

# The Literary Construction of Saskatchewan before 1905: Narratives of Trade, Rebellion and Settlement

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“HOW COULD I SPEND MY DAYS IN THE CIVILIZED WORLD, and leave my beloved children in the wilderness? ... How could I tear them from a mother’s love, and leave her to mourn over their absence, to the day of her death?” So wrote fur trader Daniel Williams Harmon in his 1820 book about his struggle over whether he should leave his “country” wife and children in western Canada, as his employer directed, or take them with him when he moved back east. Harmon was one of the first to write explicitly and personally about social relations in the territory that became Saskatchewan in 1905, but he was far from the first to write about the area itself. At the time of the earliest written report in English in 1690, only the river was called Saskatchewan (or *kisiskâciwani-sîpiy*), and almost every writer from then until 1905 came to the area as an adult rather than having been born there. European traders who claimed “firsts” in reaching the area, surveyors sent to report on the potential of the land for farming, participants in the North-West conflict of 1885, travellers on the new trans-Canada railway, writers for the district’s first newspapers, settlers who broke and farmed the land – writings by all these people provided a changing picture of the territory. This picture often owed more to the places the viewers came from, previous reports about the area and established literary conventions than to what the writers themselves observed in the land about which they wrote. Nevertheless, their texts present a portrait, sometimes incomplete but always intriguing, of the places and people they encountered and how they themselves shaped those places and people through their travels and writings.

Although many First Nations lived in or travelled through the area of Rupert’s Land that became Saskatchewan, Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) trader Henry Kelsey is considered the first European to have

travelled to and written about that land. In 1690-91, the twenty-three-year-old Englishman was sent by the HBC to the area west of what is now The Pas, Manitoba, in an attempt to convince the First Nations of the plains to trade with the company, which had been granted control of the land by the British Parliament. With a group of Assiniboine men and their families, Kelsey travelled south to the Touchwood Hills in 1690; the following summer he returned to the same area. A version of his diary was first printed in 1749 in the *British Parliamentary Papers* as part of an inquiry into the workings of the HBC.

The introduction to Kelsey's journal describes the summer of 1690 in a long poem that includes not only the first known written depiction of east-central Saskatchewan in English but also probably the first verse set there:

And now will give acco[un]t of that same Country soile  
Which hither part is very thick of wood  
Affords small nuts w[i]th little cherryes very good  
Thus it continues till you leave ye woods behind  
And then you have beast of severall kind  
The one is a black a Buffillo great  
Another is an Outgrown Bear w[hi]ch is good meat  
His skin to gett I have used all ye ways I can  
He is mans food & he makes food of man.

Kelsey's description of the flora and fauna of this part of Rupert's Land is accompanied by brief accounts of the groups of Aboriginal people Kelsey met, but because he used his own uncertain transcriptions of the groups' names for each other it is not always possible to tell of whom he is speaking. For example, he includes a horrified poetic rendering of an occasion when the "home Indians" (who supplied York Factory) killed six tents of people from an unidentified group with whom he was trying to trade.

Kelsey's 1691 journal is a much more pedestrian account of his return to the same area, focusing (as do most trade and exploration journals) not only on geographical features such as rivers that had to be paddled up and plains that had to be walked over but also on the dire necessity of

killing enough birds, squirrels, deer, moose and bison to support the group as they travelled. Kelsey includes another appreciative description of the parkland, however, this time in prose that compares it with land he might have seen in England: “ye ground begins to grow heathy & barren in fields of about half a Mile over Just as if they had been Artificially made with fine groves of Poplo[r] growing round [them].” His descriptions of cultural practices of the people with whom he travelled include that of a funeral pyre, when an Assiniboine man’s “body was burned according to their way they making A great feast for him.” He also notes his attempts to get the people he met to trade with the HBC rather than fight with one another; his entry of September 6 notes that he told a group “they must Imploy their time in Catching of beavour for [i]t will be better liked on then their killing their Enemies.” Kelsey concludes this part of his journal with descriptions of cultural practices, distinguishing between those of the Cree or *nēhiyawak* (whom he calls Nayhaythaways) and Assiniboine (whom he calls Stone Indians).

By the eighteenth century, French Canadian traders were also travelling to the area, establishing the first posts in 1751 (Fort La Jonquiére, east of the forks of the Saskatchewan Rivers) and 1753 (Fort de la Corne at the forks, which the English rebuilt and renamed Fort à la Corne). The accounts of these traders are mostly in the third person, including a report by Montrealer Jacques Legardeur de Saint-Pierre. The English translation of the journal Legardeur kept for La Jonquiére, the governor of New France, notes that a fort was established 300 leagues upriver from “Pasqoya,” near present-day The Pas, by May 29, 1751. Ten men in two canoes “built a fort, which I named Fort La Jonquiére, and accumulated a considerable stock of supplies.” Although this account does not tell us much about the literary construction of Saskatchewan, it does show it to be a place where vying parties were searching for trade routes.

Fort de la Corne featured in the writings of another HBC trade promoter, Anthony Henday, whose 1754–55 journal provided significant commentary on the Saskatchewan territory and its people. Other “winterers” to the plains would follow him, but the twenty-nine-year-old Henday was credited as the first European man to traverse the territory from one side to the other and the first Englishman to write

about that traverse. As with Kelsey, however, the fact that he was guided the whole way by Plains Cree men and women, and the fact that he was visiting trading posts set up by French traders, make later claims that he was the discoverer of the territory highly questionable. Because Henday was using First Nations geographic and ethnographic naming that was either inconsistently transcribed or whose meaning has been lost, and because his descriptions of the countryside were vague and his estimations of distances doubtful, there is disagreement about which parts of Saskatchewan and Alberta Henday travelled through and wrote about. His original handwritten journal has not survived; instead, what remains are four copies made at different times, each differently worded, and first published in 1907 in the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*.

Like Kelsey, Henday described the parkland south of the Carrot River as a place of “fine level Land, and tall Cherry trees, filburds, and Nutts,” and he discussed in detail the moose, elk and deer that his group hunted. During a day when it stormed, Henday wrote that the party spent the day in “a grand feast, with smoking, dancing, drumming and conjuring.” On August 15, he saw his first bison, and five days later he arrived at the South Saskatchewan River, which he called the Wapesu or Red Deer and described as “fine Levell Meadow Land, and dry on both Sides, Grows Hasels, popular & willows, and high Banks on both sides of ye River.” On September 1, in one of the versions of his journal not expurgated by his superior (who knew that the company frowned on such liaisons), he described giving part of his provisions to his “bed-fellow,” an unnamed Cree woman who was living with him. By September 11, he had crossed what would become the Saskatchewan-Alberta border and was into the territory where he would spend the winter.

With a group of Cree men bearing furs, Henday returned to the Saskatchewan district the following summer, this time paddling canoes to the forks of the Saskatchewan Rivers. Along the way, he met with several groups of Blackfoot or Niitsítapi (whom he called Bloody Indians or Archithinues, the Cree word for “strangers”), who had “the finest horses I have yet seen here.” They confirmed what his country wife (whom he had left behind in Alberta) had told him: the furs the Cree

traded were mostly obtained from Blackfoot groups. Henday revealed (more explicitly in some versions of the diary than others) that he was having difficulty convincing the First Nations communities to trade with the HBC. On May 24, he noted that his group arrived at a French fort (likely Fort de la Corne), where he had supper with the factor, and “the master gave the natives 10 gallons of adulterated brandy and has traded from them above 1000 of the finest skins...; I cannot get them to proceed, it’s surprizing to observe what great influence the French hath over the natives.” The version of the diary sent to HBC headquarters, however, did not acknowledge what Henday now knew: that it would be difficult to prevent First Nations from trading with the French. By the end of May, Henday was on his way back to York Factory.

In the late 1700s and early 1800s, many other trade explorers for the Hudson’s Bay Company, and later the North West Company and the X Y Company, travelled to and wrote about parts of Saskatchewan in their journals, including Matthew Cocking, Samuel Hearne, Philip Turnor, Peter Fidler, David Thompson and Alexander Henry the Younger. For the most part, their journals (many of which remained unpublished until the twentieth century) described the river routes, their attempts at trade, including setting up trading posts, and their efforts to find and map routes to the western or northern ocean. The published accounts included North West Company explorer Alexander Mackenzie’s *Voyages from Montreal, on the River St. Laurence, through the Continent of North America, to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans* (1801), in which Mackenzie described mostly journeys farther west and north but included information about his travels along the Churchill River.

The most notable of the unpublished journals was by David Thompson, whom scholar of exploration literature Germaine Warkentin has described as “the most outstanding of Canadian exploration writers in English, possessing the most reflective cast of mind and the greatest powers of synthesis.” Thompson was born in London but came to Canada at age fourteen to work for the Hudson’s Bay Company and later the North West Company. His narrative, which he began to write in 1846, was published after his death as *David Thompson’s Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784–1812* (1916). It included accounts of several years of travelling, surveying and trading along the

Saskatchewan Rivers and on the plains, including setting up a post at South Branch near Batoche in 1786, and it recorded stories told by the people Thompson met, including a story about “Weesarkejauk” (the trickster *wisahkecâhk*) and muskrat remaking the world after a great flood. The account is also noteworthy because it included transcriptions of stories told to Thompson by a Peigan elder, Saukamapee, in whose tent he spent the winter of 1787–88. Although the Peigans were a Blackfoot people of the foothills, Saukamapee told Thompson that he was originally a “Nahathaway” (*nêhiyawak* or Cree) from the Pasquia River area; as a young man, he had fought with the Peigans and had been rewarded by being adopted into their tribe. Saukamapee’s stories begin around 1730 and thus form the earliest recorded account from a First Nations man from what is now eastern Saskatchewan and western Manitoba. As well as telling stories of battles, Saukamapee recounted responses to the first horses on the plains (which the people called “Big Dogs”) and described a smallpox outbreak.

Another remarkable fur trade narrative was Daniel Williams Harmon’s *A Journal of Voyages and Travels in the Interiour of North America*, published in 1820. It described his years as a trader with the North West Company at forts near Pelly, Batoche and Cumberland House from 1800 to 1807. When Harmon, an American who had moved to Canada to work with the North West Company, first arrived at Fort Alexandria near present-day Pelly on October 23, 1800, he wrote that the fort was situated on a small rise that separated the banks of the Assiniboine River from “a beautiful prairie”: “At a little distance behind the fort, are small groves of birch, popular, aspin [sic] and pine. On the whole, the scenery around it, is delightful.” A few weeks later he described a Cree sweat lodge and a herd of 5,000 bison. His narrative is intriguing because he touches on moral dilemmas in which he was placed. As a man who took his Christian religion seriously, Harmon struggled with the ethics of trading destructive liquor for valuable furs. He also wrote openly about gender relations and marriage customs between traders and residents, something only hinted at by earlier writers such as Henday and Thompson (who also married a country wife, Charlotte Small, at Ile-à-la-Crosse). At the time, both the North West Company and the Hudson’s Bay Company discouraged employees from formally marrying their

country wives. Of his Métis wife, Lizette Duval, whom Harmon married in the custom of the country in Batoche in 1805 when she was fourteen and who is never named in the book, he initially said, "If we can live in harmony together, my intention is to keep her as long as I remain in this uncivilized part of the world; and when I return to my native land, I shall endeavour to place her under the protection of some honest man, with whom she can pass the remainder of her days in this country." However, thirteen years later, when he moved from western Canada to Fort William (now Thunder Bay), he took Lizette with him and remarried her in a Christian ceremony, noting that his action was what both Christianity and humanity required.

By the mid-nineteenth century, other books appeared that included accounts of adventurers, traders and artists who had lived in or crossed the territory, often along the Carlton Trail, the new overland route that connected the Red River area to Fort Carlton. These books included British naval explorer John Franklin's *Narrative of a Journey to the Shores of the Polar Sea* (1824), which contained several chapters about Cumberland House and Fort Carlton as the expedition travelled overland to map the polar shore; HBC governor George Simpson's *Narrative of a Journey Round the World* (1847), which recounted a horseback journey along the Carlton Trail to Fort Edmonton; Paul Kane's *Wanderings of an Artist among the Indians of North America* (1859), in which (helped, according to Ian MacLaren, by an editor or ghostwriter) Kane wrote about travels during which he sketched scenes along the North Saskatchewan trade route; Viscount Milton's *The North-West Passage by Land* (1865), in which Milton described overwintering north of Fort Carlton in 1862-63 on his way to explore a pass through the Rockies; and the Earl of Southesk's *Saskatchewan and the Rocky Mountains* (1874), which described a hunting trip in western Canada in 1859-60. Many of these narratives matter-of-factly discussed killing bison. Simpson made the anachronistic pronouncement that "The buffaloes are incredibly numerous" (referring to herds he had seen in 1829); when he described a buffalo hunt near Fort Carlton, he said, "The morning's chase resulted in about fifty killed; but so abundant were provisions at this moment, that, after taking the tongues, we left the carcasses to the mercy of the wolves."

That era's most significant literary construction of Saskatchewan

came in 1858–60 from the pens of two men sent by the British and Canadian governments to the prairies of Rupert’s Land to determine whether the area was suitable for settlement and thus should be purchased from the Hudson’s Bay Company: Irishman John Palliser and Englishman Henry Youle Hind. Palliser had already spent a summer hunting on the North American prairies, mostly in the United States but also possibly in what is now southern Saskatchewan; his account was published in 1853 as *Solitary Rambles and Adventures of a Hunter in the Prairies*. Encouraged by the Royal Geographical Society and funded by the Colonial Office of the British government, Palliser returned in 1857–59 as head of an expedition charged with searching for travel routes, including possible rail routes, and determining the climate, plant life and geology and thus the possibility of agricultural settlement.

Palliser published reports of his investigations in 1859 and 1860. Although not literary in nature, these documents have been called by Irene Spry an “essential source of information for the precursors of settlement, such as the North West Mounted Police, the boundary surveyors, railway planners (notably Sir Sandford Fleming), and other travellers.” Journal entries by Palliser and his colleague, Dr. James Hector, describe a side trip some of the party members made to the Moose Mountains in the southeast and thence to the impressive eroded sandstone of Roche Percée near the border with the United States. Further entries describe the Qu’Appelle Valley and lakes, the “Creek where the Bones lie” (Wascana Creek, near present-day Regina) and Carlton, where the surveyors heard reports that smallpox was raging.

In Palliser’s final summary, published in 1863 as *Exploration – British North America: The Journals, Detailed Reports and Observations Relative to the Exploration, by Captain Palliser*, he wrote glowingly of the area along the North Saskatchewan River: “Whenever the banks of the valley slope gently back to the higher prairie level, as at Fort Carlton, there are to be found the most desirable spots for settlement,” and “The richness of the natural pasture in many places...can hardly be exaggerated.” However, Palliser provided a very different account of southwestern Saskatchewan. In what became known as the “Palliser Triangle,” he described “a region, desert, or semi-desert in character, which can never be expected to become occupied by settlers,” consisting

of “arid plains, devoid of timber or pasture of good quality,” and “extensive sandy wastes.” An exception was the Cypress Hills, where “there is abundance of water and pasture, and also a heavily timbered slope facing the north, where spruce firs, pines, maple, and many kinds of shrubs flourish in abundance.”

Of the people already living there, Palliser reported, “We do not apprehend that the Indians along the North Saskatchewan are likely to cause any serious difficulties to the settlement of the ‘fertile belt,’” though he warned that settlers “would not find all the Indians with whom they came in contact so friendly.” He predicted that, if help with agriculture was offered, “I am certain that they would very rapidly commence planting potatoes, and so save themselves from much of the labour and hunger which they have to endure throughout the winter in providing the flesh of the elk, moose, and deer, as food for their very large families.”

Shortly after Palliser began his expedition, the parliament of Upper and Lower Canada decided to investigate the possibility of expanding west into the territory still controlled by the HBC. Hind, who was teaching geology at Trinity College in Toronto, was part of the expedition sent by the Canadian government in 1857-58 under the nominal leadership of retired HBC official George Gladman to survey the area for its farming and mining potential. Hind published progress reports beginning in 1858, and then in 1860 he published a lively account of his travels in the two-volume *Narrative of the Canadian Red River Exploring Expedition of 1857 and of the Assiniboine [sic] and Saskatchewan Exploring Expedition of 1858*. His narrative shows an attempt at literary entertainment as well as information; Richard A. Jarrell has described it as “one of the classics of 19th-century exploration literature, offering a clear, detailed, and colourful account of the prairies and their inhabitants on the eve of settlement which would change them forever.” Hind concurred with Palliser that the southern prairies were too arid to be successfully farmed. His book includes a novel description of travels west along the Qu’Appelle River Valley until it intersected with the South Saskatchewan River, during which he visited a Church of England mission, explored lakes and rock outcroppings, witnessed a Cree man kill a bison on foot with a bow and arrow and encountered a buf-

falo pound in which more than 200 animals were killed. Hind recounted a six-hour meeting with a Cree leader whom he called Mis-tick-oos in which several speakers “objected strongly to the half-breeds’ hunting buffalo during the winter in the Plain Cree country” and “urged strong objections against the Hudson’s Bay Company encroaching upon the prairies and driving away the buffalo.”

Ten years later Irishman William Francis Butler, who came to western Canada during the Red River Rebellion of 1869–70, published a more literary account of his winter travels through the North-West Territories in 1870–71. Butler had been asked by Lieutenant Governor Adams George Archibald to travel through the territory that had just been acquired from the HBC to report on conditions of First Nations and methods of keeping law and order. His official report recommended appointing a travelling magistrate, establishing a military force, setting up government stations, extinguishing Indian title and opening areas along the rivers for settlement. In his 1872 book *The Great Lone Land*, the chapters on his travels through the Saskatchewan and Assiniboia districts present a lively and entertaining picture of the landscape but also report the depredations of smallpox, annihilation of the bison and effects of the by-then forbidden practice of giving First Nations whisky in exchange for furs.

Butler’s description of the winter landscape demonstrated European Romantic ideas of the sublime applied to the Canadian prairies:

No ocean of water in the world can vie with its gorgeous sunsets; no solitude can equal the loneliness of a night-shadowed prairie: one feels the stillness, and hears the silence, the wail of the prowling wolf makes the voice of solitude audible, the stars look down through infinite silence upon a silence almost as intense... One saw here the world as it had taken shape and form from the hands of the Creator.

Like previous travellers, Butler was especially taken with the Touchwood Hills area: “Beautiful hills swell in slopes more or less abrupt on all sides, while lakes fringed with thickets and clumps of good-sized poplar balsam lie lapped in their fertile hollows.” In a less Romantic vein,

he described the plains as “seared with the tracks of the countless buffalo which, until a few years ago, were wont to roam in vast herds between the Assineboine and the Saskatchewan.” Now, he wrote, “the same wrecks of the monarch of the prairie lie thickly strewn over the surface.”

Butler’s book explores in detail the negative effects of trade and settlement on the people of the territory as well as on the bison they hunted. Butler reported that thirty-two of the sixty people at Fort Carlton had died of smallpox in the previous few years, while at Fort Pitt 100 Cree people had died just outside its walls. One man he met at the HBC post near the confluence of the Battle and Saskatchewan Rivers who had survived smallpox asked if it was true that “the white man was coming to take their lands.” Butler’s response is retrospectively ironic: “If the white braves did come...it would be to protect the red man, and to keep peace amongst all.” In his own musings, Butler acknowledged the falsehood of his statement; reversing the conventional civilization-savagery dichotomy while evoking Romantic ideas of the noble savage and using by-then conventional verbal markers of racial colouring, he wrote, “My God, what a terrible tale could I not tell of these dark deeds done by the white savage against the far nobler red man!” Commenting on the deliberate destruction of bison herds south of the border to wipe out First Nations, he wrote, “First the white man was the welcome guest, the honoured visitor; then the greedy hunter, the death-dealing vender of fire-water and poison; then the settler and exterminator.”

Butler’s narrative was the beginning of a series of books by visitors who discussed travels in Saskatchewan for purposes of policing, missionary work, railway construction, surveying and potential settlement. In 1873, adjutant-general of the Canadian militia Patrick Robertson-Ross published an account of his military tour across western Canada; W.M. Moore reported on the Presbyterian mission in Prince Albert; and George Monro Grant issued an account of Sandford Fleming’s expedition through Canada as engineer-in-chief of the proposed Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). In 1876, Samuel Anderson published a report in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* on the 1872–76 boundary commission, and the following year Thomas Spence, clerk of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba, issued the first of a series of pamphlets encouraging settlement in the Saskatchewan area. Grant in

particular was clearly influenced by Butler – in his *Ocean to Ocean*, he refers to Butler’s book and uses the term “Great Lone Land” – and his chapters on travelling through the prairies are entertainingly written. As was Butler, Grant was enthusiastic about the Little Touchwood Hills, comparing them with landscapes in England: “Only the manor-houses and some gently-flowing streams were wanting, to make out a resemblance to the most beautiful parts of England.” He also predicted heavy settlement of the area, noting that, “Where hundreds of homesteads shall yet be, there is not one.” Grant did not have the ecological consciousness of Butler, however; he kept expecting to see herds of bison that never materialized, and he wrote of killing a bird that was clearly a whooping crane. He also wrote about meeting a “brigande” of Métis hunters from Manitoba hunting for bison and mentioned a Métis settlement that had just been established along the banks of the South Saskatchewan River.

As the masculine and European names of these authors suggest, published accounts of the territory by women and First Nations were scarce during this time. In 1875, however, an anonymous Sister of Charity of Montreal published an English translation of *Notes and Sketches Collected from a Voyage in the North-West*, about her work in charge of a party of Grey Nuns who travelled in 1871–72 to Ile-à-la-Crosse; her purpose was to encourage the faithful to donate money. Although the Grey Nun did not describe her travels, she did describe a school the sisters established at Ile-à-la-Crosse; she noted that the children spoke only their native languages (Cree and Dene), and she wrote, in a manner we would now judge as condescending, of the “numberless little ones, who never will receive instruction, or become civilized.” Of her colleagues in the order, she noted, “The life they lead is frequently rough and painful, without alluding to the loneliness they must necessarily suffer.” At Fort Carlton, where other visitors mentioned HBC factor Lawrence Clarke, the Sister of Charity wrote instead about “the gracious reception extended to us by Mrs. Clark [sic],” including “her unbounded liberality in furnishing us with provisions for the remainder of our journey.”

In 1879, English peers Algernon and Alice Heber Percy wrote a short book on an 1877–78 hunting trip, *Journal of Two Excursions in the*

*British North West Territory of North America*. Since the book consists mostly of diary entries that refer to Alice, it appears to have been mostly written by Algernon, though the illustrations were likely drawn by his wife. On their 1878 trip across the Assiniboia and Saskatchewan districts, Algernon reported having trouble finding game to slaughter, though he did cross the North Saskatchewan River to wound a bison that nevertheless got away. Intriguingly, he also reported meeting Métis leader Gabriel Dumont, who had settled along the South Saskatchewan River in 1872–73: “From a French half-breed on a small farm, we got fresh buffalo meat, fresh eggs !!! and some potatoes. So we feasted. He has also a ferry here, known by his name, ‘Gabriel’s Crossing.’” Like the Sister of Charity, the Heber Percys described being “most kindly and hospitably received by Mrs. Clarke” at Fort Carlton.

Although published First Nations voices are not abundant in this era, a few literary traces can be found (see Kristina Fagan Bidwell’s chapter in this volume for a discussion on unpublished journals and other works by Cree writers). In 1880, Alexander Morris, the last lieutenant governor of Manitoba and the North-West Territories, issued *The Treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-West Territories*, which includes reports of his role in negotiating the signing of the Qu’Appelle Treaty in 1874 and the Fort Carlton and Fort Pitt Treaties in 1876. This intriguing book includes supposedly verbatim translations of responses by leaders such as Big Bear to the proposed treaties, recorded by Secretary to the Commission A.G. Jackes. The book quotes Big Bear as saying to the commissioners on September 13, 1876, in Fort Pitt, “I heard the Governor was to come and I said I shall see him; when I see him I will make a request that he will save me from what I most dread, that is: the rope to be about my neck (hanging).” As the interjected final word and the response of Morris indicate, he took this statement to mean that Big Bear wanted an end to capital punishment for crimes the Cree did not consider in the same light as the military and settlers. However, Big Bear’s subsequent comment, “What we want is that we should hear what will make our hearts glad, and all good peoples’ hearts glad,” and his request that those assembled “will help us to protect the buffalo, that there may be enough for all,” suggest that Big Bear used the noose as a metaphor to talk about threats

to Cree livelihood in a broader sense.

Other writers of the early part of the 1880s continued to focus on missionary work and issues of law, governance and settlement; many of their writings mention Battleford, capital of the territories from 1877 to 1883. In 1881, Alexander Sutherland published a report on the conditions and needs of Methodist missions in the North-West Territories. He travelled through the United States but returned along the Saskatchewan Rivers on a scow allowed to drift in the current. As an encouragement to prospective settlers, he described the garden of Mrs. McKay, wife of the HBC factor at Fort Pitt, in which “Cabbages, celery, radishes, tomatoes, squash, cucumbers, onions, kale, red pepper, corn, etc., etc., showed a luxuriant growth.” He also commented on the rising town of Battleford, investigated Prince Albert’s need for a Methodist mission and remarked on the “government instruction farm” at Scott. In 1882, former member of the North West Mounted Police (NWMP) Jean D’Artigue published *Six Years in the Canadian North-West*, an account of his experiences on the historic 1874 first overland journey of the NWMP along the United States-Canada boundary. D’Artigue was part of a group that explored Roche Percée and was then sent overland to Edmonton; he was critical of the leadership of the main expedition. Of his return trip in 1880, D’Artigue wrote, like Sutherland, of floating down the North Saskatchewan River in a skiff. He predicted that Battleford would, “before long, become one of the greatest commercial centres of the North-West.”

The same year William H. Williams, a journalist with the *Toronto Globe*, published in book form a series of articles he had written about an 1881 investigatory journey through the North-West Territories with the Marquis of Lorne, then the governor general. The group travelled by rail to the end of the CPR line then under construction in Manitoba, then switched to horses and carts. At Qu’Appelle Mission, Williams called the valley “the most delightful and park-like that I have ever seen,” and he commented on a farm that boasted a flourishing vegetable garden and “as fine a sample of wheat as I ever saw at any of our Provincial Exhibitions.” Later, on the plains near Humboldt, he wrote that, while the first settlers would no doubt choose to settle on parkland, “The time is...closer than people generally suppose, when farms in these unshel-

tered prairies will be eagerly sought after, when the extension and elaboration of the railway system shall have brought the coal of the North Saskatchewan to the very doors of the farms in this fertile region." His next entry is headlined "In Camp, Gabriel Dumont's Crossing, South Saskatchewan, Aug. 24." At Fort Carlton, Sutherland quoted Cree chief Mistawassis' address to the Marquis of Lorne, which included a request for assistance because the Cree could no longer rely on hunting bison: "Often have I been sorely perplexed and miserable at seeing my people starving and shrunken in flesh till they were so weak that with the first cold striking them they would fall off their feet, and then nothing would save them." Williams wrote that the governor general replied rather hard-heartedly that "the Great Mother [his mother-in-law, Queen Victoria] had many white children who were very poor, some of whom thought she was giving to the red man more than their share."

By 1883, books promoting settlement began to appear, including what was likely the first book published in Saskatchewan, the 104-page *The Battle River Valley* by William Laurie. The book was printed by Laurie's father, Patrick Gammie Laurie, who had started the first newspaper in the territories, the *Saskatchewan Herald*, at Battleford in 1878. Although the main purpose of the book was to encourage settlement by refuting the reputation of the area for light or sandy soil, it also provided a history of Battleford, beginning with CPR engineers passing through in 1874 and touching on the town's selection as the seat of government for the North-West Territories in 1877. Laurie included a panegyric on his father, a "pioneer newspaperman": "Keepin [sic] always the general interests of the Territories in view, he industriously disseminated information concerning this locality." Indeed, both Sutherland and Williams had referred to Laurie senior in their books, Sutherland noting that he had "received much kind assistance from Mr. P. G. Laurie, the proprietor of the *Saskatchewan Herald*, a spirited little sheet, published once a fortnight," and Williams noting Laurie's beautiful garden. In *The Battle River Valley*, William Laurie, who had lived and worked in the North-West, criticized rival books by itinerants such as Williams and Sutherland; he referred to "troops of tourists" who "upon their return to 'civilization'" published books in which "Men who would scarcely be able to tell a harrow from a horse-rake undertook to advise

intending settlers ‘where to go, how to go, and when to go.’” Laurie’s book fulfilled those functions in a purportedly more knowledgeable way, with sections titled “What to Bring,” “When to Come,” “How to Come” and “What to Do When Here.”

If Laurie’s short book was the first published in Saskatchewan, others have been claimed as possible firsts related to more literary endeavours. In 1882, for possibly the first time, a novel was set partly in Saskatchewan: Butler, who had written about Saskatchewan in *The Great Lone Land*, tried his hand at fiction in *Red Cloud, the Solitary Sioux: A Story of the Great Prairie*. Set partly in the United States and partly in the Assiniboia district, his novel traces the romantic wanderings of the English narrator and his Sioux friend and mentions locales that include the South Saskatchewan River and the Cypress Hills. In 1884, reflecting the formation of literary societies in Battleford and Regina during the decade, two books of poetry written by residents of the territories appeared: M.A. Nicholl’s *Lays from the West*, published in Winnipeg, and Nicholas Flood Davin’s *Eos: A Prairie Dream and Other Poems*, published in Ottawa. Nicholl, who wrote under the pen name “Stella,” was a missionary wife stationed in Grenfell. Regina literary figure Kate Simpson Hayes claimed that Nicholl’s was “the very first book written in Saskatchewan, or Assiniboia, as it was then known” (Peel, Ingles and Distad). Her first poem, “In the Northwest,” sets the nostalgic, religious and derivative tone for the rest of the book:

In myriads o’er the prairie  
Bright flowers bloom strangely fair,  
There’s beauty in the clear blue sky,  
There’s sweetness in the air;  
And loveliness, with lavish hand,  
Decks dell and dingle gay;  
Yet still I love my native land -  
The Green Isle, far away.

Although many of Nicholl’s poems are set longingly in Ireland, others, such as “Ode to Summer,” reflect on the beauty of the prairie summer while echoing Butler’s description of the territory: “Welcome!

to the ‘Lone-Land’ bowers, / To our prairies, wild and green!” If Hayes is correct, then Davin’s 1884 book of poetry was written before he came to Saskatchewan in 1883 to found the Regina *Leader* newspaper; in 1887, he became even more well known when he was elected to the Canadian parliament as Conservative member for Assiniboia West. The title poem of his book melds Greek mythology with developing mythologies of the Canadian landscape and railway. In the poem, the Greek goddess of the dawn, Eos drives her chariot over Canada to the end of the railway, saying, “[S]ee where the iron horse / Pants, puffs out smoke and snorts and cries and bears / Long trains thro’ what was wilderness a year / Ago.” In 1886, Davin’s *Leader* Printing Company produced what Davin claimed to be the first literary work (consisting of short fiction rather than the settlement guide the Lauries had produced) actually published in the North-West: *An Old Woman’s Story* by his niece, Lizzie Rowe (Peel, Ingles and Distad). Later literary works set in Saskatchewan and written by authors who were not based there are addressed in Jenny Kerber’s essay in this volume.

Literary icons of the North-West Territories included Hayes herself, who wrote for the *Leader* and had a personal relationship with Davin that began the year after she moved to Regina in 1885. (Hayes was separated but not divorced and had two secret children with Davin.) In 1895, at about the time their relationship collapsed, she published a collection of poems, stories and plays called *Prairie Pot-Pourri*; most of the works had been published in the *Leader* and were republished under her pen name, Mary Markwell. The stories include a humorous narrative about a lazy English settler, a tragic story of a young Métis girl from Clark’s Crossing on the South Saskatchewan River sent east to be educated and then abandoned by her missionary lover and a novella that uses the North-West Rebellion as a climax. Among the poems, one called “Riel” compares Louis David Riel to a bird whose cry could have done the North-West good:

Oh, Wild-bird! had’st thou raised thy voice –  
Not in a note of discord – but in song  
That would have made this prairie land rejoice  
To call thee son!

In 1896, Spectator Printing and Publishing in Moosomin published a collection of essays, stories and poems by another Saskatchewan literary light, Bertram Tennyson. A nephew of English poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson, he homesteaded and practised law in and near Moosomin; his book, *The Land of Napioa*, includes the poem “Batoche, 1885.”

As these works show, the North-West Rebellion of 1885, in which Riel and Batoche played key roles, paved the way for an outpouring of writing about the Saskatchewan districts. Initially, much was of a military or journalistic rather than fictional or poetic nature. Indeed, Davin himself had increased his newspaper’s circulation dramatically by publishing an interview he purportedly conducted with Riel on the eve of his execution after disguising himself as a priest to gain entry to the prison. Military leaders who wrote about their experiences included Major Charles Boulton in *Reminiscences of the North-West Rebellions* (1886) and Thomas Bland Strange in his autobiography *Gunner Jingo’s Jubilee* (1893). Other books told stories of less renowned participants: the pseudonymously published 1887 *Reminiscences of a Bungle* (according to Peel, Ingles and Distad, written by either Lewis R. Ord or T.S. Russell) was highly critical of the leadership of the campaign; John George Donkin’s *Trooper and Redskin in the Far North-West* (1889) told the story of a mounted police officer stationed in Prince Albert during the conflict but sent south to guard Riel in Regina during the last days of his incarceration; and John Pyne Pennefather’s *Thirteen Years on the Prairies* (1892) recounted his experiences as medical officer with Strange’s column.

In *War in the West: Voices of the 1885 Rebellion* (1985), Rudy Wiebe and Bob Beal collected some of the contemporary voices of other players, including First Nations and Métis men and several women. Included in their book is the report of January 21, 1882, in Laurie’s *Saskatchewan Herald* of a speech Chief Poundmaker made to his band, in which he said, “Next summer, or at the latest next fall, the railway will be close to us, the whites will fill the country and they will dictate to us as they please.” Wiebe and Beal also reproduced a letter from Gabriel Dumont and forty-six other Métis men in the North-West, dated September 4, 1882, and published in the 1886 sessional papers of Canada, in which they asked that their rights to the land they had settled be recognized

when the land was surveyed. Among their comments: "Great then was our astonishment and perplexity when we were notified that when the lands are surveyed we shall be obliged to pay \$2 an acre to the government if our lands are included in odd-numbered sections." Also included are excerpts from diaries, letters and newspaper reports written from both sides of the action. For example, *Toronto Mail* reporter George Ham, who accompanied General Frederick Middleton, wrote on April 9 that "Messengers from the north say Riel intends to make a stand at Batoche's crossing."

One of the only published books that provides voices of women about the 1885 conflict is Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney's *Two Months in the Camp of Big Bear*, published in the fall of 1885. This short book relates the two women's experiences after their husbands and seven other mill owners, farm instructors, traders and missionaries of the Frog Lake settlement were killed by Wandering Spirit (Kapa-pamahchakwew) and other members of Big Bear's Cree. Along with several other families, the women travelled with the Cree group to Fort Pitt. Not surprisingly, Gowanlock and Delaney's book is a bitter account of their ordeal that does not acknowledge any legitimate grievances.

Louis Riel's own writings during 1885 contributed to the literary legacy of Saskatchewan. His journals, letters, prayers, songs and poems from the battlefields of Batoche and his prison in Regina, along with his addresses to the court at his trial, have been published in a five-volume *Collected Writings* (1985). Included are the songs "C'est au champ de bataille" and "Trois corps humains," which conclude in a similar way: "Mourir...chacun meurt à son tour. / Vaut mieux mourir en brave / Faut tous mourir un jour" (To die...each dies in his turn. / It is better to die bravely / But all must die one day). These lines about the inevitability of death were passed down from Riel's family with the notation that they were composed by Riel, though others have suggested they were part of a traditional Métis song.

The drama and tragedy of the North-West Resistance almost immediately inspired a number of melodramatic fictional writings; some of the authors, such as Hayes and Tennyson, lived in the North-West, but others were outsiders. Ontarian Joseph Edmund Collins' *The Story of Louis Riel, the Rebel Chief* (1885) and *Annette, the Metis Spy: A Heroine of the N.W.*

*Rebellion* (1886) mixed up the Red River and Batoche areas as well as the events of 1869 and 1885 and placed Riel at the centre of a love triangle; American Forrest Crissey's *Rodney Merton, the Young Newspaper Scout: A Story of the Riel Rebellion* (1892) was an adventure book for boys; and English writer John Mackie's *The Prodigal's Brother: A Story of Western Life* (1899) was touted as a novel of "love and adventure at the time of the Saskatchewan Rebellion" (Peel, Ingles and Distad).

Many nonfictional accounts of the conflict in the North-West noted that completion of the cross-Canada railway in 1885 allowed the militia to arrive in the territory much more quickly than they had been able to get to the Red River area in 1869–70. The railway spawned a new kind of literary work – the narrative of east-west travel across Canada by rail – that almost always described, at least in part, the Assiniboia district that became southern Saskatchewan. Many such early descriptions were perfunctory since they were based on the view out the window of a rail-car that passed through much of the area at night. One advantage of railway travel was that it allowed more women to travel to Saskatchewan and thus write about it; while many such travellers were British or American, others were Canadian. One was Toronto journalist Ellen Elizabeth Cameron Spragge, who in 1887 published *From Ontario to the Pacific by the C.P.R.*, an account of the first "through" train across Canada in June–July 1886 reprinted from her columns in the *Week* of Montreal. Spragge crossed the central part of the Assiniboia district at night, but she did discuss a storm in Moosomin and a stop for hot-box repairs in Broadview just before she went to sleep. At Old Wives' Lake the next morning, she commented on the skulls, bones and trails of bison: "At several stations I noticed ghastly trophies of piles of bones, many feet high, awaiting transport to distant cities for fertilising and chemical purposes." She noted with interest her "first glimpse of the aborigines" at Swift Current, described gophers "scampering about in all directions," and commented on "the monotony of the scene" through which she had just passed.

Two Canadian women writers who actually got off the train in the Assiniboia district were journalists Lily Lewis and Sara Jeannette Duncan, who started an around-the-world tour with a cross-Canada train journey in 1888. Lewis sent her dispatches to the *Week* under the pseu-

donym Louis Lloyd, while Duncan sent hers to the *Montreal Daily Star* under the pen name Garth Grafton. As well as writing an entertaining account of a settlement near Moosomin, Lewis reported on visits to Government House and the NWMP barracks in Regina, which had been the territorial capital since 1883. She identified Nicholas Flood Davin as the man who toured her and Duncan around the Regina area; she was especially enchanted when he introduced them to “Elaine,” the name Lewis gave to Kate Simpson Hayes. As Lewis wrote, “We found a literary lady, but I hardly know which I enjoyed most, her coffee or her conversation; which I most admired, her verses or the coquettish way she had transmogrified her log cabin” (October 25, 1888). Duncan’s rival columns reappeared in fictional form in her serialized 1890 *A Social Departure: How Orthodocia and I Went Round the World by Ourselves*. The novel tells of two young women on an around-the-world trip who visit a prairie homestead; the narrator says that she has not described the scenery en route “as no scenery whatever occurred during the whole twenty miles.” *A Social Departure* also depicts a fictionalized visit to the “Canadian Mounted Police” station that reminded the narrator of the North-West Rebellion: “Here we heard of Riel – the patriot and the traitor, you remember, the man and the mercenary, the murderer and the martyr, whom we hanged, with much agitation, a very few years ago for obstinately heading the second half-breed rebellion in the North-West” (wording almost identical to that in Duncan’s *Daily Star* column).

All travel writing includes an element of fictional literary construction, but the witty fictiveness of Duncan’s style is evident in other contemporaneous books written about cross-Canada train trips, including English illustrator Edward Roper’s 1891 *By Track and Trail: A Journey through Canada*. Although Roper claimed to be writing nonfiction, the romance he described between a young Englishwoman and a man she met on the ship from England reads much like Duncan’s fictional romance narrative. Roper wrote that, when he got off the train in Broadview, he created a stir: “Evidently the arrival of a stranger at Broadview was not an everyday occurrence, however many might pass it in the train.” He described Broadview as nothing more than a “collection of shanties” where “I met no one I cared to see or talk to.” In several chapters, he referred to the discomforts of homesteading, describing

men “batching it” in sod shacks and wooden shanties, one of which he pictured as “a heap of manure” beside “a big square packing case”; illustrations published in his book show the dismal reality of the scenes he was describing. Like many travellers and writers, Roper also discussed both the bison and First Nations in terms of the inevitability of their disappearance. He was told by a CPR official later in his journey that “there is not a wild buffalo left in the country. It is sad, but it was inevitable.” Of Blackfoot people encountered near Maple Creek, he reported on Canadians commenting “that they were surely dying out, and that when they were all gone it would be a good thing.” Roper’s report of his own encounters with members of First Nations reflected preconceived ideas about them. On his return trip through the Qu’Appelle Valley, he reported meeting a group whom he believed planned to kill him; as he later learned, they simply wanted to return a stray horse to its rightful owner.

Other notable railway narratives include Scotswoman Jessie Saxby’s 1890 *West-Nor’-West*; Saxby disembarked to visit a brother-in-law and two sons farming near Regina. Like Lewis and Duncan, Saxby described Nicholas Flood Davin, and she wrote that the territorial capital was growing in a higgledy-piggledy but practical manner: “Hotels, complete and comfortable as any in the old country, stand side by side with wooden shanties...Mexican saddles rub shoulders with tea-trays in one store. Tinned meats jostle bananas and oranges in another.” In *Through Canada with a Kodak* (1893), Ishbel Maria Gordon, marchioness of Aberdeen and Temair and wife of the governor general, wrote sketchily about the Assiniboia district but was innovative in including photographs. In *Winter and Summer Excursions in Canada* (1894), Scotswoman Catherine Laura Johnstone described taking the new branch line to Duck Lake, Carlton and Prince Albert, in the process passing through Saskatoon, which she dismissed as “a little town on the South Saskatchewan.” English missionary Alexander Boddy’s *By Ocean, Prairie and Peak* (1896) included letters from young farm workers he had met on the ship from England documenting their early experiences in Canada. Toronto journalist Bernard McEvoy’s 1902 *From the Great Lakes to the Wide West* described Regina as a place that “straggles out from the railway on to the surrounding prairie,” with streets of

“primeval black prairie soil” so muddy that “one naturally clings to the sidewalks” and thus finds out that “there are a few highly respectable stores and buildings, not to mention several churches, the court-house, and some schools, of which a larger city might be proud.” As earlier travellers had done, McEvoy described meeting Davin; unlike earlier travellers, he also mentioned Davin’s “recent tragic death” (Davin had committed suicide in 1901).

In the 1890s, another genre of writing about early Saskatchewan developed: the narrative of settlement. Although many earlier promotional materials by the government, land companies and railways included brief testimonials by settlers, now whole books began to appear. One was English emigrant W.M. Elkington’s *Five Years in Canada*, published in 1895. His book contains a rather lacklustre account of four seasons on a farm he purchased near Qu’Appelle. The loneliness of living in a shack on the prairies, as well as low prices for his crops, led him to abandon his farm in 1894, but he described working at larger neighbouring farms such as the former Bell farm at Indian Head; participating in work bees; attending several Dominion Day picnics; visiting the experimental farm at Indian Head and the Roman Catholic mission where First Nations children were educated; being a guest at a Sun Dance; and witnessing an altercation during which a Native man was shot dead. A livelier account of settlement appeared in Georgina Binnie-Clark’s 1910 *A Summer on the Canadian Prairie*. Binnie-Clark travelled from England to Fort Qu’Appelle in 1905 to visit her homesteading brother, considered by the locals to be a remittance man; her book was scathing in its condemnation of effete and incompetent middle-class British men who aspired to be farmers. That summer she bought her own farm, and her next book, *Wheat and Woman* (1914), described her efforts to run it.

Those real narratives of settlement inspired fictional works, often formulaic romances and children’s adventure stories, that used settlement in the Assiniboia and Saskatchewan districts in their plot lines. In 1892, Argyll Saxby (son of Scottish traveller Jessie Saxby), who had homesteaded in the Qu’Appelle Valley but then moved to Australia, published a novel for boys called *Comrades Three! A Story of the Canadian Prairies*, about three young Cornishmen ranching in the Wascana

Valley who were aided by a Blackfoot chief named Black Cloud. Jessie Saxby herself wrote the children's novella *Brown Jack: A Tale of North-West Canada* (1896), about an Aboriginal man in the Qu'Appelle Valley who gives his life to save the daughter of settlers. Former NWMP member John Mackie published *Sinners Twain: A Romance of the Great Lone Land* (1895), set in the Cypress Hills area of Alberta but with one character, a sergeant in the NWMP, who travels to headquarters in Regina. Scot Catherine Johnstone used her travels in Canada as the basis for a novel for boys called *The Young Emigrants* (1898), the story of a twelve-year-old from London who heads to Qu'Appelle to make his fortune and eventually leads his family to become successful farmers at Indian Head. In 1900, Francis James Hunter, who in 1883 became manager of the Regina branch of the Bank of Montreal, wrote *Colonel Gascoigne, V.C.: A Story of Travel, Adventure and Love*, a fictionalized account of Frederick Gascoigne and his daughter, Elizabeth, set north of Regina. The following year English novelist Harold Bindloss, who spent some of his youth in western Canada, issued *A Sower of Wheat*, a romance set in a fictionalized version of the English colony of Cannington Manor in southeastern Saskatchewan; in his book, the settlement is called "Carrington Manor." That same year Charles Fox, an English settler in the Qu'Appelle Valley north of Regina, published *The Land of Lasses Few: A Tale of the Canadian Prairies*, the story of two young women from Yorkshire who discover romance and marriage on the "bachelor frontier" near Regina (Peel, Ingles and Distad).

Before Saskatchewan became a province, histories had already been written about it. In 1883, French-Canadian missionary Georges Dugas published his French-language *Légendes du Nord-ouest*, a collection of histories handed down orally among the Métis of the Red River. The last story, "Marguerite Trottier, scalpée par les Sioux," described a Métis woman who had accompanied her husband to Fort Qu'Appelle in 1807-08. As the group was starting its return canoe journey, it was attacked by a party of Sioux; Trottier's husband fled, leaving Marguerite behind with their infant son. Dugas reported that, while the baby died, Marguerite survived being scalped and having an eye gouged out; however, she refused to live again with her husband, instead remarrying and starting a new family. As early as the winter of 1885, Church of

England clergyman Charles Pelham Mulvaney issued *The History of the North-West Rebellion of 1885*; later history books about Saskatchewan included a history of the rebellions by R.G. MacBeth (1898) and a history of fur traders in the Saskatchewan district by Agnes Laut (1904), who had previously written a work of fiction about the fur trade.

When Saskatchewan attained provincial status in 1905, a new literary era began. For the first time, writers born in the province published literary works. Some became well known across Canada, including Sinclair Ross, whose *As for Me and My House* (1941), and W.O. Mitchell, whose *Who Has Seen the Wind* (1947), demonstrated that the Saskatchewan landscape and people, as well as prairie-based events such as the drought of the 1930s, could provide riveting subject matter. The twentieth century saw the production of Saskatchewan writing that was literary rather than primarily documentary and no longer romantic, stereotypically adventurous or based solely on European models.

#### NOTE

An invaluable source of information about early Saskatchewan books and writers is Bruce Braden Peel's *Bibliography of the Prairie Provinces to 1953*; information from the revised edition by Ernie Ingles and Merrill Distad is available on the web through University of Alberta Libraries.

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