

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

FLIN FLON: A SINGLE ENTERPRISE COMMUNITY

1927 - 1946

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Flin Flon: a single enterprise community 1927-1946

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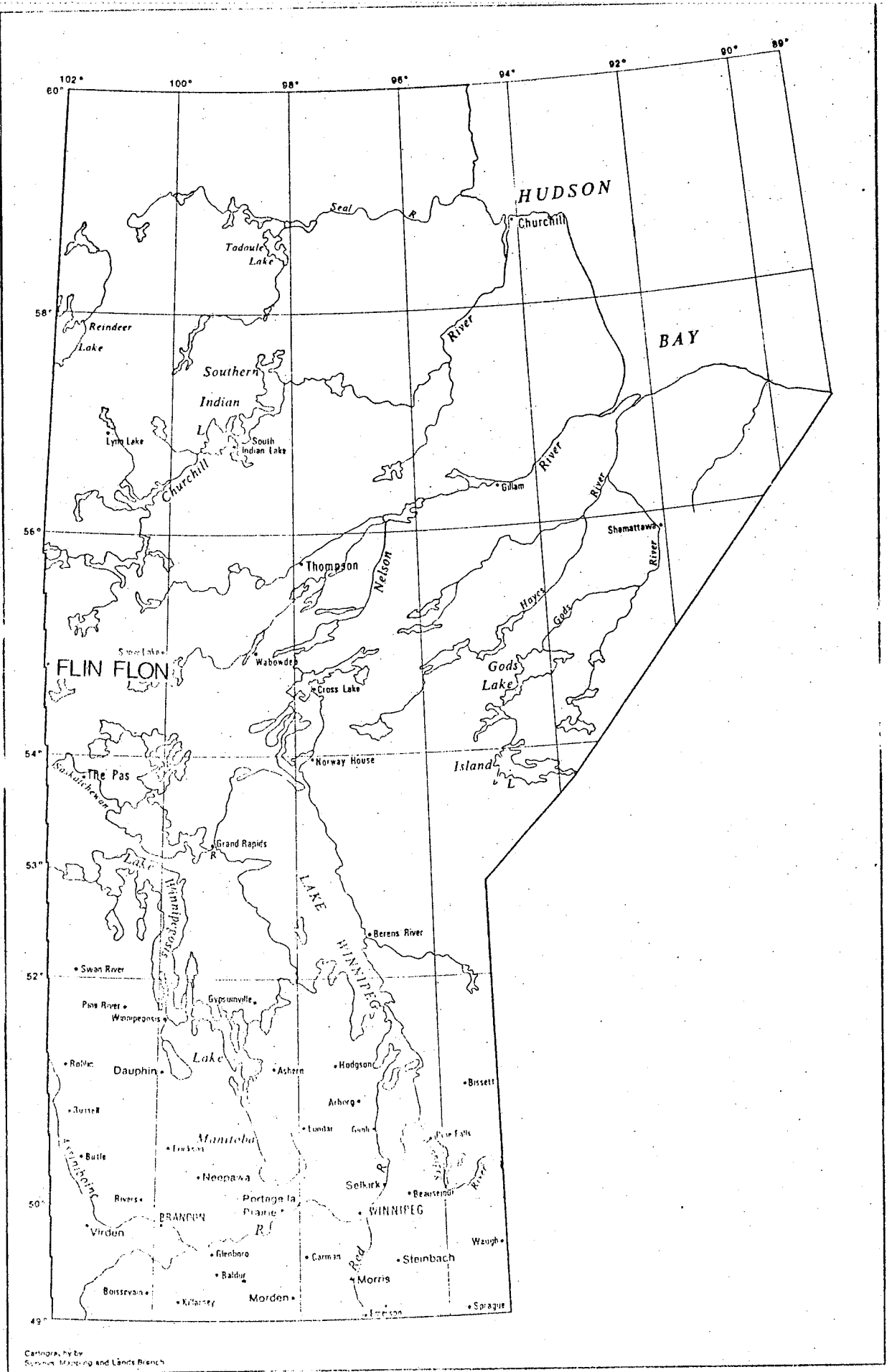
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INTRODUCTION

The study, "Flin Flon; A Single Enterprise Community", was undertaken to illustrate the development of an urban society in Manitoba's northern frontier, in the years 1927-1946. In doing so, the thesis portrays the growth of Flin Flon from a primitive mining camp into a booming industrial town of approximately seven thousand inhabitants.

The underlying theme of the study is to present Flin Flon as representative of urban expansion in the region beyond the limits of the southern population belt. In this manner, it is possible to describe the community as a model of Canadian, resource-based, communities. It is, as a consequence, one of many communities that have encouraged the settlement of the frontier regions of the country.

The resource-based, frontier community within the Canadian context is generally either the product of a single industry or single enterprise activity. The single industry community allows for the development of a resource based community around several enterprises. The single enterprise community, such as Flin Flon, evolves from one enterprise. The Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Company Limited is the enterprise responsible for the development of Flin Flon. Its livelihood, and therefore the livelihood of Flin Flon, is dependent upon the exploitation of the resource wealth located within the district.

Flin Flon is representative of the extractive type of resource orientated, single enterprise community. As such, it is the most common form of resource-based single enterprise community. It is,

however, one of four types that can thus be classified. Included in this number with the extractive communities are lumber orientated communities, fishing communities and hydro-electrical communities, all of which, to one degree or another, have fostered the expansion of the Canadian urban frontier with the establishment of single enterprise, resource-based communities.

Beyond the resource-based communities lie several other, very broad classifications of single enterprise communities. The manufacturing, administrative-defense-service, transportation and the construction type of single enterprise community, like the resource orientated communities, have at their base the single enterprise. They are, however, not as frontier orientated as the resource community and are therefore usually located within heavily populated regions.

The study of Flin Flon as an example of the expansion of the Canadian urban frontier is presented in the text of the thesis in a chronological manner. This type of format allows the study to illustrate specific periods of community growth or stagnation in the framework of the overall evolution of the community. This is particularly important in the discussion of the single enterprise community as it helps to demonstrate patterns or themes in Company-community relations.

The first period discussed deals with the establishment of a single enterprise model and its application to the early history of the Flin Flon region. It assesses the historical patterns of growth and attempts to demonstrate their significance in terms of the development of Flin Flon as a single enterprise community. In this manner,

the early period describes the resource base of the community and its growth in relation to that base. Chronologically, the discussion deals with a period from roughly 1900-1927, when the Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Company was incorporated.

The incorporation of the "single enterprise" presents a natural starting point for the second period of the study. This analyzes the growth of the community from 1927-1934 and presents it as the construction and organizational phase of development. It also allows for the illustration of community response to Company activity. The seven year period is regarded by the study as the formative years of the community and as such emphasis is placed on the long range effect of Company policy upon the community.

The third section of the study deals with the events and circumstances surrounding the one month of June 1934. The Flin Flon strike, during the summer of 1934, is evaluated as both an economic and social response to the patterns of growth within the community. The importance of this particular phenomenon of strike within the single enterprise community, lies not only in its effect on the community but also in the fact that it is a deviation from the norm within developing single enterprise community. These factors combined with the strike's significance in terms of creating a watershed in the relations of Company and community, elevates it to perhaps the most important event in the evolution of the community.

The period from 1934-1946 is evaluated in the thesis as the time when Flin Flon comes of age. The study reflects upon this stage of growth as the maturation of the community. It is characterized by

the tendency on the part of the Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Company Ltd. to isolate itself from community affairs while at the same time allowing or encouraging the community to accept more responsibility. This period, and indeed the whole study, culminates with the Act Incorporating the Town of Flin Flon in 1946.

The evaluation of Flin Flon as a single enterprise community is concluded with a comparative study of characteristics generally accepted as traditional within the single enterprise community. On this basis, it is finally possible to determine the level of Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Company's involvement in the growth of the community.

This thesis, then, depicts the development of Flin Flon, as an example of urban growth within Canada's northern frontier. As a contribution to the study of Canadian single enterprise communities, it hopefully helps to illuminate the phenomenon of urban expansion as well as encourage the continued investigation of the process.

"Flin Flon: A Single Enterprise Community 1927-1946", is the combined efforts of many interested individuals. Over the course of its preparation, my gratitude to those involved in its completion can only in a small way measure the appreciation that is intended. I would specifically however, wish to thank the staffs of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba, the Provincial Library of Manitoba, the Elizabeth Dafoe and Engineering Libraries, University of Manitoba, and the University of Winnipeg Library, for their unselfish assistance in fulfilling my continued requests for information.

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CHAPTER 1

The Single Enterprise Community; A Model and Its Application to
Flin Flon

A special and somewhat distinctive feature of the Canadian urban scene is the relatively large number of communities that owe their existence to an industrial enterprise. While it is estimated that as high as ninety percent of the total Canadian population inhabits a narrow strip of arable land that parallels the international border,¹ the remaining ten percent falls largely into the category of the single industry community.² By definition, the single industry community can be determined as having a large percentage of its basic labour force employed in one dominant industrial activity and where employment is dependent upon the functioning of that activity.³ Although this definition would not entirely restrict the single industry community to the area beyond the reaches of the southern belt of settlement, it would effectively eliminate metropolitan communities wherein the labour force may be dominated by commuters.⁴ By the same token, it makes allowance for both the dominant industrial activity and the various service industries that evolve in the community as a result of, and for the maintenance of, the primary industry.

The process of establishing the quantitative measure for the "Large percentage of the labour force" involved with the single industry necessary to qualify, by definition, as a single industry community has been generally accepted at seventy-five percent as proposed by Rex Lucas in Minetown, Milltown, Railtown.⁵ This, seemingly arbitrary

selection takes into consideration various civilizing aspects of the community such as a newspaper office or hotel and public baths by allowing a twenty-five percent portion of the labour force to be involved in such enterprises. At the same time, this percentage requires that a minimum of three-quarters of the same labour force be involved in the dominant industrial activity or at least dependent upon its continued functioning for their employment.

Based upon the seventy-five percent factor, Flin Flon qualifies by definition as a single industry community. According to the 1951 Canadian Census, Flin Flon had a total labour force of 4,013 men and women, of which 3,796 were wage earners.⁶ Statistics supplied by the provincial Department of Mines and Natural Resources for the same year indicate that an average of approximately 2,700 people were employed by the mining enterprise in Flin Flon.⁷ This information on the Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Company's employees, although close to the seventy-five percent margin, does not include enterprises such as the Hudson Bay Air Transport Co. Ltd., or the Island Falls Power Plant, both of which are subsidiary of the mother company and both of which would contribute to the single industry status of Flin Flon. In the final analysis then, the town of Flin Flon as incorporated in 1946, meets the criteria established for its single industry status by 1951 which would suggest that the same would hold true for the period prior to 1946.⁸

In keeping with the theme of the single industry community, a further offshoot has evolved which becomes a specialized form of single industry community. This is the single enterprise community,

which must satisfy the definition of a single industry community as well as meet its own requirement.⁹ Assuming that a particular community has seventy-five percent of its labour force engaged in a dominant industrial activity, it would also require to have that dominant activity initiated and controlled by a single enterprise in order to qualify as a single enterprise community.¹⁰ The single enterprise, be it an industry, government agency, defense establishment or a transportational network must, by virtue of its dominance in the economy of the community, be actively involved in the community itself.¹¹ This involvement may out of necessity or choice be exercised as employer, landlord, storekeeper, town council, recreation director and perhaps even as the fire department.¹² The totality of the enterprise in the life of the community generally dictates the type of single enterprise community that evolves. In most cases in the single enterprise community, there is an acceptance of a limited amount of company involvement as a matter of course, whether it is in the form of housing, recreational activities or company stores. But in other cases a "closed" single enterprise community has developed because of the company's total control of facilities within the community.¹³

The universal feature of the single enterprise community is the predominance of company-owned family dwellings.¹⁴ In the first stage of community development, the accommodations are generally restricted to bunkhouses or tents, owned and maintained by the enterprise. As the settlement develops a resemblance of permanence, individual houses are constructed by the company in order to attract a stable working element to whom the houses are rented. With the passage of time, agreements

are generally reached whereby the employee has the option to buy the company house. This evolutionary trend, being the norm in Canadian single enterprise communities, is an extremely important method of maintaining a viable work force and correspondingly a viable community.

Other major characteristics of the single enterprise community, which are not as traditional or all encompassing as company housing, are the company-owned retail general store, hotel, recreation center, playgrounds, water works, church buildings, hospitals and possibly the company-supported school. In addition to these physical features, the company in many cases indirectly controls many of the personal and social aspects of the lives of its employees. This would in some instances, also include political representation in the community or at the provincial or federal level.

In general then, the single enterprise community must be a single industry community in which the industrial activity of the community is under the complete control of a single enterprise. The characteristics which, on occasion, evolve from these circumstances, such as company-owned housing or retail outlets are basically indicators of the type of single enterprise community that may exist. So while on the one extreme, a single enterprise community may exist with simply a goodly proportion of the labour force involved in the single enterprise, it may also function under conditions in which the enterprise has the authority to restrict civil freedom within the boundaries of territorial law.

The community of Flin Flon, already assessed as a single industry community, also meets the necessary requirements to qualify as

a single enterprise community. The one dominant enterprise active in the community in the period under consideration is the Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Company.¹⁵ The statistics provided by the Department of Mines and Natural Resources which were referred to in the context of the single industry community, pertain strictly to the operation of the single mining company,¹⁶ and therefore indicate that approximately seventy-five percent of the labour force was indeed involved in its operations.¹⁷ As a consequence, Flin Flon can be determined to function as a resource orientated, extractive, single enterprise community under the supervision of a private enterprise.

The resource-based single enterprise community is but one example of the phenomenon that has resulted in the growth of the Canadian urban frontier.¹⁸ They, like the manufacturing, administrative-defense-service and transportational or construction single enterprise communities meet the basic requirements of definition but as resource-based communities they have features that make them unique. In other words, the forestry, fishing and extractive single-enterprise communities are perhaps a truer form of single enterprise community because of their greater reliance on the company responsible for their existence. This situation is primarily due to the location of the resource that is essential to the development of the community. While, for example, a manufacturing enterprise would situate itself in close proximity to its market, the resource enterprise would by necessity have to restrict its location to the site of the resource. As a result of this location factor, a resource enterprise is often forced to pioneer the frontier of a specific region in order to obtain its commodity.

The location of resource orientated single enterprise communities has perhaps best been delineated by Ira Robinson in New Industrial Towns on Canada's Resource Frontier.¹⁹ While the bulk of Canada's population is concentrated in a thin belt that parallels the international border, it has been estimated that at least ten percent resides in isolated resource orientated frontier communities.²⁰ These communities can be categorized into three distinct groupings, which generally correspond to various physiographic features of the country.²¹ The Canadian Shield, which possess the majority of Canada's mineral wealth, is the most populated region in terms of resource orientated single enterprise communities.²² The Northern Cordilleran mountain range in the upper coastal region of British Columbia has the second largest grouping while the Interior Plains region ranks third in the number of resource orientated single enterprise communities.²³ The isolated or frontier nature of the three regions - particularly the Shield area of northern Canada - increases the chances of a paternal relationship between the community and the enterprise that is responsible for its existence.

The community of Flin Flon is located on the Canadian Shield and therefore falls into the most populated physiographic region of Canada, in terms of single enterprise communities. Even the most populated area however can be evaluated as having given rise to isolated frontier communities, which, without the presence of an exploitable resource, would not necessarily have developed. In the case of Flin Flon, the resource industry is extractive, based on the mineral wealth of the Shield and, while this is the dominant resource industry active

in the Canadian Shield region, it combines with the forestry industry to give the Shield its premier position in resource-based single enterprise communities.²⁴

The obvious connection between the resource and the location of the resource-based community is the dominant factor in its development. The resource itself, however, is generally not influential in determining the type of community that evolves. The exception to this rule is a situation wherein the resource is deemed to be of enough value to warrant its development but its treatment or exploitation, because of the cost and expertise involved in its development, demand a large single enterprise's participation. In other words, unless the type of resource find is beyond the scope of single industry as compared to single enterprise development, the community will usually evolve as a multi-enterprise community based on the single industry of the resource.

Combined with the expenditure on the exploitation of the resource itself is the expenditure involved in the development of the process by which the resource can be made profitable. This includes such facilities as transportation, power and, of course, the construction of the community itself. The major feature in this vein that influences the involvement of the single enterprise is the general isolation of the region in which the resource is found. The enterprise must, in most cases, pioneer the frontier and implement its own system of transportation, power supply and community growth. This, like the expense involved in the profitable exploitation of the resource, would demand a large enterprise with the capital and the expertise, as well as the political power, to initiate the development of the resource.

The isolation of the region in which the single enterprise community develops is, as a rule, maintained because of past resource exploitation. A region such as the Canadian Shield most actively warrants development because of its resource wealth and while one form of development may lead to another method of resource exploitation it does not necessarily foster a high level of permanence. In fact, it is possible to suggest that the exploitation of a particular resource reinforces the isolation of the region. So while it could be argued that the fur trade introduced agriculture which in turn introduced mineral or forest exploitation in Manitoba, it would be possible to also determine that these industries because of their economic base, maintained the frontier nature of the region. The fur trade, for example, required a large uninhabited countryside in order to expedite the exploitation of the region's fur wealth; similarly agriculture and forestry require large tracts of open land in order to function properly. The continued evolution of resource-based industries has helped to produce a situation which is favourable to the single enterprise community in the resource region.

The historical neglect of the frontier region in which the majority of the single enterprise communities are found is a contributing factor to their evolution. History maintains that early interest in Canada was primarily due to its potential resource wealth and while permanent settlement eventually followed, it too was based on the resource wealth of the country. The continued isolation of various regions in Canadian history because of resources or the lack of them is an important factor in the eventual dominance of the single enterprise

community in the resource field. The relationship between historical precedent and contemporary single enterprise communities is indeed a factor in the growth of communities such as Flin Flon.

Single enterprise communities, such as Flin Flon are the products of three factors that play a large role in their evolution as single enterprise communities. The resource and the type of development necessary to make it profitable combines with the continued isolation of the particular region in which the resource is located to promote the rise of the single enterprise community. The application of this thesis to the community of Flin Flon effectively illustrates that had it not been for the eventual participation of the single enterprise in the resource development of the area, that the mineral wealth and subsequently, the community itself, would not have developed as it did. Thus, the major function of the single enterprise in community development is in providing the method through which that development may take place.

Isolation

The historical precedent of isolation which contributes to the final evolution of Flin Flon as a single enterprise community began with the first expedition in search of the passage to the riches of the East Indies. Commencing in 1576 and continuing through until the first fur trading venture in the area of northern Manitoba in 1659, the region had significance in terms of development, only in as much as it impeded travel to the Indies and forced exploration of the northern reaches of Canada.²⁵ Indeed, the interest of the first explorers of the northern region of Manitoba was firstly with the east and then

perhaps more as a consolation, with the potential of the Canadian frontier. This meant that the Canadian north acted as a buffer for the alleged northwest passage. It was not until the resources of the frontier were appreciated that it warranted investigation.

The fur, agricultural, lumber and mineral wealth of Manitoba can be illustrated as the initiators of the area's development. Introduced by the explorations of those involved in the search for the northwest passage, the series of resource development schemes continued to contribute to the isolation of the region. So, while in the case of the northwest passage, outposts were established merely out of necessity for the realization of the final objective,²⁶ in the resource period of the region's development, outposts were established in a fashion so as to allow for the fullest possible exploitation of the resources, which meant the continued isolation of the area.

The fur trade era can be characterized by the rivalry of two countries, three companies and all the individuals who were actively involved in the pursuit of furs. Originally orientated towards Hudson Bay, the competition forced the traders inland. As they moved towards the interior of the northern Manitoba region they established outposts which served to extend the frontier further west. Encouraged by the efforts of Henry Kelsey, Anthony Hendry or the Sieur de la Verendrye a series of posts connected by a growing inland transportation system quickly emerged. The whole basis of the system however depended upon open access to the fur bearing areas of the north. This consequently meant that while the posts of the Northwest or Hudson's Bay Company served as the connection between the traders and the market, it also

ensured that the traders could move within the interior unimpeded by settlers or communities of settlers. Hence, the nomadic nature of the traders and the limited settlement potential of the outposts helped to maintain the isolation of northern Manitoba.

The connection between the fur trade era and the agricultural development of Manitoba is based upon the generating of interest in the settlement possibilities of the frontier. The Earl of Selkirk, for example, initiated his settlement schemes on the inspiration of the travels of Alexander Mackenzie.²⁷ While Mackenzie himself was introduced to the potential riches of the countryside, he also introduced those riches through his writings to potential settlers.

The division between the fur trade industry and that of agriculture can fairly accurately be drawn at 1869 when Rupert's Land and the North-West territory were formally transferred to the Dominion of Canada. Where the companies and individuals of the fur trade era pursued the wealth of the furs at the expense of all else, the Dominion government sought a policy of settlement at all costs.

Settlement of the farming population in northern Manitoba was almost non-existent. Those settlers who were associated with Selkirk's expeditions traversed the province by way of the Nelson River to Lake Winnipeg and eventually landed at the proposed site of settlement at the junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers in southern Manitoba. This trend continued through the first half of the nineteenth century until the importance of the northern route into the province began to lose its dominance as the major route of traffic.²⁸

Although the northern clay belt, between the Nelson and Churchill

Rivers was considered arable, the farming of the north was not viewed as a profitable venture.²⁹ The short growing season and the lack of facilities acted as deterrents to all but a few hardy individuals. The adventurous had, in some cases, taken to the farming of the pioneer fringe but this was generally the exception rather than the rule.³⁰ The agricultural industry tended to funnel potential settlers into the southern reaches of the province away from the north and thereby maintained the relative isolation of the north.

The major exception to this isolating role of agriculture was its attempt to maintain the Hudson Bay connection. As early as 1879, charters had been obtained from parliament authorizing the survey of potential rail routes to Hudson Bay.³¹ Several proposals were presented for the route's advantages and significantly these appeals became one of the factors involved in the eventual construction of a rail connection to Hudson Bay.³²

The railway combined with river transport to further open the north to commercial enterprise. Most noticeable among these was the forestry industry.³³ When the rail connection to The Pas was completed in 1908, it became economically viable to establish industry that had previously been out of the question due to the lack of a transportation system. The lumber industry was quick to take advantage of the rail connection and in 1909 the first sawmill began operations in The Pas region.³⁴ Two years after it had started operation, the mill was cutting thirty-five million feet annually. But, like its predecessors in the resource exploitation business, the forestry industry contributed to the relative isolation of the region. The Finger Lumber Company,