

PRAIRIE PATRIARCH: A HISTORY OF ALMON JAMES COTTON 1858-1942

by

Wendy Jean Owen

A thesis
presented to the University of Manitoba
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
History

Winnipeg, Manitoba

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WENDY JEAN OWEN

**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
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ABSTRACT

Between 1870 and 1914 Canada's prairies were settled by thousands of farmers, many from overcrowded Ontario. While the Ontario farmer has been the protagonist in much Canadian fiction, often being portrayed as a tyrannical patriarch, he has seldom been examined as an individual in historical writing. Agricultural history rooted in political economy and economic history presents the farmer as an anonymous figure contributing to collective statistics about costs, yields, and averages under cultivation. Like the fiction, the historical literature sees the farmer as victim, subject to a myriad of larger environmental and economic forces over which he has little control.

In the career of Almon James Cotton (1858-1942), we have the opportunity to follow the agricultural strategy of an effective and articulate prairie farmer.¹ Cotton is one of the few farmers in early Manitoba for whom extensive financial records and personal papers are available. In his early years in the West, at Treherne, Manitoba, between 1888 and 1902, Cotton established himself by exploiting leased land, combining good fortune, above-average farming practices, and constant expansion of his acreage under cultivation to become known as Manitoba's Wheat King. Detailed analysis of Cotton's surviving account books makes it possible to follow the gradual process by which Cotton achieved his success, providing a case study illuminating the long-standing debate over the costs of establishing a prairie farm. At the turn of the century, with four sons to establish on farms of their own, Cotton shifted from tenancy to land ownership, purchasing 3,000 acres in the newly-opened Swan River Valley.

In the Swan River Valley, Cotton turned patriarch and squire, per-

haps enabling him to avoid the alienation which beset many farmers. He had not only to improve his land but to take the lead in the building of roads, bridges, schools, churches, and even towns. He became briefly involved in provincial politics, running in 1903 for the Manitoba Legislature on a combined Temperance-Liberal ticket. But Cotton found politics unsatisfying, and lavished far more attention on correspondence with over 2,000 potential newcomers to the region, serving as an unpaid agent of the Department of Immigration. He became a spokesman for the successful prairie farmer, sharing in criticism of the eastern establishment and boosting the region in a variety of ways.

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INTRODUCTION

Between 1870 and 1914, Canada's prairie provinces were settled by thousands of farmers. They came from all corners of the world, but one of the major sources was the overpopulated farming districts of central Canada, particularly Ontario. The Ontario farmer on the prairies has been the protagonist in a good deal of Canadian fiction, especially in the early days of realism, but he has seldom been examined as an individual in historical writing. We have had a good many studies of the prairie farmer as a group, but few of the historical equivalents of the characters in the novels of Robert Stead and Frederick Philip Grove. In part this neglect results from an absence of source material; few pioneer farmers had the time or the inclination necessary to make possible a biographical approach. In part the neglect follows from the larger-than-life fictional characters, for it has often seemed that real farmers led much less interesting lives than those created by the novelists. One farmer whose records have survived, and whose career did have some dimension to it was Almon James Cotton, known in his time as Manitoba's "Wheat King." Cotton was not only a highly successful farmer who regarded himself as a self-made man, but like his fictional counterparts he built a dynasty in the Swan River Valley region of Manitoba. His life tells us much

about the development of prairie agriculture and settlement in the formative years of the West.

Two distinct sources shape our prevailing images of the farmer in the early years of western expansion. One source, rooted in a long tradition of political economy and economic history, presents the farmer as an anonymous figure contributing to collective statistics about costs, yields, and acreages under cultivation. Often portrayed as a victim, the farmer is subjected to a myriad of larger environmental and economic forces over which he has little control.¹ To a considerable extent, this image was one advanced and perpetuated by the farmers themselves through their various movements of protest. This study of A. J. Cotton, by concentrating on the life of one farmer, enables us to see him not in the abstract, but as a concrete personality, one who makes decisions as well as being acted upon by the outside world.

Born in Ontario, Cotton had farmed there without marked success before removing to Treherne, Manitoba, in 1888. Between 1888 and 1900, Cotton laid the foundations of his reputation as an effective farmer. While much has been written in recent years about the minimal amounts of capital necessary to establish a prairie farm, little is known about the subsequent behaviour of farmers who did achieve success. A. J. Cotton had a deliberate strategy, based upon tenancy of virgin prairie land. Close analysis of his account books for the period 1888-1900 enable us to follow his steady progress

and ultimate emergence as one of Manitoba's leading farmers, a product of good fortune, above-average farming practices, and constant expansion of his acreage under cultivation. By 1898 Cotton was ready to move into a new phase of his career, as large landholder, leading citizen, and founder of a family dynasty in the Swan River Valley.

The move to Swan River takes us to the other source of the image of the farmer, one rooted in the imaginative literature of the prairie West. This source is more ambivalent about the forces to which the farmer is subject, sometimes seeing him triumphing over them and often being submerged by them. The literary image, however, does offer the farmer some sort of humanity in terms of his relationship with his family. The result is not always positive. As one critic has put it, the farmer in much western fiction is

. . . the "prairie patriarch" filled with the righteousness of his own purpose, but in fact a land-hungry, work-intoxicated tyrant. The farm women are subjugated, culturally and emotionally starved, and filled with a smouldering rebellion.²

Characters like Caleb Gare in Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese, Gander Stake in Robert Stead's Grain, and Abe Spalding in F. P. Grove's Fruits of the Earth, provide a powerful evocation of the prairie farmer.³

While the two images of anonymous farmer and literary

protagonist are not often juxtaposed, since political economists and critics of fiction inhabit different world, they are not so much conflicting as complementary. Unable to control either nature or the impersonal economic forces of the external world, the fictional farmer sublimates his sense of alienation in an attempt to dominate the one aspect of his life over which he can exercise power: his family. Prairie writers have developed a variety of versions of this central theme.⁴ On one level, A. J. Cotton represents a real life-embodiment of both images. He was subjected to the impersonal forces, and he did consciously set out to make himself the patriarch of a dynasty. But care must be exercised not to turn Cotton into little more than a mechanically representative figure.

While Cotton did struggle with forces beyond his control, occasionally perceiving them as such, he also managed to turn some of those forces to his advantage. And while Cotton exhibits traits drawn from Caleb Gare, Gander Stake, and Abe Spalding, he was neither introspective nor alienated. He turned to building a dynasty not because of his dissatisfaction with achievements on the land, but because their success made possible a new life with different goals. Cotton was never swept up in "the turbulent tide of Mammonism" - the phrase is Robert Stead's in The Homesteaders - nor did he suffer the "depersonalizing effect of mechanization, the alienating effect of industrialization."⁵ He never became captured by the machine age, allowing his farm to be domin-

ated by labour-saving machinery. If he exploited various members of his family as a labour force, he was also generous and loyal to them, a true paternalist rather than a tyrant. Houses and machines are often employed by the novelists as symbols and metaphors for alienation. Unlike Abe Spalding's edifice, A. J. Cotton's housing was modest and unpretentious, even in his dynastic period. Moreover, Cotton had a positive attitude toward the land, and even after he no longer worked it actively, he revelled in the pleasures of the farmer's kitchen garden.⁶ Cotton was no saint, and he is no more - or less - typical than any of the fictional characters. But his career, especially in Swan River, offers a somewhat less negative version of the prairie patriarch.

The difference between A. J. Cotton and the fictional patriarchs may lie in the way in which Cotton developed his life. He did not attempt dynastic pretensions until he had become successful. And he turned for his pretensions to one of the last manageable frontiers in the Canadian West. In his mid-forties, Cotton turned his back on a southern Manitoba where he might well have found himself subjected to the alienating conditions outlined by both the economic historians and the novelists. Instead, he moved to new territory and new involvements. Perhaps he escaped from the "modern trend" of running "the farm like a factory" by removing to Swan River.⁷ Perhaps such an action was merely avoiding the inevitable. But for Cotton it worked. In

Swan River he became involved in politics, in the petty details of improving the amenities of his district, and in "boosting" both the West in general and Swan River in particular.

One of the most interesting aspects of Cotton's activities in Swan River was his considerable correspondence with prospective newcomers to the Canadian West. As an unpaid agent for the Commission of Immigration, in the early years of the century Cotton wrote to nearly 2,000 intending settlers, answering their queries and offering them advice. In most cases Cotton talked in generalities and cliches, but he did serve as a real-life illustration of a farmer who had been successful, and none of his letters indicated any sense of alienation from his environment. Cotton was an enthusiastic believer in the West, and he communicated his commitment to his correspondents. Enthusiasm and commitment, as well as a definite quality of adaptation and personal growth, make Cotton a sympathetic figure. Together with his undoubted success as a working farmer, these qualities make A. J. Cotton's life and career worth examining in some detail. The pages which follow attempt to understand Cotton and place him in the context of his times.

NOTES: INTRODUCTION

1. See, for example, C. A. Dawson and Eva B. Younge, Pioneering in the Prairie Provinces: The Social Side of the Settlement Process (Toronto, 1940); Robert England, The Colonization of Western Canada: A Study of Contemporary Land Settlement, 1896-1934 (Toronto, 1936); A. S. Morton and Chester Martin, History of Prairie Settlement and "Dominion Lands" Policy (Toronto, 1938); J. L. Tyman, By Section, Township and Range: Studies in Prairie Settlement (Brandon, 1972); Trevor J. O. Dick, "Mechanization and North American Prairie Farm Costs, 1896-1930," Journal of Economic History, 42 (1982), 199-206; Frank Lewis, "Farm Settlement on the Canadian Prairies, 1898-1911," Journal of Economic History, 41 (1981), 517-536; K. H. Norrie, "The Rate of Settlement on the Canadian Prairies, 1870-1911," Journal of Economic History, 35 (1975), 410-427.
2. Dick Harrison, Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction (Edmonton, 1977), p. 90.
3. Martha Ostenso, Wild Geese (1925); Robert Stead, Grain (1926); F. P. Grove, Fruits of the Earth (1933).
4. Harrison, Unnamed Country, 100-130.
5. Ibid., p. 118.
6. A. J. Cotton, "The Farmer's Vegetable Garden," The Nor'West Farmer, 21 December 1904.
7. Grove, Fruits, p. 41.

CHAPTER I: IN THE BEGINNING

Almon James Cotton was born near Port Granby, Ontario, on the north shore of Lake Ontario, in 1858. Cotton's grandfather John Cotton had emigrated to Upper Canada with his wife and family in 1838 from Bude in Cornwall, England.¹ John Cotton and his brother William, who had begun farming in the Port Hope area in 1836, were among the flood of English settlers who had entered Upper Canada in the 1830s. John Cotton settled on fifty acres in Clarke Township in Durham County. Almon James was the illegitimate child of John Cotton's daughter Emma, and like many such offspring in the nineteenth century, he was raised by his grandparents. Although brought up on a farm, A. J. (as he became known) went to work for the railroad upon leaving school, probably because there seemed little future on his family's holdings, a typical situation for all but eldest sons in the older parts of Ontario and undoubtedly exacerbated by the manner of his birth.² The agricultural lands of the province were desperately overpopulated by the 1870s and 1880s, and younger members of farm families were forced to migrate elsewhere or leave farming in order to become established. Most of John Cotton's offspring seem to have remained in the immediate area, but four of William Cotton's five children ultimately moved to the United States and the remaining one settled in industrial Hamilton. A. J. achieved sufficient success to

justify marriage, and on 22 June 1880 he married Louise Ford, the daughter of John Gay Ford, a farmer of Little Britain, Ontario.³ In 1881 old John Cotton died, and the young couple took over his fifty-acre farm, renting it from A. J.'s uncle Henry Cotton for \$25 per annum.⁴ Fifty acres was hardly enough land upon which to prosper, but it was a start in life.

The records begun by A. J. Cotton on 23 February 1881, when he "commenced business for himself," show that in his first year of farming he paid out nearly \$100 more than he took in.⁵ However, despite the shortfall in the accounts of 1881, Cotton seems to have scraped by. On his farm barley was the main crop, but like most farms in Ontario at this time, Cotton's was really a mixed holding. In later years he raised horses, both for his own use and for sale. In February 1884, with the help of cash he had earned loading barley onto Lake Ontario schooners, A. J. was able to extend his acreage by purchase of the nearby Henderson farm, then owned by John Staples, a local schoolmaster. Cotton paid \$6,400 for the Henderson property, comprising the centre 100 acres of lot 5 in Broken Front, Township of Clarke, and containing a dwelling house and two barns.⁶ He rented the dwelling on his new property for \$2 per month, which suggests it was not a very substantial building. To help with his expanded land holdings, A. J. took on a hired man - Samuel Henderson, later his brother-in-law. Cotton was to pay Henderson \$160 per annum plus board, washing, and mending.⁷

The expansion of the farm through the Henderson purchase appears to have been a mistake, and Cotton's subsequent reluctance to buy land may have been conditioned by this early experience. In any event, by the autumn of 1887 the Cotton enterprise was in trouble, and the family decided to leave Ontario, "having farmed down there," Cotton later recalled, "until we could farm no longer at a profit."⁸ Whatever the reason for Cotton's difficulties, it is unlikely to have been an absence of hard work. The surviving account books for the early years bear out Cotton's contention that he worked hard for little profit in Ontario. Both A. J. and Henderson worked on the Lake Ontario schooners, and on the railroad when there were blockages to be cleared on the line. They cut and sold cord wood, as well as tending the farm and stock. Although Cotton would later blame American policy for his failure, particularly the McKinley tariff, that legislation did not pass the American Congress until 1890.⁹ The problem was more likely the size of the farm, the lack of good land upon it, and the size of the mortgage. Like many farmers in the area, Cotton made ends meet by supplementing his farm income with non-farm labour, often the sign of an inadequate holding either in size or in fertility.

Selling the Henderson farm proved more difficult than Cotton had anticipated. The farm did not sell at auction when first put on the block in October 1887, and when it fi-

nally sold in December of that year, it realized only \$5,000, \$1,400 less than Cotton had originally paid for it. The original fifty-acre Cotton holding reverted back to Henry Cotton after A. J. removed to Manitoba. After Henry's death in 1910, A. J. came under some pressure, particularly from his sister Lina, to buy the property. But he refused, on the grounds that none of the family were left nearby to supervise the farm, and even if rented out it would cost more in upkeep than it could bring in revenue.¹⁰ Cotton was never sentimental about Ontario. If Cotton lost money on his land, his disposal at auction of farm animals, implements, and equipment, was more successful. Prices ranged from 25¢ for a seed box to \$45 for a Massey binder to \$145 for a bay horse.¹¹ Cotton did not dispose of all his livestock and implements, however, and in March 1888 he packed a railcar with goods and set off for Manitoba. The car, which travelled from Newtonville, Ontario, to Treherne, Manitoba, via the Grand Trunk and Canadian Pacific Railways, also contained the Cotton household furniture. The total value of the goods that Cotton shipped he estimated at \$800, but this valuation was probably not on a replacement cost basis.¹²

The land to which Cotton migrated in 1888 belonged to Major (later Colonel) William McLean, a Port Hope businessman. McLean had visited Manitoba in the summer of 1887, when memories of the bust of 1882 were receding and eastern optimism for Manitoba was rekindling, helped by a good crop

year. McLean purchased land about a mile outside Treherne, about 100 kilometers southwest of Winnipeg on territory newly opened by the railway. The land was the east half of section 3, township 8, range 10, west of the first meridian. Obviously a speculator, McLean needed someone to bring the land under cultivation. He was prepared to give a five-year lease with an annual rental of one dollar payable at the end of the year, providing he acquired all other improvements - broken land, fences, and buildings - at the conclusion of the lease. While such an offer might not at first glance appear attractive, Cotton accepted it. No doubt the experience with the Henderson property made him more willing to lease, as did news of the quality of the land, the cost of which was beyond his available resources. Before he came to terms, Cotton wrote to a neighbouring farmer in Treherne to enquire about the potential of the land, but when he was assured it was good grain-growing land he signed the lease with alacrity. Although there is no mention of statute labour and taxes in Cotton's description of the lease preserved in his account book, it is clear from subsequent books that Cotton was responsible also for the statute labour and local taxes from the outset.¹³ In 1888 Cotton spent three days with his horses helping to clear what became Treherne's main street, and on 23 November 1888 he paid \$14.76 as taxes in full for the year. The taxes were to rise yearly as Cotton broke new land and added improvements, and by 1901 the taxes were \$70

per annum.¹⁴ Despite these charges, Cotton had none of his capital tied up in land, no mortgage costs, and few financial responsibilities for it. Providing he did not over-improve the property, he was getting first cultivation of it for a relative pittance.

In his first year Cotton and his hired hand Albert Taylor between them broke sixty acres of prairie. Cotton had hired Taylor before he left Ontario: "Hired Albert Taylor for two terms of eights in each term at 17.00 per month beginning today (March 17, 1888) for the first term. April 1st 1889 for the following 8 months."¹⁵ It is interesting to note that Taylor was not hired for the entire year but only for the farming months. Presumably he returned to Ontario for the winter. Cotton planted no wheat in his first year; of the sixty acres broken, twenty-three were planted with barley, two and one-half with oats, and one acre with potatoes. The last crops were obviously intended for food and fodder. Cotton planted the barley against the advice of his new neighbours. Barley was not generally profitable in his new surroundings. But A. J. was familiar with the crop and had never planted wheat. And he was very lucky, not for the last time in his Manitoba activities. Rain came at exactly the right time, and he was able to harvest a yield of sixteen bushels per acre, for a total of 356 bushels. He was even more fortunate that 1888 was a year of high prices and he was able to get top dollar for his crop.¹⁶ The Cottons also sold thirty-five pounds of butter and seven

and one-half dozen eggs in their first year in Manitoba. Sale of such surplus did not imply any serious efforts at mixed farming, although Cotton supplemented his income for years through such marketing, but it did mean that the subsistence area of the farm was more than doing its job. As in Ontario, Cotton helped to balance his books by working for other farmers in the area. He earned \$12 for four days' work with his horses and another \$24.50 for fifteen days of manual labour.¹⁷

There was no farm house on Major McLean's land, and for the first year the Cotton family, their hired man - and later Mrs. Cotton's brother William Ford - lived in an abandoned house on a neighbouring farm. Fancy housing was obviously not one of Cotton's immediate priorities in Manitoba; how Mrs. Cotton felt is not recorded. The primitive conditions may have reflected a continuing shortage of building materials in Manitoba at this time. When the Cottons took over the abandoned house it had no floor, but they put one in with the material from the packing boxes in which their goods had been shipped. They floored "a piece overhead large enough for the man to sleep on" and "hung some carpets and curtains for walls."¹⁸ On March 21, 1889, Cotton began to lay the foundation for a new house on Major McLean's land, suggesting that he was reasonably satisfied both with the land and the move to Manitoba. Lumber for the house came to \$124.57 and its total cost was calculated by Cotton at \$217.04. Costs for improvements on the land - outbuildings

and fencing - as well as the need for more implements and more hired help as more land was broken, created more outlays in 1889. Cotton had borrowed money from members of his family in Ontario before he came west and soon began to incur other debts.¹⁹ Like most farmers, Cotton's early years saw him continually in debt. Unlike most farmers, however, Cotton gradually managed to reduce his debts. By 1891 his finances were beginning to improve, and he was not only able to pay off all the debts incurred in that year but also to make inroads into the earlier ones. In 1891 he was able to pay his threshing bill for 1890 and most of the 1891 bill, as well as sending a total of \$250 to his aunt Nora Williams and her husband John back in Port Hope. One of the principal reasons for this turn-around was that Cotton had sold his 1890 wheat crop for \$2516, and was able to look forward to another prosperous year in 1892. By the end of 1892 his net worth had increased significantly, despite extra expenses caused by the hiring of two hands in addition to his brother-in-law, William Förd.²⁰

Despite the early success with barley, wheat was the crop upon which A. J. Cotton's success was built. Wheat had been the foundation of the prosperity of Upper Canada, and it would be the basis of Manitoba's agricultural progress in the last years of the nineteenth century as well.²¹ One of the major concerns of Ontario farmers, of course, was whether wheat could consistently mature in the shorter growing season of Manitoba, especially outside the Red River Valley. Cotton welcomed the arrival of Red Fife, a wheat

strain which matured in 115-125 days, as opposed to the 125-145 days of earlier varieties. Red Fife was a great advantage to prairie farmers of the 1880s. In order to encourage its use the Canadian Pacific produced seed at their experimental farm and even supplied it free of charge to settlers. The development and spread of such hardy strains made the northern expansion of the agricultural frontier of America possible.²²

By the end of 1892 Cotton had broken 270 acres of Major McLean's half section. In that year he had sown 153 acres with wheat, twenty-three with oats, and ten with barley. Twenty-five acres were newly broken and the remainder were probably in summer fallow. Whether the practice of summer fallowing had spread as a direct consequence of the events of 1885, when land had been left croplless because of farmer involvement with the Riel Rebellion, is not clear. But land left fallow produced a crop after the drought of 1886 while land that had been cropped in 1885 did not. The observations of farmers like Angus McKay and W. Motherwell, who had been farming in the Indian Head region since 1882, probably spread by word-of-mouth.²³ Whatever its origins, summer fallowing - that is, ploughing the land in June or July and then keeping weeds and wild grain out by successive harrowings until the following year's planting - was becoming widespread in the West as a means of producing better crops. The Manitoba Department of Agriculture was a firm advocate of summer fallow and was constantly en-

joining farmers to adopt it, both as a means of conserving water and as a way of controlling weeds.²⁴

Weeds had become a major problem in Ontario, and some of the varieties had been imported to the newly-opened western lands in the seed grain that most Ontario farmers brought with them to their new homes.²⁵ The most noxious weeds were wild mustard, wild oats, and thistles.²⁶ In 1884 the Manitoba legislature had passed stringent laws regarding the destruction of weeds. While it was the responsibility of the municipality to appoint overseers to see that the legislation was put into effect, the Department of Agriculture had the responsibility of overseeing the operation and appointed its own noxious weed inspectors to see that the municipalities were doing their duty.²⁷

The main brunt of the battle against weeds had to be born by the individual farmers. The Department of Agriculture was constantly exhorting farmers not to overextend their cultivation, but instead to cultivate no more land than they could work thoroughly.²⁸ Weeds not only choked the growth of the crop but in the grain reduced its grade at the elevator. The worst sources of contamination were non-resident lands which had been cropped in the past but were then left vacant.²⁹ At Treherne Cotton may have felt some of the effects of uncropped land when he first arrived, but the growth in settlement and the reassumption of farms - providing they were taken up by conscientious farmers - soon

reduced the problem to manageable proportions. In the absence of weed killers, summer fallow was regarded as one excellent weapon. The best protection against weeds, however, was the careful farmer. According to Cotton, a yield of fifteen bushels to the acre was often more exhausting to the land than a larger crop, because "where you see a 15 bushel crop you generally see a full crop of weeds which is produced by improper cultivation which is not profitable to the producer and impoverishes his land for future profitable crops."³⁰

In 1893 Cotton decided to expand his area of cultivation by renting an adjoining half section belonging to Isaac Mawhinney. The arrangement was that Cotton was to break 155 acres of North Half-section 2.8.10W, as well as having the option to break more. Mawhinney himself was to fence 180 acres, while Cotton agreed to fence any land that he broke beyond 180 acres, as well as paying the taxes, doing the statutory road labour, and giving a dollar rent per annum.³¹ At the end of five years, the land was to be "in as good a state of cultivation regarding roots, grubbing etc" as the land Cotton rented from Major McLean.³² Landowners obviously found the prospect of putting land into active cultivation attractive, regarding such "improved" land as more valuable than unimproved. Such standards were reflected in the prices paid for land. As Cotton consistently demonstrated, to some extent older assumptions carried over from the east were not totally relevant in the new environment. In most

of Ontario, improving land meant clearing it of bush and forest, a slow and laborious process which could be done at the rate of a few acres a year. Although breaking prairie land was not a simple matter, it was seldom as complicated or as expensive as in the east. Cotton was always pleased to take advantage of the premium placed on improved land by his compatriots, and built his success on improving land rented from others at minimal cost.

A. J. broke seventy-five acres of his new land the first year, summer fallowing twenty-seven acres of the total. While he did not do all the breaking himself, he and his hands were also involved in planting ever-increasing amounts of acreage, something they could not have done while clearing Ontario woodland. In 1893 Cotton sowed a total of 200 acres of wheat, forty of oats, and forty-three of barley. His yields were not more than average, although his increase in acreage sown resulted in more grain to sell. So long as expansion did not put him too far in debt, he could expect to prosper. Nevertheless, despite cash returns from the subsistence areas of the farm in 1893, Cotton calculated a small loss in net worth on the year. The reason for the loss was partly increased wages paid to William Ford and Ezra Haskill, who now earned \$220 per year apiece. Haskill had lived in Mariposa near the Fords and had moved to Treherne with his family in April 1893. But the greatest share of Cotton's increased costs were the product of expansion, coming from the construction of a granary and two stables, as

well as the purchase of additional farm equipment. Despite the use of rented land, expansion of acreage required new expenditures of money.³³ At the same time, Cotton's decade of expansion in the 1890s predated most of the mechanization which later plagued the prairie farmer, and he did not have to weigh large capital expenditures for equipment into his calculations.

In 1893 Cotton's original and highly favourable five-year lease with Major McLean ran out. From 1894 he was to pay \$450 per year to rent the east half of section 3, township 8, range 10 west. It must have been tempting to relinquish the lease and concentrate on the Mawhinney land, but despite the enormous increase in rent, Cotton dug in and continued to pay it. He increased his acreage under cultivation to accommodate his increased land costs. By 1895 he sowed the largest acreage of wheat to this point in his farming career - a total of 314 acres - and his yields were the highest ever. Averaging over forty bushels per acre, he was able to ship 12,585 bushels of number 1 wheat in nineteen railcars to Fort William. It was this wheat shipment, both in terms of quantity and quality, which first earned A. J. Cotton the sobriquet of "Manitoba's Wheat King."³⁴

Cotton and his family took advantage of success and excursion rail rates to return east for a visit to Ontario. A. J., his wife, and their two youngest children Frances and Almon left on 17 December 1895.³⁵ In Ontario, Cotton repaid the money he had borrowed years earlier for the move