, the railway did much to influence both the general economy and the settlers although it often did so with other purposes in mind.

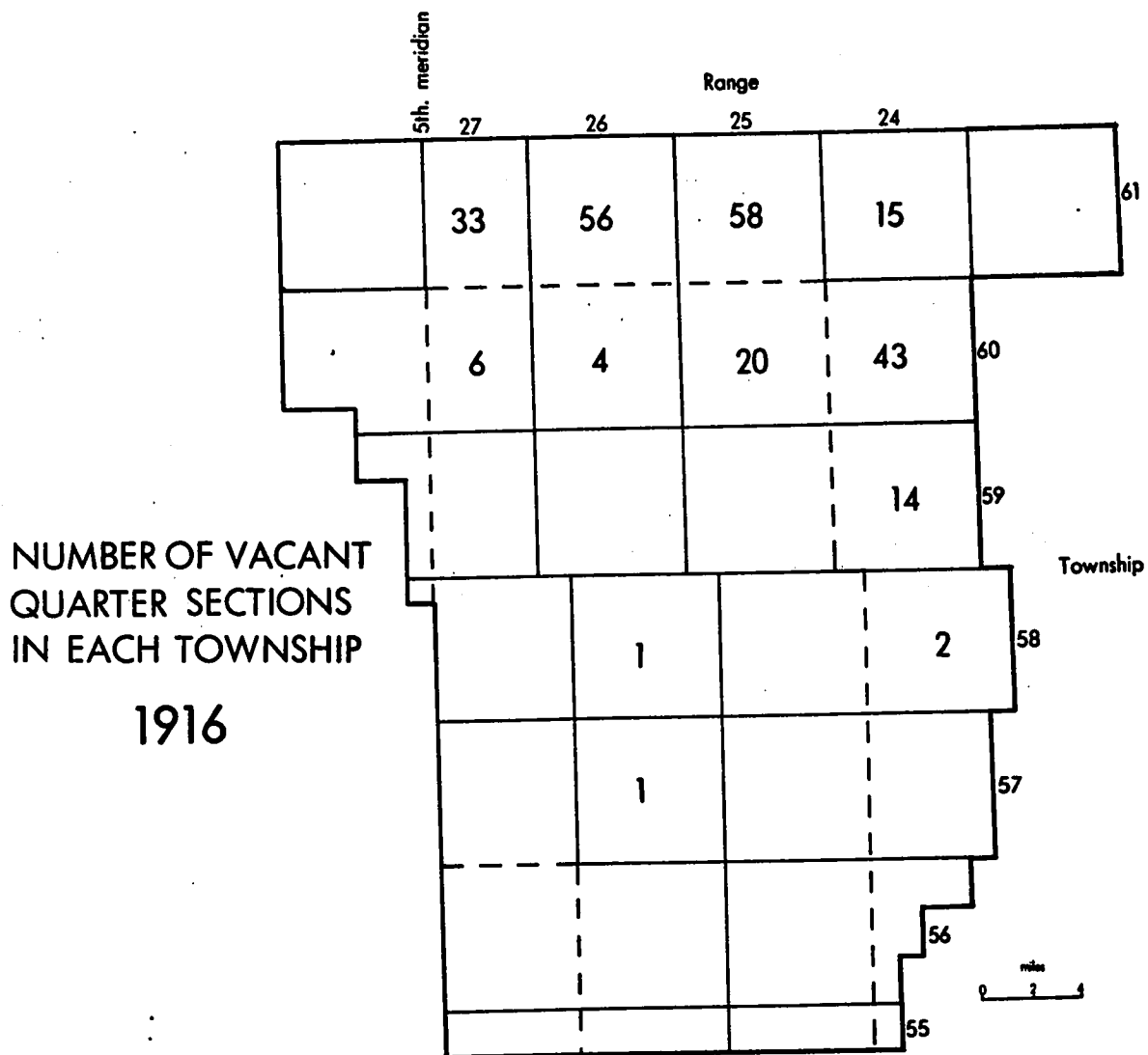
Although the preceding pages have dealt mainly with the influence of the railroad on settlement, the influence of the Government must not be under-estimated. The mere fact that the Dominion Government granted the railways tracts of land is a sound basis for judging the importance

FIG. V.



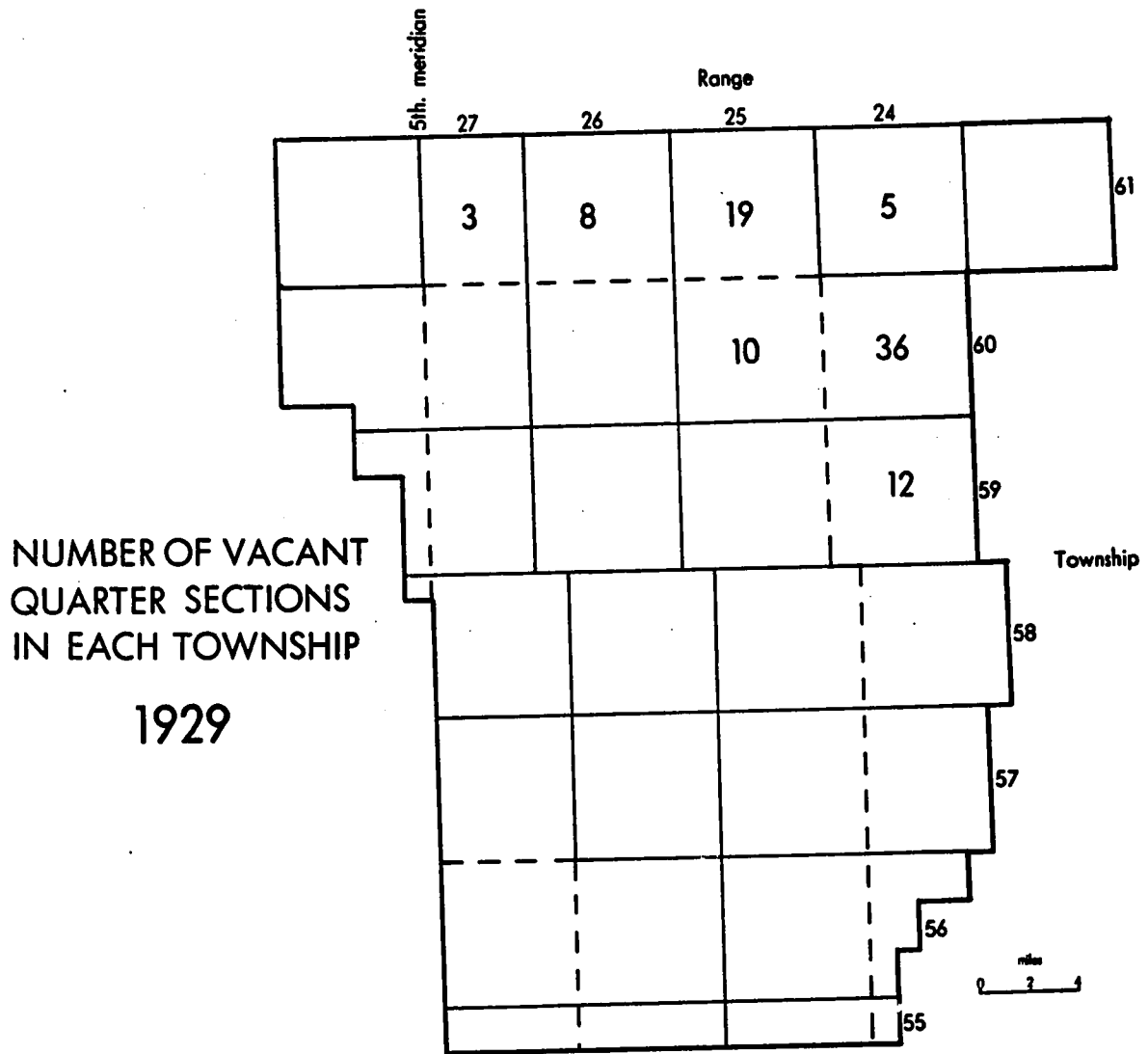
Source: Canada, Department of the Interior

FIG. VI



Source: Canada, Department of the Interior

FIG. VII



Source: Canada, Department of the Interior

of Government intervention.

The direct influence of the Dominion Government regarding its Homestead Policy has already been discussed in some detail. The Dominion Government's initial purpose for implementing the granting of land for homesteading purposes was to settle a country whose size staggered the imagination. In order to consolidate Canada into one country people were needed. Slowly but surely, as the country filled up, more and more concessions were granted by the Dominion Government, especially in relaxing the relatively strict homestead regulations. Although the regulations regarding homesteads were detailed quite specifically, often the individual homesteader could appeal these under special circumstances. If the crop year was particularly bad owing to adverse weather conditions or a death occurred in the family or a crisis, such as when World War I broke out, regulations were dropped and the homesteader was granted additional time to fulfill his obligations.

Generally speaking the regulations governing land grants and land settlement were more relaxed under the jurisdiction of the Dominion Government than under the later jurisdiction of the Alberta Government. This can be explained in part by the Dominion Government's aim to settle an empty country and to attract as many people as possible. In doing so regulations were sometimes relaxed but it is not the writer's intention to imply that the Dominion Government was negligent in its duty to promote rapid settlement. Whereas under Dominion regulations anyone could file for a homestead if he intended to become a Canadian citizen or was a British subject, this regulation was changed when the Alberta Government took control over land regulations and stipulated that those

people wishing to apply for homestead land must have resided in Alberta for not less than five years. This was later relaxed somewhat and the residence requirement was reduced to three years in the Province. The stricter regulations of homestead settlement under the Alberta Government can be partly explained by the fact that large areas of land were no longer available for homesteading.

Homesteads came under Provincial control in July of 1931 and many minor changes came about in the regulations. Now a person wishing to raise stock might do so but in addition to keeping the stock on the land in each year for five years, he had to fence the whole quarter section and have suitable buildings erected on the land for the accommodation of his stock.

The Alberta Government allocated specific tracts of land where homesteading was permitted. In order to avoid over-crowding in any one particular area, especially the southern part of the Province, the Government encouraged homesteading in the central and northern part of the Province. Thus, those vacant quarter sections remaining in the study area gradually began to fill up as the frontier was pushed further north.

World War I caused some upsets in homesteading and the Government implemented several restrictions. Western homesteads could not be given to Germans, Austrians, Bulgarians or Turks.⁸ So-called enemy aliens were barred from applying for homestead entry but the real effect of this action was never really felt in the study area since

⁸Athabasca Herald, December 28, 1916.

very few Germans and their sympathizers settled in the area during the War.

It is difficult to measure the relative importance of both the railway and the Dominion Government on settlement in the study area. Initially, the Dominion Government opened up the possibility of owning land at a cheap rate through its Homestead Policy. Subsequently, the railway aided further in offering land for sale and offering transportation facilities. Thus, both agencies played an important role in settling the West.

CHAPTER IV

EFFECTS OF ETHNIC ORIGIN AND OTHER SELECTED VARIABLES ON SETTLEMENT

The Canadian West attracted a large number of immigrants from many countries and became a "melting pot" of many nationalities. Since promotional schemes advertising land in Canada were primarily directed towards Europe, it was logical that most settlers were either directly European or of European descent. More settlers of British origin came directly to Alberta from Britain as opposed to settlers of French origin who came not directly from France, but rather from Quebec and the Maritimes.

As the prospective homesteaders came west, they brought with them many of their cultural traits. Initially, and to some extent today, those people of similar ethnic backgrounds tended to settle in close proximity to each other. At times conscious efforts were made by land promoters to encourage group settlement whereas at other times small groups or individuals would congregate at one site and gradually attract more and more people of similar ethnicity and in such a way form a large group settlement.

In order to ascertain whether in fact there was a difference among the various cultural groups in regard to settlement of the study area, several observations were made using such factors as marital status, age, family size, birthplace, cost of housing and soil types.

EFFECT OF HOMESTEADER'S BIRTHPLACE

In attempting to isolate the various influential factors that might have had an effect on the measure of success of the homesteader, it was decided to first analyze the effect of the homesteader's birthplace in relation to the success of patenting the land. If, in fact, it could be shown that there was an effect, one could suggest reasons why one particular group had more or less success than another ethnic group.

In the study area there are basically two main cultural groups represented, the French and the British (Table VII). Most of those settlers listing Canada as their birthplace were of French or French-Canadian descent judging by their names. Those listing the United States as their birthplace appeared to be of British origin although it must be noted that among them were probably some Scandinavians and Germans who had anglicized their names. Also, some homesteaders of British descent came not directly from Britain but rather from Ontario and as such are classified under Canada.

The southern and eastern part of the study area, the Morinville district, was primarily settled by French speaking peoples (Figure VIII). Although no recognized pre-planned group of French settlers came to the Morinville district, many were attracted there solely because there were other French speaking settlers already there.

The northern part of the study area, near what is now Westlock, was mainly settled by those of British origin, either directly from Britain or from Ontario and the United States. Based on interviews with old-timers of the district many of the immigrants, although born in Britain, spent at least some time in Ontario before coming west.

LOCATION OF SAMPLE QUARTER SECTIONS BY ETHNIC ORIGIN

FIG. VIII

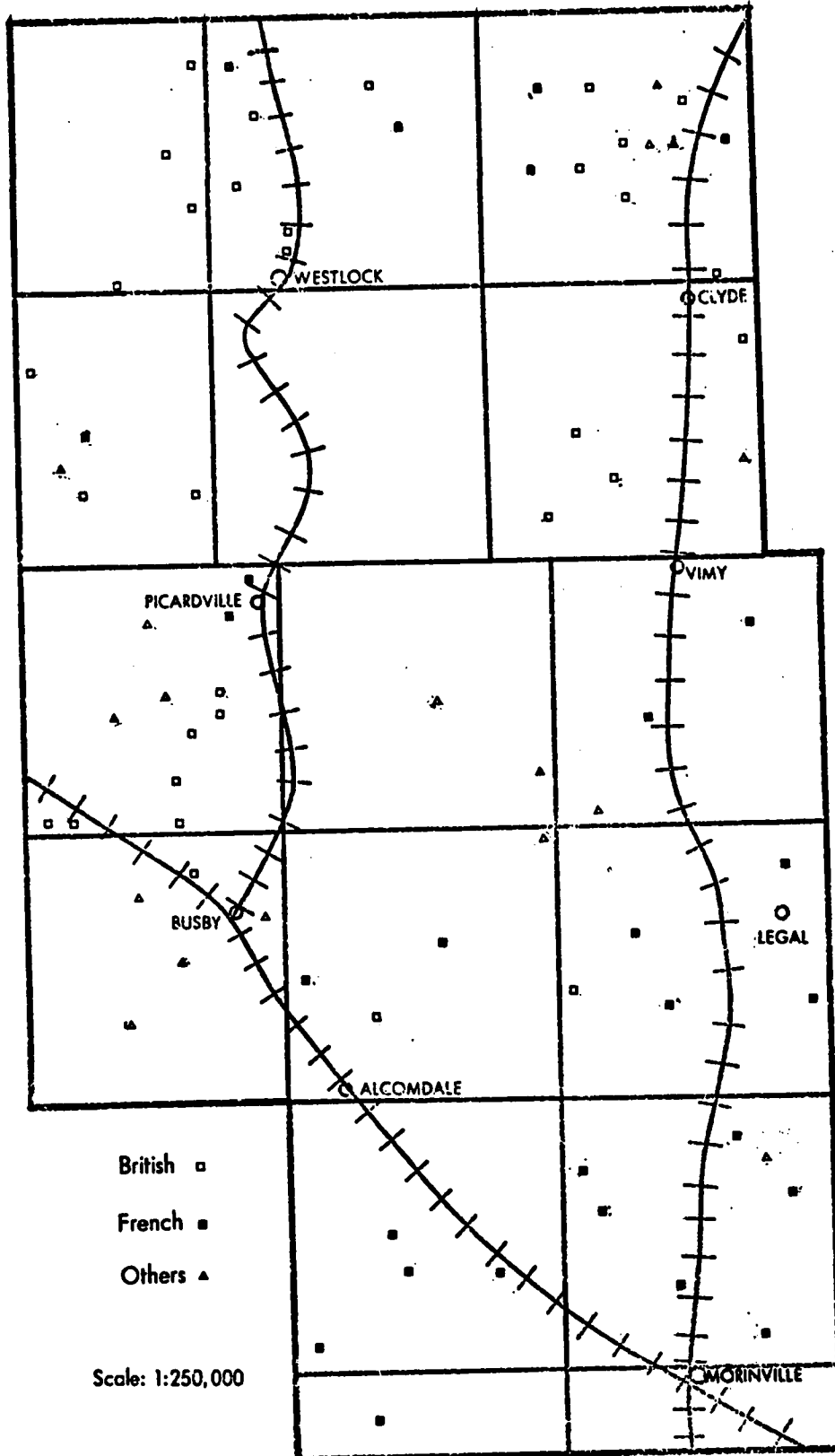


TABLE VII
 FREQUENCY OF PLACES OF BIRTH BY HOMESTEADERS
 IN STUDY AREA*
 (USING 74 QUARTER SECTIONS)

Place of Birth	Absolute Frequency	Percentage
Britain	17	23.0
France	4	5.4
Canada	26 (20 of whom are French-Canadian)	35.1
United States	15	20.3
Germany	10	13.5
Sweden	2	2.7
	74	100.0

* Note: The source for this table and all subsequent tables is the Homestead Files unless otherwise specified.

Table VIII shows the number of attempts made to patent the land before the latest attempt proved successful. Slightly over half of the quarter sections in the sample had never been attempted before. About one-third of the quarter sections had been attempted once before with no success. The remainder of the quarter sections were tried twice and three times before being successfully patented. It is unfortunate that, with some exceptions, the Homestead Files do not reveal the nature of the unsuccessful attempts at patenting the land. One such exception may prove interesting in seeing why three settlers gave up before a French-Canadian settler successfully patented the land. The file reveals that the first homesteader on the particular quarter section abandoned the land in 1900 because "the land is too swampy and too wooded". The second attempt was made in 1906 and that particular homesteader's reason for abandonment was "this quarter section is very heavily timbered and has quite a number of sloughs". The third unsuccessful attempt was made in 1908 when the particular homesteader claimed, "I wish to locate further north". The land was finally successfully patented in 1914. It is difficult to assess why in fact three settlers were unsuccessful whereas the fourth seemingly made no mention of the difficulties in clearing the land. This particular quarter section was on Class I soil which may have had an effect on the final success in cultivating the land. It is not valid to draw any conclusions from this one isolated example but it does serve to illustrate the reasons why some settlers did not patent the land.

TABLE VIII
 NUMBER OF ATTEMPTS TO PATENT LAND PREVIOUS TO THE
 SUCCESS OF THE HOMESTEADERS IN SAMPLE BY 1915
 (74 QUARTER SECTIONS)

Birthplace of Patentee	No previous attempts	1 previous attempt	2 previous attempts	3 previous attempts	Totals
Britain	10	3	-	-	13
France	-	1	-	-	1
Canada	22	15	2	2	41
United States	5	5	1	1	12
Germany	3	1	-	-	4
Sweden	1	2	-	-	3
TOTALS	41	27	3	3	74

Part of the reason why Canadians and Americans might have had a slight advantage over Western Europeans is their familiarity and ease of adaptability to a land and climate that were quite unlike those many Europeans had experienced. This again is only speculation since the Homestead Files do not reveal this information. There does not appear to be any clear cut evidence that those from one particular birthplace were any more successful than others although those of French-Canadian and British-Canadian descent may have had a slight edge over other ethnic groups. Some may have had more problems in adapting than others but their ultimate success in patenting the land was the same. The difficulty lies in the fact that the Homestead Files deal only with the successful patents and as such reveal little or no information about the unsuccessful attempts other than listing the number of unsuccessful tries.

EFFECTS OF HOMESTEADER'S FAMILY SIZE

It is difficult to theorize whether a large family would be an advantage or a disadvantage to a homesteader. One could argue that if a homesteader had a large family, he would have at least some children old enough to help on the farm. However, one could also argue that the necessity to provide food, shelter and clothing for a large family could prove costly. Thus, in the initial stages of the farm, the disadvantages of a large family might balance out the advantages. In later stages, as the children grew older, there would be an obvious advantage in minimizing labour costs. Of course, if the homesteader had sufficient capital to begin with, the costs of providing for a large family would

not be as critical for him as for one who had little capital.

In order to find out whether family size had an effect on the success or failure to patent the land, the sample of 74 quarter sections was analyzed. Table IX shows the percentage of success and failure in relation to family size. From the results it can be seen that the majority of homesteaders were single with no dependents at the time of patenting the land. Out of the total random sample of 74 quarter sections, 71 per cent of the homesteaders were successful in patenting the land. One reason perhaps for a relatively higher number of instances of failures to patent among the single homesteaders was that the single homesteader, having no dependents, was free to pack up and go if another opportunity presented itself elsewhere. Those with families to take care of, were more restricted in their ease of movement.

The reasons why the percentage of success among homesteaders with a family is relatively high is not necessarily due to any special farming skills attributed to the individual farmer, rather he is more liable to "stick it out" longer for the sake of providing a home for his family.

Closely associated with family size is the size and cost of housing in relation to size of family. It was found that the larger families did not necessarily have larger houses, and as a result they did not spend more money on a house than did the single homesteader. Most of the houses were a frame type as opposed to the less expensive log cabins. The average cost per house was roughly between one hundred and three hundred dollars for all family sizes (Table X).

TABLE IX
 PATENT SUCCESSES IN RELATION TO FAMILY SIZE
 (IN PER CENT)
 (USING 74 QUARTER SECTIONS)

Family Size	Frequency of Family Size	Frequency of Success	Frequency of Failure
Single person	61.8	38.1	23.7
Man and wife	10.3	7.2	3.1
Man, wife and 1 child	6.2	6.2	-
Man, wife and 2 children	7.2	6.2	1.0
Man, wife and 3 children	6.2	6.2	-
Man, wife and 4 children	3.1	2.1	1.0
Man, wife and more than 4 children	5.2	5.2	-
TOTAL	100.0	71.2	28.8

TABLE X
 COST OF HOUSING IN RELATION TO FAMILY SIZE
 (USING 74 QUARTER SECTIONS)

COST OF HOUSE IN DOLLARS	FAMILY SIZE						
	Single	Man & Wife	M, W and 1 child	M, W and 2 children	M, W and 3 children	M, W and 4 children	M, W and more than 4 children
1,000	xx		x				
900							
800	x						
700							
600		x		x			
500	xx				x		
400	x		x				x
300	x xx xxxxxxxx	x		x	xx		x
200	xxxxxxx xxxx xxx	xxx	x	x	xx		
100	xxxx xxx xxx	x	x			x	x
	x x xx x	x		x		x	

The cost of house construction in the study area was generally lower than in the southern part of Alberta.¹ In a sample of homestead housing in the Lethbridge-Medicine Hat area, the average cost was found to be \$577.00 per house. This was probably due to the absence of readily available lumber in Southern Alberta as opposed to the more forested area in Northern Alberta. Also, in the study area much of the lumber was farm-sawn, which reduced the cost considerably.

After housing and other improvements had been taken care of, there was the added expense of farm equipment, stock, seeds and basic food items. The Alberta Government published a list with the cost of the above named items needed for a family of five.²

1	14" plow stubble and breaker bottoms	\$ 41.00
1	12 x 16 disc harrow, trees and yoke	68.00
1	3½ x 4 farm truck, trees and yoke	59.50
3	sections diamond drag harrow, necessary feed for chickens, hogs and cow for a few months	20.00
12	chickens	9.00
2	horses (\$75.00 per team)	75.00
1	set farm harness	27.50
1	milk cow	60.00
2	70 lb. hogs (brood sows)	10.00

¹Mallett, R., Settlement Process and Land Use Change - Lethbridge-Medicine Hat Area. Unpublished M.A. Thesis, 1971.

²Box 5, item #62. Premier's Office Files, Provincial Archives, 1915.

1200 lbs. flour for one year supply	\$ 24.00
400 lbs. dressed pork, six months supply	24.00
12 sacks of potatoes for one year supply	12.00
160 lbs. of sugar	8.00
allowance for tea, coffee, spice, etc. for one year supply	<u>15.00</u>
	\$453.00

Taking all the expenses involved in setting up a homestead, it would appear that a settler would need a minimum of \$1,000.00. Thus, the homesteader coming west was by no means a poor person, since such a person would be unable to cover all the expenses. Many times a settler's basic capital was added to by winter employment away from the farm. During winter months when there was little or nothing to do on the farm, homesteaders would seek employment in the cities or with the railway in order to supplement their often meager income during the first few years on the land. It is often believed and wrongly so, that the homesteader started out with virtually nothing, which, judging by the foregoing observations, simply could not be so. To give some indication of the price the farmers received for their wheat in their first years on the land which accounted at least for some of their income, the following results were noted:

WHEAT

<u>Crop Year</u>	<u>Average farm price (\$ per bushel)</u>
1906	0.65
1907	0.92
1908	0.67
1909	0.73
1910	0.74
1911	0.62
1912	0.54
1913	0.61
1914	0.91
1915	0.88
1916	1.33
1917	1.74
1918	1.92
1919	2.31
1920	1.52

Source: A Historical series of Agricultural Statistics for Alberta, Alberta Department of Agriculture, Publication Number 850.

AGE OF HOMESTEADERS

One would expect pioneers and their families to be young and in the most productive years of their lives. In part, this was found to be true. In the random sample of 74 quarter sections, the average age of the settler at the time of entry was found to be 33 years. There was virtually no difference in age based on birthplace. Thus, the

pioneer family, in terms of age, was a very homogeneous group, regardless of ethnic origin. In the sample, despite a large number of pioneers in their twenties, a surprisingly high number were in their thirties and forties. The oldest homesteader in the sample was 69 years old, an old age to begin breaking land and cultivating crops. The youngest was found to be 18 years old. These figures compare very favourably with a study done in the Athabasca district, some 50 miles northeast of the northern part of the study area.³ In that study on pioneer homesteading the average age was found to be 34.5 years, with a range from 18 to 62 years old.

Age, per se, does not appear to have been an important determinant of success or failure in patenting a homestead. Although it is not revealed in the Homestead Files, one might argue that the older pioneers could have had some previous farming experience, whereas the younger ones would have had to rely on their exuberance and a desire to set up a farm in order to be able to start a family as soon as possible. Again, this is speculation only and cannot be proven.

Based on the fact that approximately 60 per cent of the homesteaders in the sample were single and that the average age was 33 years, many of the settlers married at a relatively old age. The ratio of married men to single men did not vary greatly with country of origin. The reason why men tended to marry later in life is perhaps a reflection of the need to offer the prospective bride a reasonable home and a comfortable

³Stone, D., The Process of Rural Settlement in the Athabasca Area, Alberta, Unpublished M.A. Thesis, 1970.

life. Often the homestead was the answer to this need.

LENGTH OF TIME FROM ENTRY TO PATENT

The first years on the land were often very lonely and heartbreaking for the settler, especially the single one. To survive the long cold winters it often took more than just perseverance, it took a great deal of faith and stubbornness also. Times were hard on the prairies and the feelings of many homesteaders were summed up by W.C. Pollard.⁴

Life on the homesteads was filled with hardships mingled with mirth, and one can readily imagine the struggle necessary to obtain the elements of an education beyond that given by the public schools. The poverty on the frontier is shared by all and is not that humiliating poverty that is witnessed where there is class distinction, and, consequently manhood or womanhood is not degraded.

Many of the settlers perhaps had an idea what conditions were like in Western Canada but none had actually witnessed or experienced these conditions. Although some may have been acquainted with clearing land, they did not realize the length of the winter, which hampered clearing operations, but felling less so. Also, many of the homesteaders initially had no mechanized form of machinery and all the clearing had to be done by hand with the aid of a team of horses to pull out the stumps. Gradually, as tractors became more commonplace, the land could be cleared at a much faster rate. Based on interviews with old-timers in the study area, land could be cleared by hand at an average of 5-19 acres per year,

⁴Pollard, W.C., Life on the Frontier, a sketch of the Parry Sound Colonies that settled near Edmonton, N.W.T. in the early nineties. (No date, available in University of Alberta Cameron Library).

depending on the vegetation cover. Thus, based on that rate, it could possibly take a homesteader up to 32 years to clear all his land although this was not found in the study area. Often, the homesteaders would cooperatively clear large sections of land so that each one would not have to wait the maximum period to crop their land.

To illustrate the average length of time taken from date of entry to date of patent a sample of 115 quarter sections was taken*. The dates of entry were classified under six time periods, each period covering six years. The first homestead entry in the sample was in 1891 and consequently this date was chosen as a starting point (Table XI). In each case only the date of entry is classified, not the date of patent. The date of patent was used solely to find out the average length of time from entry to patent by time periods.

Table XI is initially somewhat misleading. There appears to be a distinct break between the time period 1891-1896 and 1897-1902. The drop in the average number of years to patent the land from 6.6 to 4.1 years was in actual fact not as drastic as it seemed. The relatively high figure of 6.6 years is due to the extra long time taken by five homesteaders during 1891-1896 to patent their land. These five homesteaders took an average of 12.6 years to patent their land whereas the

* Note: Sample of 115 quarter sections includes both the sample of 74 quarter sections as well as 41 quarter sections (out of the original sample of 198) which are not listed in the Homestead Files but are listed at the Alberta Department of Lands and Forests. Those listed at the Department of Lands and Forests contain only dates of entry and dates of patent.

TABLE XI

AVERAGE NUMBER OF YEARS TAKEN FROM

DATE OF ENTRY TO DATE OF PATENT

(USING 115 QUARTER SECTIONS)

	1891-1896	1897-1902	1903-1908	1909-1914	1915-1920
Total number of quarter sections entered:	20	14	50	25	6
Average length of time to patent:	6.6 years	4.1 years	5.4 years	5.5 years	5.3 years
Total number of quarter sections entered:					
Average length of time to patent:					

other 13 homesteaders during this period took only 5.1 years to patent their land. Unfortunately the Homestead Files do not reveal the reasons why five of the settlers took such a long time to clear and crop their land.

SOILS

Soil type was not a significant factor in length of time taken to patent the land, as indicated in Table XII.

TABLE XII
AVERAGE NUMBER OF YEARS TAKEN TO
PATENT THE LAND BY SOIL CLASS
(USING 74 QUARTER SECTIONS)

Class I:	5.7 years
Class II:	6.3 years
Class III:	5.1 years
Class IV:	5.3 years

In order to find out whether soil class could be correlated with ethnic groups, the following results were noted. Those settlers of French origin accounted for about 61 per cent of the settlers on Class I soil in the sample of 74 quarter sections. Those of British extraction accounted for about 30 per cent on the same soil class.

The number of years taken to patent the land by ethnic origin and soil class are noted in Table XIII. As Table XIII shows, there was very little difference in the average number of years taken to patent the land

TABLE XIII
 AVERAGE NUMBER OF YEARS TAKEN TO PATENT THE
 LAND BY ETHNIC ORIGIN AND SOIL CLASS*
 (USING 55 QUARTER SECTIONS)

	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV
<u>French</u>	Total sample: 8 Mean: 5.8 Standard deviation: 2.9 Therefore 2/3 of explained phenomenon lies between 2.9 and 8.7	Total sample: 7 Mean: 6.4 Standard deviation: 3.5 Therefore 2/3 of explained phenomenon lies between 2.9 and 9.9	Total sample: 3 Mean: 3.7 Standard deviation: 0.3 Therefore 2/3 of explained phenomenon lies between 3.4 and 4.0	Total sample: 2 Mean: 5.5 Standard deviation: 1.1 Therefore 2/3 of explained phenomenon lies between 4.4 and 6.6
<u>British</u>	Total sample: 5 Mean: 5.6 Standard deviation: 2.3 Therefore 2/3 of explained phenomenon lies between 3.3 and 7.9	Total sample: 12 Mean: 6.2 Standard deviation: 3.3 Therefore 2/3 of explained phenomenon lies between 2.9 and 9.5	Total sample: 13 Mean: 4.7 Standard deviation: 1.8 Therefore 2/3 of explained phenomenon lies between 2.9 and 6.5	Total sample: 5 Mean: 5.4 Standard deviation: 1.5 Therefore 2/3 of explained phenomenon lies between 3.9 and 6.9

* Note: For comparison standard deviations have been calculated for all cells in the table in spite of their limited usefulness where sample size is very small.

by both French and British settlers on Class I and Class II soils. The British seemed to have fared better on Class III soils than the French but the total number of quarter sections on the latter is not large enough to warrant firm conclusions. In fact, the total sample of 55 quarter sections is not large enough to draw any statistically valid conclusions, but it does serve to indicate that differences in length of time taken to patent the land cannot have varied very much between different ethnic groups.

Based on the above observations, there must have been some other factor or factors that were more influential in determining length of time taken to patent the land than either soil type or ethnic origin.

Dominion Land Surveyors' reports seem to indicate that vegetative cover might have had some bearing on where the pioneers initially settled and the length of time taken to patent the land. McLean⁵ in 1899, observed that "the settlers are taking up the fine soil on scrubby prairie land making the start of a farm comparatively easy. Timber is close at hand for building and fencing". Saint Cyr,⁶ another Dominion Land Surveyor, stated in 1901 that "there is no doubt that the settlers are ploughing first the land either burnt over or covered by scrubby prairie with adequate green timber for building purposes". Throughout the surveyors' reports there is mention made of large tracts of scrubby prairie being taken up first. Even if this is so it does not seem to

⁵Field notes of Dominion Land Surveyors (currently held at Alberta, Department of Highways, Surveys Branch).

⁶Loc. cit.

have affected the length of time taken to patent the homestead since there do not seem to be marked differences in length of time to patent depending on period of entry as discussed earlier.

There was seemingly no introduction of new or improved clearing machinery during the time span listed in Table XI. In 1877, in the United States, William Morrison and John Lane invented a plow which had its wearing parts faced with steel which would scour the tough sod and sticky clay of the Prairies and would not wear out as rapidly as the pure wooden plow.⁷ This type of plow, widely used in the Western United States during the late 1800s, came into the study area with the first homesteaders. Tractors and combines were not introduced on a large scale into the study area until after World War I.

In order for the homesteader to clear the land he needed some method of removing the larger trees. Thus, teams of horses were often an essential part of a farmer's stock. Judging from the Homestead Files, all the homesteaders, with the exception of only a few, had some animals by the time they applied for patent. Many homesteaders also kept some cattle and hogs as a supplementary means of income. Especially in the formative years on the farm before a cash crop could be grown, some means of income was necessary. Odd individuals, who found the land unsuitable for extensive crop raising often specialized more intensively in stock raising. One of the homesteaders in the area had as many as 48 cattle on his land only two years after the land was entered upon.

⁷Kranich, F., "Growth of Farm Machinery", The Field Illustrated, XXVIII, No. 3, 1918. Pg. 147.

Other homesteaders practiced mixed farming in which the stock and the crops assumed a position of equal importance.

The stock was mainly beef cattle and milk cows. Horses were kept on hand for transportation and other duties but not as a source of income or food. Except for the larger herds, most of the beef and milk cattle were for domestic use only. They provided a good source of meat, milk, butter and cheese, commodities very highly valued at a time when stores were virtually non-existent.

Hogs, too, played an important role in keeping families alive during the "lean and hungry" years. These animals were known as "mortgage lifters" back east in Ontario. Often, when cash crops such as wheat were uncertain, the coarser grains would grow sufficiently to feed the hogs. Together with dairy and poultry produce, hogs slowly gained prominence on the homesteads. An added boom to the economy was, of course, the railroad which could ship the farm produce to the markets.

The study area never was solely a crop raising area. Stock always played a role in the economy, sometimes more prominently than others. This feature is not unique to the study area alone, however. Any agricultural frontier area requires animals to initially sustain the people and the economy. If conditions were favourable for full scale agricultural production, animals often assumed a minor role, except perhaps as draught animals and beasts of burden.

SHELTER DURING THE FIRST YEARS ON THE LAND

Almost without exception, the homesteaders came west with nothing more than what they could pack on an ox cart or what they could carry on their backs, including adequate finances. Consequently, such features

as houses had to be built from raw timber or any other building materials that were readily available. Life on the land must have been one of endurance and hardships especially in the early months of settlement.

Women lived in earthen huts or hastily built shacks while the men toiled long hours preparing the land for the first crop.⁸

Usually more permanent accommodations were constructed the following spring. Some of the poorer settlers lived in small houses built with logs and sod. Judging from some of the remaining relics of old buildings in the study area, many of the original permanent buildings were of log construction, although those homesteads analyzed in the sample were primarily frame-type structures. The logs were laid horizontally, one above the other, and joined at the corners by special notches known as the "saddle" and "dovetail" notch (Plates 1, 2 and 3). The construction was completed with a mixture of mud and grass which was "cemented" between the logs and in the joints. The roof consisted either of sod or sheet lumber overlain by wooden shingles. Those who could afford it had frame houses whereas those less wealthy usually settled for log cabins. It is interesting to note that popular as the ubiquitous loghouse was, it was not an American or Canadian derivative. In fact, the western loghouse was said to be of Scandinavian-Russian origin.⁹ Its appearance in the Canadian West is generally attributed to the French-Canadians. This is a perfect example of how cultural ideas spread westwards to Canada, trans-

⁸Philipott, Rev. A., Morinville, Fifty Years of Parochial Life, La Survivance, Edmonton, 1941.

⁹Roe, F.G., The Old Log House in Western Canada, Alberta Historical Review, Volume 6, Number 2, 1958.



PLATE 1 Early Log Cabin in the Study Area

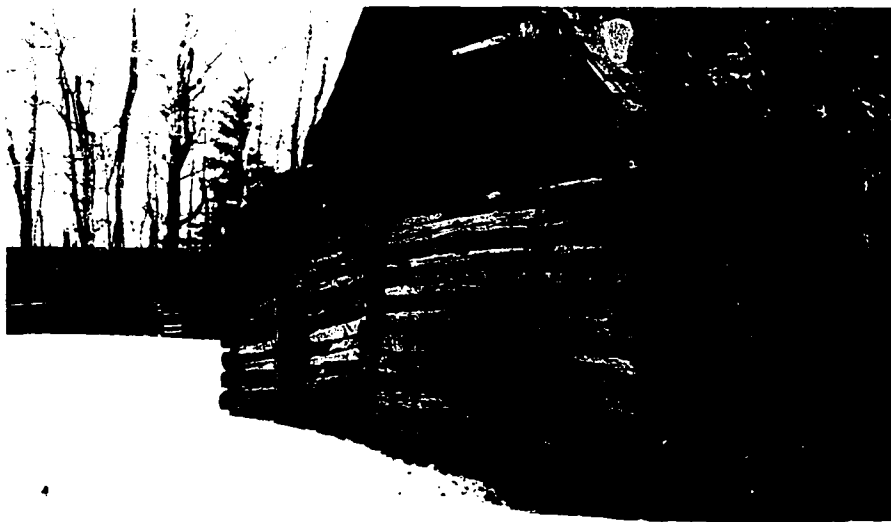


PLATE 2 Example of "Saddle" Corner Notching



PLATE 3 Example of Mud Chinking

mitted by various cultural groups, until its original point of origin is often lost.

EARLY TRANSPORTATION ON THE WESTERN PRAIRIES

For homesteaders coming west, the trip was often long and arduous. After riding the train for several days and arriving in Alberta, the journey was by no means at an end. The train trip seemed a luxury compared with the mode of transportation that followed the train. The horse was still the primary mode of transportation in the first few decades of this century, especially in Western Canada. Single travellers with little or no baggage simply rode a horse, whereas a family or those with much luggage needed a cart or wagon as well as some horses. The most popular vehicle in the early days was the Red River cart. This cart had a wooden axle and two large wooden wheels. Roads during that time left much to be desired as a travel route. Especially after a heavy rainfall, the roads became impassable. As traffic along the roads became heavier the quality of the roads rapidly deteriorated. The sodden black soil soon gave way to thick, miry mud causing severe headaches to settlers hauling their produce to market. The large wooden wheels of the Red River cart meant that the axle was higher off the ground and thus could cross over very rough terrain, mud included. Often though, even the carts became stuck and the horses simply were not strong enough to pull themselves and the cart out. One disadvantage of the Red River cart was that it shaped the trail into three furrows, two from the wheels and one from the horse. As these furrows became deeper, it was very difficult to pass other vehicles since it was impossible to turn out of the big hollows.

It became increasingly clear to the settlers that even a distance of five or ten miles from the market could take many hours of travel under adverse conditions. As the initial years on the land passed by, roads were gradually improved and the railroad offered a close and efficient means of transportation.

CONCLUSION

The initial years on the land were often very lonely and the need for companionship was great. At first, cultural groups tended to cluster, as was the case in the study area between those of French origin and those of British origin. The two distinctive groups, the French and the British, in time became less distinctive although the core groups remained. Judging from the Municipal District map of 1967 many of the settlers are now of non-British and non-French background. Many Germans and East Europeans have come into the area subsequent to the initial settlement. The effects of ethnic origin are even less apparent today than they were at the turn of the century.

From analysis of the Homestead Files it has been shown that such physical factors as soil type seems to have had little effect on the success of homesteading. Moreover, ethnic origin, per se, also seems to have had little or no effect on pioneer homesteading in the study area. Success is virtually the same among all the various cultural and ethnic groups represented.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This study has analyzed the process of initial homesteading in North Central Alberta. The period dealt with covered approximately 30 years, from 1891-1920. The main focus of the study was to determine the various influences on homesteading in a pioneer agricultural area. As a basic unit of study the quarter section was chosen since the majority of the settlers initially applied for 160 acres. Out of the total number of quarter sections in the study area, a ten per cent stratified random sample was chosen based on soil capability ratings (Table II). The primary source of the detailed investigation of the individual homesteads and their occupants was the Homestead Files, Provincial Archives. These files illustrated such information as date of entry, date of patent, ethnic origin of the settlers, age and marital status of the settlers, and improvements made on the land. From the information obtained in the Homestead Files, several correlations were made in order to isolate the most influential factors relating to success or failure of the settlers' attempts to patent the land. Initially it was hypothesized that soil type would tend to influence the choice of location of the homestead. This was found to be partially true especially in the case of the initial settlers of the study area, French-Canadians.

The French-Canadians initially settled in the southern part of the study area. Such centres as Morinville, Riviere Qui Barre, Legal, Picard-

ville and Vimy attest to the French-Canadian influence. Generally speaking, the type of soil in the Morinville district is Class I with some Class II and Class III (Figure IV). Whether, in fact, the French-Canadian settlers were aware that the soil they settled on was of such good quality is difficult to determine. Their reasons for settling where they did might have been in response to the fact that the area further south had already been taken up. Also, the advent of the railway might have influenced later decisions as to where to locate settlement. Regardless of the reasons why they settled where they did, the French-Canadians did settle on a good quality soil. Yet, based on observations, those settlers of French-Canadian origin did not experience any higher degree of success than those settlers of British origin who settled mainly on Class II and Class III soils. This would seem to indicate that soil type had little or no effect on the homesteader's success in patenting the land. Following the comments of the Dominion Land Surveyors in the area the main physical influence on the location of homesteads seems to have been vegetative cover. Generally speaking, the land with the least amount of vegetation was taken up first, minimizing the cost of clearing the land.

Thus the direct effect of physical influences, such as soil, vegetation, water and topography in relation to location of homesteads and successful patents on the homestead seem to have been minimal.

One of the most influential factors in the location of homesteads was the railway. Settlers tended to follow the railway lines in an attempt to shorten the distance they had to haul their produce to market. Until the railway came into the area, many settlers found it impossible

to haul their produce by road simply because it was too far and too costly to travel the distance to markets. Based on interviews with old-timers of the area, some settlers, upon learning that the railway did not come through where they expected it would, moved closer to the railway and abandoned their initial homesteads.

Another important influence in the location of homesteads was a cultural one. Broadly speaking, settlers of similar ethnic background tended to settle in close proximity to each other, at least initially. The French-Canadians tended to settle in the southern half of the study area whereas those of British origin tended to settle the northern part, near what is now the town of Westlock. As settlement progressed, the two core regions became less distinct although the differences are, to some extent, still apparent today.

With respect to success in patenting the land, there is no significant difference according to ethnicity. The French-Canadian homesteaders were as successful as those of British origin. Many members of both groups, whether of French or British descent, spent at least some time in Quebec or Ontario before coming west. This was especially true of those who came from France via Quebec to Alberta. Because of this, both groups were at least acquainted with the Canadian environment. Probably because of this the French-Canadians and the British seem to have achieved a slightly higher rate of success in patenting the land than those settlers from other places of origin.

Average length of time taken from date of entry to date of patent showed a remarkable consistency in time and in space. The average number of years taken to patent land in 1891 differed very little from the time

taken in 1920 (Table XI). The sample taken included 115 quarter sections which were relatively evenly distributed throughout the study area. Thus, on the whole, there did not appear to be any major differences or barriers to successfully break and cultivate the land in the study area. Those settlers who did fail to do so had either little or no knowledge about farming or simply gave up for a variety of reasons. The failures are a result of human action, not the environment, since subsequent settlers did in fact successfully patent land on which others had earlier failed.

An analysis of the ages of the homesteaders revealed that the average age was 33 years. At first this figure seems high but perhaps many of the settlers could not afford to come west until they had saved adequate capital. The average age differed very slightly amongst the various ethnic groups.

Approximately 60 per cent of the homesteaders in the random sample were single (Table IX). The next highest group was families of two members. The failure rate amongst single homesteaders was generally higher than any of the other groups. This may be explained, in part, by the fact that a single person was more apt to pick up and leave if another opportunity for livelihood presented itself. Married homesteaders tended to persevere since they had the responsibility of a wife and perhaps some children. Based on the Homestead Files, the single homesteader spent less capital on building his house than did the married settler.

Although both the single and married settlers brought along the bulk of their capital when they first set out west, this capital was often supplemented by wages obtained from winter employment. Since

regulations stated that no homesteader could be forced off his land during the winter months, many took this opportunity to leave their homesteads to work elsewhere. As the farms began to grow more prosperous and started to produce saleable commodities, the need for winter employment was less important.

The first years on the land were undoubtedly the hardest ones, but as the community grew and settlers began to know each other the hardships somehow seemed less difficult to face. In a time when the need for co-operation was great, most people responded very favourably. Gradually, ethnic ties weakened as the groups began to appear less distinctive. The study area developed into a prosperous agricultural area, aided by good quality soils.

This study has by no means examined all the salient features surrounding the initial settlement of the Morinville-Westlock district. It has attempted to illustrate examples of the various influences and effects, both physical and cultural, that faced the initial homesteaders. The importance of this study lies not so much in the specific conclusions drawn, although these are important, but rather to present a historical geography of pioneer homesteading in North Central Alberta. It is very difficult to reconstruct what conditions were actually like at the time of initial settlement. Only by examining old records and interviewing old-timers of the area, can one begin to understand what in fact took place. How the homesteaders initially perceived their new land would be an interesting study in itself although many of the conclusions would be

based on hypothesis rather than fact. Also, the reliability of some of the old homesteaders' stories is subject to some questioning. With the tools available, this thesis has hopefully opened the way for other studies. To understand the situation as it is today, it is helpful and often necessary to first study the past. The study of the Canadian pioneer is a fascinating one and is a tribute to man's endurance and courage.

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