

## PIONEERS AND PROGRESSIVE PEDAGOGUES: CARRYING THE UNIVERSITY TO THE PEOPLE OF SASKATCHEWAN, 1905-1928

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### Abstract

*This paper focuses on the University of Saskatchewan's project of creating a public university committed to mediating relevant knowledge to the farmers' economic and lifeworld situations. The conceptual framework uses Habermas's system/lifeworld dichotomy and his notion of the public sphere as an interpretive lens. Lessons for the present are drawn from this case study.*

### Résumé

*Cet article porte sur un projet de l'université de la Saskatchewan qui visait la création d'une université publique dont le but était de transmettre les connaissances propres à la situation économique et au « monde vécu » des agriculteurs. Le cadre théorique utilise la dichotomie qu'opère Habermas entre les notions de système et de « monde vécu », ainsi que sa notion de sphère publique envisagée comme outil d'interprétation. Des leçons applicables au présent sont tirées de cette étude de cas.*

### I: The Emergence of University Extension in Canada

Historians of Canadian adult education generally agree that the idea of extension was a borrowed one. The English universities of Cambridge and Oxford get the originating credit. Cambridge launched formal extension classes in 1873, and Oxford is intimately, if ambiguously, bound up with the emergence of workers' education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The famous document "Oxford and the Working-Class" was published in 1908; the English Workers Education Association (WEA), under the dreamy leadership of Albert Mansbridge, was formed just five years earlier. Mansbridge, a lower middle class autodidact, preached adult

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education with passionate fervour to working people and liberal elites who were able to gather in tutorials run by luminaries like socialist historian Richard Tawney of Oxford fame. English developments form one stream of influence into the Canadian worlds of higher education. The other influence, constantly referenced by the pioneering university builders of Alberta and Saskatchewan, was the American University of Wisconsin. Indeed, the older, more established universities like Toronto, Queen's and McGill were influenced by English developments, defining extension primarily as the offering of courses in non-traditional ways (what is termed the extramural function of the university).

This course-giving approach, building on the foundation of traditional university work, was rejected by the emergent universities of Alberta and Saskatchewan in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. A different vision was offered: that of building on the "existing activities and interests of people outside the university and its immediate community" (Corbett, 1952, p. 7; Peers, 1949). Although Queen's University's openness to making arrangements for practising teachers to work for a degree without attending classes in the 1880s reflects a mild democratizing tendency, this approach to extension did not break with the traditional model of the university. In sharp contrast, the leaders of the Universities of Alberta and Saskatchewan, formed simultaneously with the birth of these provinces in 1905, identified the fate of their new institutions with their ability to carry useful knowledge to the people and respond to the needs of people hungry for cultural enlightenment, scientific and technical insight and human solidarity.

This paper focuses on the University of Saskatchewan's project of creating a public university whose self-understanding committed it irrevocably to mediating relevant knowledge to the farmers' life-situation. The argument proceeds through historical narrative informed by Habermasian notions of system and the lifeworld (Habermas, 1987) and the public sphere (Habermas, 1989; Calhoun, 1992). The university necessarily must provide its youth with the technical knowledge and skills to work in the complex economy. But this is but one function. As a public sphere, the university must mediate its knowledge to its citizenry, within and without the university's walls. These knowledge forms encompass extra-economic functions like the fostering of leadership and moral qualities that are outside the narrow range of skills needed for professions. They include cultural traditions and the nurturing of political consciousness. The quality of participation, then, is one fundamental dimension of the public sphere. The other is the quality of the discourse in public learning spaces. Here, the

salient question is the extent to which modes of discourse are governed by critical-rational principles rather than status or partisan interest.

I provide the context for the emergence of the University of Saskatchewan's project by touching briefly on the way the universities moved into vacated public space (first opened hesitantly by the Mechanics' Institutes), as well as contrasting Queen's University's pioneering entry into extension in the late nineteenth century with that of Saskatchewan. This effort at historical reconstruction and memory claiming has contemporary resonances. For several decades now, Canadian universities have been under inordinate pressure, one is tempted to say siege, from the market. Rather than mediating knowledge to the people as they grapple with problems and issues in their productive activity and life world negotiations, contemporary universities place their highest value on the production of knowledge that can be transformed into marketable commodities. This particular phase in the evolution of the Canadian university can benefit from a comparative example from the past. Through examining the University of Saskatchewan's attempt to realize its vision of a public university, we may gain insight into what appears, in the contemporary university, to be a steady move away from the early twentieth century vision of mediating knowledge to the people who are engaged in the complex processes of making a living and living a life. One of the most pressing issues facing us as Canadian adult educators is to ascertain whether or not the cultural underpinnings for the early twentieth century notion of the "public" has, in fact, been eroded, or is in danger of vanishing as the market usurps the state in regulating society.

The men who advocated extending the university to the people were Anglo-Protestants, either Presbyterians or Methodists (Dr. H.M. Tory of the University of Alberta, Dr. Walter Murray of the University of Saskatchewan, George Munro Grant of Queen's as well as early extension leaders E.A. Corbett and A.E. Ottewell of Alberta) embraced the idea of the social gospel and public service. They effected a cultural synthesis of the new sciences (like evolutionary biology) and Protestant Christianity. Indeed, it seemed as if science itself—its wondrous application to a myriad of human problems—was the new utopia, and the educational popularizers its missionaries. In the first decades of the twentieth century the ideal of serving the people (a fundamental theme of the social gospel) converged with the new scientific world-view that was slowly displacing the older moral theology. In agriculture, the new scientific world-view was beginning to undermine old-fashioned, tacit, hands-on forms of knowledge and skill. And the university

leaders were animated by a transcendently grounded vision of public service that deeply valued practicality.

The earliest formal nineteenth century efforts to extend scientific and humanist forms of knowledge to the people were, perhaps, in the Mechanics' Institutes, which spread like mushrooms in Canada from the late 1820s to the 1890s, the period of Canada's Age of Industry. With the rise of industrial capitalism, jobs began to change and work was reorganized. The industrialization process itself required men and women to learn new modes of self and world understanding and acquire new skills, attitudes and sensibilities. The fundamental educative process at work in mid-nineteenth century Canada was the "transformation of Canadians" into industrialized minds and bodies. This process, H. Clare Pentland (1981) has observed, was conducted "largely in the school of experience with the goad of harsh impersonal penalties for failures" (p. 176). In this grim school of labour workers were learning about the nature of mechanistic time, waged work, contractors, where their security and power lay, and the rules of the game in a capitalist market. The world of knowledge and skill bound up with catching fish, chopping and rafting lumber and canoeing gave way to a new order of factories, mechanization, regulated time. Some tasks were deskilled, but in all work domains (farm, fishery, mine, factory, office, hospital, school) new forms of knowledge and technical skills that could be, in part, acquired through learning processes separated from the experience of work itself. But a new economic order requires a corresponding transformation in world-outlook.

During the 1820s literary and scientific societies (like the Montreal Natural History Society, formed in 1827) proliferate, a sure indication of the increased interest of the privileged classes in natural science and self-improvement as well as indicating the emergence of an embryonic civil society. The rise of the Mechanics' Institutes, aptly characterized by E.A. Corbett (1952) as "community educational centres" (p.5), are both "germane to the new age" and in "accord with its spirit" (Pentland, 1981, p. 182). The emergence of the educational form of the Mechanics' Institutes presupposes the growing importance of science, inventions and the desirability of having wage earners become familiar with the new technological processes. The Mechanics' Institutes were, certainly, primarily the means whereby the local upper classes conducted "rather dilettantish investigation" of the new intellectual atmosphere. But they were also an important index of the "diffusion of the belief in progress" (Pentland, p. 182ff) and the opening up of public spaces to those other than merchant and professional elites.

The Mechanics' Institutes, Corbett (1952) says, "provided the universities and colleges with their first organized opportunity to relate the thinking and the research going on within the universities to the problems of the communities they served" (p. 5). Some university professors, particularly those with an interest in natural history or the new technologies, would lecture at the Institutes (with few actual mechanics in attendance), and, as university historian Robin Harris (1976) observes, by the mid-19th century "free public lectures were provided by Dalhousie, McGill, Queen's, Acadia, and Laval" (pp. 147-148). The Institutes opened up some social learning space for these amateurs out to explore the new sciences and inventions. This new knowledge, however, was hardly diffused widely throughout the population, and the university lectures were mainly "affairs of the moment" (Dunlop, 1981, p. 5). With the gradual disappearance of Mechanics' Institutes in the late nineteenth century, universities moved into the vacated public space and began to offer lectures on a variety of subjects, mainly of a scientific, literary and historical nature. Queen's University is often considered a conservative and traditional university. Yet it is Queen's that assumed the leadership of the extension movement in the 1880s and 1890s. The University of Toronto would, however, have the honour of hosting the first Workers Educational Association meetings in Canada in 1917.

George Munro Grant, a Nova Scotian by birth and Presbyterian minister by vocation, left his prestigious parish of St. Matthew's Church in Halifax in 1877 to assume the principalship of the floundering Queen's University. By all assessments, Principal Grant was a man of vision (he was a staunch but not stodgy advocate of the British imperial linkage) and openness for his time (he opposed the Toronto Trades and Labour Council's anti-Chinese sentiments in the 1890s); and he struggled, like so many recalcitrant reformers of the day, with the Capital-Labour conundrum. One of the leading proponents of the Protestant social gospel, Principal Grant believed that the university and the church were "vital forces in national development, not refuges shielding scholars from the world" (Berger, 1970, p. 183). In an address to the University Council on May 27, 1889, Grant stated:

The status and prosperity of any country depends on the kind of education given to its youth. The great problem of education is to get a steady supply of well trained teachers, men and women of culture, of the right spirit, and with true ideals. These must come from the universities. Therefore, if we would improve in education, we must begin from the top; and the universities, even when well equipped, cannot do their work

unless properly prepared material is given to them. (Dunlop, 1981, p. 19)

This excerpt provides some insight into why Grant sought to build up the extension arm of Queen's. He believed that the university had a responsibility to extend its edifying influence to as wide a constituency as possible (the public service ethic). He also knew that, given Queen's fragile predicament (Queen's was being pressured to become an affiliate of Toronto), that he needed to construct his constituency by permitting extra-mural students to gain university credits through self-directed study (the pragmatic interest). Although we often date Queen's formal commitment to extension work in 1889, during the decade of the 1880s summer schools were introduced, allowing men, and particularly young women, to attend regular classes of the university. In 1879, special summer courses had been organized to help women gain entrance to medical school (male students forced them out of medical school in 1883-1884 and into their own college). Essentially, Grant thought that by extending extra-mural courses to school teachers he would create a loyal following who would serve as a lobby for Queen's interests against rival universities.

Though hardly revolutionary, this sort of departure from the normal pattern was for its time significant enough, and the university had to grapple with the nuts and bolts administrative issues of how students would gain access to books and who would serve as examiners in Queen's outposts scattered throughout Ontario and Canada. By 1894, 67 extra-mural students were registered. There was great demand for these services and Queen's had to recruit special correspondence tutors beginning in 1894. Queen's would go to become widely recognized for its correspondence courses. The university also reached out to other constituencies in search of credentials, offering courses for prospectors and miners in association with the Kingston School of Mining. These latter courses, extending as far as Sault St. Marie and the Rainy River District, were intended to promote the study of elementary mineralogy and geology, and to diffuse knowledge that would be useful to those exploring and developing mineral lands. By 1898, these courses would be discontinued for lack of significant interest. Queen's would persist in these sort of endeavours, however, opening a Navigation School in collaboration with the School of Mining that offered a three week course and certificate.

In his review of university extension in Canada written in the early 1950s, Ned Corbett (1952) observed that the "administration and staff of many of our Canadian universities regarded extension work as an entirely

unnecessary activity and not properly the function of an institution whose first responsibility lies in teaching and research” (p. 7). This turned out to be the case even with Queen’s. Between 1900 and 1910 there was growing concern over standards for extension work (these courses watered down the content) and university administrators, including Principal Grant, became worried that university professors could not play the dual roles of professor and extension teacher. This sentiment was nicely captured in a *Boston Herald* article reprinted in the influential *The Canadian Educational Monthly and School Magazine* in the summer of 1892. “No man occupying a professor’s chair at Harvard or Yale or Princeton or Johns Hopkins,” the writer pontificated, “can give his nights to university extension in the cities, without destroying or impairing the usefulness of his days at the university (Dunlop, 1981, p. 62). Another conflict, with deep analogues to our time, occurred when economics professor O. D. Skeleton conducted a rather aggressive campaign to entice the thousands of bank clerks to take extra-mural courses. By September 1913, in co-operation with the Canadian Bankers Association, 680 had registered in an associate’s course, with 375 in a fellow’s. Dean Cappon reacted to Skeleton’s campaign with a tart reminder:

It should be kept in mind...that in the arts faculty at least education should always have more than a merely vocational purpose....In the midst of all our practical modern developments...training a larger-minded citizenry, remains properly the chief function, the function which distinguishes it from a technical or business college. (Dunlop, 1981, p. 102)

The seeds of the tension between the utilitarian impulse (education for vocation) and the cultural impulse (education for active citizenry) were planted early in extension’s soil. One can also see the beginnings of the commodification of knowledge, packaged in “courses” that could be “consumed” by the “clients.”

## **II: Creating a University for the People of Saskatchewan**

Between 1886, when Sir Wilfred Laurier assumed prime ministership and Clifford Sifton began to craft his western settlement policies, millions of immigrants poured into the prairies, aided by the building of the transcontinental railway and lured by the dream of riches of a new beginning. In 1895 there were only 73,500 settlers in the entire North-West Territories; by 1911 Saskatchewan would have a population of approximately 490,000 (about 95,000 farms with almost five million acres of wheat), scattered over

an area of almost 100,000 square miles. Over two-thirds lived in the southern, treeless plains, or in the parklands of the northern section. Most of the immigrants from Central Europe chose the wooded sections of the northern part of the province. Bloc settlements were common, be they Ukrainians or Mennonites, and some Anglo-conformists like Saskatchewan Premier J.T.M. Anderson would find this troubling and a bit sinister (Anderson, 1918). The basic settlement pattern was put in place during this boom period. Those who flooded into the new land faced severe learning challenges as they struggled to adapt to their new worlds. Not only did they confront problems pertaining to crops and livestock, they also had to build new forms of solidarity in a land of great isolation and ethnic diversity. The ruling Anglo-elites like Anderson were queasy about any religious outlook that strayed to far from the norm. In Alberta, for example, Mormons were viewed suspiciously, and Mennonites drew the ire of some Saskatchewan Anglo-conformists. The new University of Saskatchewan had to win the support of the people (public relations was of primary importance in the pioneering era). This support, in part, depended upon channelling the resources of scientific and cultural knowledge to the people of the provinces.

The Saskatchewan Liberals who won the election in 1905 wanted their new university to be practical and serve the whole province. For whatever reason, the pressure on the University of Saskatchewan to "meet the pressing practical problems" (Hayden, 1983, p. 17) seems to have been more intense than in Alberta. In choosing Walter Murray as their first president, Saskatchewan had found a fierce idealist disciplined and tempered by the many assaults to his bedrock Christianity in the modernizing culture of the late Victorian era. Murray was born on May 12, 1866 in rural Kings County, New Brunswick into a middle-class, stern Presbyterian family. From his late teens, Murray seemed imbued with the progressive spirit of the social gospel. Expelled from the University of New Brunswick in 1883 for a spirited protest against ineffectual teaching, Murray transferred to Dalhousie where he graduated in 1886 with honours in classics and mathematics. After a year of teacher training, he went to Edinburgh, acquiring a first-class honours MA in philosophy in 1891. While there, he met other men like the University of Toronto's Robert Falconer who, steeped in Hegelian idealism, became a stalwart advocate of the moral and service functions of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Canadian university. Falconer, Murray and H.M. Tory of the University of Alberta, found common ground in their struggle to blend the absolute and the empirical in an age puffed with the glories of science and technology. To education was transferred the role the Church had once played. For Murray, the university's fundamental task was to provide a unifying cultural

orientation for the people of Saskatchewan in the age of progress. The university had to help men and women acquire the means of livelihood and resources for everyday meaningful living. Culture had to be fused with utilitarian interests. The university could brook no opposition as the emergent imperial centre for knowledge dissemination and legitimation in the pioneering and professionalizing society.

In a series of revealing President's reports, written from 1908 into the 1920s, Walter Murray set out his vision of the role of the university in society. The University of Saskatchewan had to be undivided and non-sectarian, agricultural education had to be central to its mission, it had to fuse culture and utility, and it had to serve the people. In his no holds barred presidential report of 1908-1909, Murray wrote: "If our university is to serve the province in the things that abide, it should provide both the schools of science, where mastery over nature is taught, and the school of the humanities where men learn the purpose of life and the art of living. It should conserve the best of the past, and meet the needs of the future" (p. 11). Perhaps his Maritime experience as a Presbyterian progressive in Halifax and professor of philosophy at Dalhousie, had embittered him to the sectarian politics of cloth and cloak. Whatever the reason, Murray railed against the sectarian spirit of Oxford and the Maritimes, where all of the little universities were begging for support to American millionaires (President's Report [PR], 1924-25). He thought that the new western universities of B.C., Alberta and Saskatchewan were emerging free from interference by vested interests and had begun their existence with a "single aim—to serve the state, unmindful of sectarian bias and urban rivalries" (PR, 1920-1). Murray's unyielding commitment to an undivided university was as strong as his opposition to sectarianism. Along with the committee who deliberated on what kind of university Saskatchewan ought to have, Murray was opposed to "dividing the work of higher education among separate institutions" (PR, 1908-9, p. 2). Murray opposed a separate college of Agriculture, a matter of some contention in Alberta and, to a lesser degree, in Saskatchewan.

He thought that a traditional university like Oxford would not have incorporated a College of Agriculture. But a university "created by the people, supported and controlled by the people could not afford to neglect the chief interest of the people" (PR, 1912-13, 1913-14). This sentiment was in tune with Murray's attempt to reconcile idealism and the practical. With the Agricultural College under the university's roof it would be in close touch with people's needs, infusing agriculture with a scientific spirit and

preventing the professions, literary and scientific interests from becoming "self-centred and indifferent to the great practical interests of the people" (PR, 1908-9, p. 2). Hon. W. Motherwell, Minister of Agriculture, was willing to transfer the educational work of his Department to the university (as well as some of his staff), and the governing bodies of the university were sympathetic with the needs of agriculture. The old fears of possible discord between arts and agricultural students or that students in agriculture would be drawn away to the farm did not rule the day.

Murray's vision of the modernizing university fused two models of the university, the traditionalist and the utilitarian (PR, 1908-9, p. 10). The traditionalists, drawing inspiration from Matthew Arnold, wanted to preserve the "best that has been thought and done in other times and other lands," and the utilitarians believed that through the "investigations and applications of science man learns of the new conditions and how to meet them. Man, the minister and interpreter of nature, through knowledge acquires power over nature". This latter vision, drawing its inspiration from Francis Bacon, had as its watchword the mastery of nature through science. Murray believed that the Great War had revealed the awesome power of science—a potent instrument, he said, for "extending human power, supplying human needs, and alleviating human pain." Indeed, the world appeared to be on the "verge of an era of reconstruction, more profound in its principles, more far-reaching in its effects than any since the introduction of Christianity." But the Great War had also revealed deep threats to the human spirit. Humankind was called upon to "think out anew those fundamental principles and laws which should regulate the conduct of nations no less than of individuals" (PR, 1916-17, pp. 4-5). The sciences of human society (history, law, economics) would be appealed to as never before, and men and women would turn to literature, philosophy and art and religion with ever greater passion to discover the secrets of human nature. By the end of the twentieth century this enlightenment vision would seem touchingly innocent, not yet tarnished, the ideology of progress still wearing emperor's clothing.

Good social gospeller that he was, Murray wanted to constrain the power of the emergent technical-instrumental reason. But in a province where farming was the fundamental means of living, he was pulled ineluctably towards solving technical agricultural productive problems. His "schools of the practical sciences" were really the necessities, and the "schools of liberal arts or humanities", the luxuries. Both were needed to "conserve the past, and to meet the needs of the future" (PR, 1908-9, p. 11), but the university had to "strive to identify itself in the most intimate manner with the dominating

interests of the people” (PR, 1912-13, p. 3). Like Wisconsin, the University of Saskatchewan had to be a service university. Scientific agriculture had to be an integral part of the new university and it was entirely fitting that the university “through correspondence classes, extension courses, supervision of farmers’ clubs, travelling libraries, women’s institutions or musical tests to place within the reach of the solitary student, the distant townsmen, the farmer in his hours of leisure or the mothers or daughters in the home the opportunities for adding to their store of knowledge and enjoyment, as it is that the university should foster research into the properties of radium or the causes and cure of swamp fever”(PR, 1912-13, p. 3). Murray’s vision of extension flowed naturally from his progressivist world-outlook. A true university of the people had not only to produce knowledge, but it also had to disseminate this knowledge to the populace. The knowledge deemed most important to disseminate pertained to the myriad of technical problems and issues confronting farmers in the realm of production in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Saskatchewan. Utility won over culture, and assumed the driver’s seat in the University of Saskatchewan Extension Department. The reverse would be the case at the University of Alberta under H.M. Tory’s watchful eye and A.E. Ottewell’s robust leadership.

### III: Carrying agricultural knowledge to the people of Saskatchewan

Pioneer interests in agricultural science and extension Almost two decades before the province of Saskatchewan was partitioned out of the North-West territories, agricultural leaders recognized the need for a “science of agriculture based on an understanding of local conditions and of the need for making existing scientific information available to a pioneer farm population” (Baker, in Rayner Papers, 1920-51, p. 1). In 1884 the federal government was conducting scientific research, and in 1886 they established experimental farms at Ottawa (Ontario), Brandon (Manitoba) and Indian Head (Saskatchewan). In its first annual report (1898), the Department of Agriculture of the North-West Territories noted that “information was desired and services required” on weed eradication, gopher destruction, agricultural demonstrations, pure bred bull importation, government inspection of stallions, general health of livestock, and the stimulation of interest in poultry and hog production (First Annual Report, 1898, p. 30). The “Agricultural Societies Ordinance” of 1884 arose out of the recognition of the need for a state-approved farmers’ organization to encourage improvement in agriculture, horticulture, arboriculture, manufacture, and the

useful arts. While the agricultural societies focussed mainly on production issues, their mandate embraced key lifeworld domains of the home and community. Shortly thereafter, five agricultural societies were created at Regina, Indian Head, Moose Jaw, Whitewood and Prince Albert.

The early architects of the agricultural societies recognized that state aid to agriculture would be "mainly ineffectual and even mischievous" without "organization for economic purposes among agricultural classes" (Fourth Annual Report, 1901, p. 114). Knowing the immensity of the task facing them, they argued that the agricultural societies were the main educational form for channelling knowledge to the farmers. Once funding for these societies was secure, agricultural societies could be important learning sites, hosting agricultural and industrial exhibitions (the centre piece of society activity), introducing new varieties of seeds and plants, eradicating noxious weeds, encouraging ploughing competitions and promoting farmers' institutes. The latter institutions had emerged in the U.S. in the wake of failed enthusiasm for "culturally oriented extension programs." In the 1880s several American universities began organizing short courses, with agronomists travelling to various farm locales. Travelling agricultural road shows had existed prior to the Civil War, but universities only entered the field in the 1880s (Kett 1994, pp. 277-279). In Canada, the federal government initiated the idea of farmers' institutes, and the University of Saskatchewan took up the idea in the years following 1910. W.B. Baker, one of Saskatchewan's most eminent agricultural educators in the 1940s and 1950s, maintained that the assignment of the farmers' institutes meetings specifically to the agricultural societies indicated that the "place of farmer education in programs of agricultural improvement was established in the minds of agricultural leaders from the very beginning" (Baker, in Rayner Papers, 1920-51, p. 2). In 1907, for example, farm institutes held 106 meetings; along with this, a growing interest in organizing institute meetings for women.

The responses of the early agricultural societies to the noble aspirations of their leaders varied considerably. For some societies, the exhibition was the focus (with its chautaugua-like mix of socializing and entertainment), with other educational and social responsibilities neglected. Recognizing this, the Department of Agriculture for the North-West Territories established a fairs and institutes branch in 1903. This didn't always do the trick. In 1919, with almost two decades of society activity behind them, the Director of Extension, after expressing gratitude for hot winds, drought, hail, war, frost and pestilence, complained that some societies saw their "whole

duty” in supporting a “holiday of races and sports,” others gave general support to activities such as ploughing matches, standing crop competitions, and seed fairs without any “very clear idea of their real value,” or simply supported the live stock industry for material gain. The more honourable societies, in contrast, grasped the possibility of “substituting craftsmanship for drudgery in all agricultural operations” and saw it as their “main business ...to foster conditions tending toward more perfect rural civilization” (Saskatchewan Agriculture Societies Association Papers, Annual Convention-1919). Scattered throughout the province, many aggressive societies gradually emerged, extending their activities to include farmers’ institutes, exhibitions, seed fairs, experimental demonstration work with farm crops, stock judging and field grain competitions. “The pioneer farmers of Saskatchewan,” W.B. Baker observed, brought “with them a rich and varied agrarian heritage from many old and established countries of the world, [and] had transplanted the seeds of a new agriculture which was already emerging as a social and economic force at the turn of the century” (Baker, n.d., p. 3).

### *The Creation of a College of Agriculture*

During the pioneering period of settlement, with migration to the dry land farms of Saskatchewan literally somersaulting daily, farming conditions were particularly favourable. Experimental farms had made headway in the development of early varieties of wheat; the CPR had opened up the southern part of the province; farmers’ organizations were demanding a “more equitable policy for agriculture” (Baker, n.d., p. 4). Thus, it is not surprising that out of the “ferment of agricultural improvement” should emerge a “growing demand for more thorough agricultural extension education and quite a strong sentiment in favour of establishing an agricultural college” (Second Annual Report, Department of Agriculture, Saskatchewan, 1906, p. 88). With the establishment of the University of Saskatchewan in 1907 in the midst of this ferment and presidential empathy, a College of Agriculture was established without much dissension and given a prominent place in the affairs of the university. The first faculty consisted of William John Rutherford, BSA (Toronto), Dean and professor of animal husbandry; John Bracken, BSA (Toronto), professor of agriculture; Alexander Grieg, BSC (McGill), professor of agriculture engineering and superintendent of buildings. By 1911, the College of Agriculture had embarked on its mission: research, teaching and extension in the interest of developing a prosperous and efficient agricultural industry.

With the organization of the College of Agriculture, educational activity previously directed by the Department of Agriculture, a significant part of its responsibilities, was transferred to the university. On March 1, 1910, the fairs and institutes branches were transferred to the College of Agriculture, and the Department of Agriculture Extension was born, the first of its kind in the Dominion of Canada. F.H. Auld, who had supervised the fairs and institutes branch of the Department of Agriculture and who would go on to a distinguished career as deputy Minister of Agriculture, was transferred to the university. He became its first director of extension. The period from roughly 1905 to 1920 was a time of rapid growth and development (the agricultural societies grew from 33 to 141), and the period from 1920 to 1930 a decade of consolidation, followed by a time of stagnation and disaster in the miserable 1930s.

In his first annual report (1910-1911), Auld articulated the vision animating the extension movement. Scientific agriculture had to be mediated in popular form to the common farmers. Agriculture was in its professionalizing historical moment, and the suspicion of "book farming" had to be countered. Extension organized a convention of extension workers (one must keep in mind that the Department of Agriculture also had its own field workers). There Auld informed the workers that many extension men, although successful farmers, lacked knowledge of scientific agriculture, and their speeches did not manifest "fundamental principles" underpinning methodological choices. Too often, he thought, farmers were given recipes, and too much variation in instruction followed from year to year. "We want our speakers in the future to understand sufficient of the scientific principles which regulate their practices so that each farmer who receives instruction may be able to make himself a correct application of these principles to his particular condition" (Presidential Papers, Agricultural Extension, 1910-11). The technical-instrumental paradigm of learning was achieving ascendance in relation to the work of farming, and the extension leadership in this period—Auld, Greenway, Rayner—earnestly believed that agriculture knowledge was moving ahead of practice, rendering the common sense of farmers inadequate to the farming tasks of the day. Science was producing new knowledge about crop and livestock production problems, new knowledge about disease, insect and pest control and new knowledge pertaining to wasteful or inefficient use of the soil. With scientific knowledge running ahead of the ordinary farmers' indigenous knowledge and understanding, the extension leaders pressed ahead with missionary zeal. Science was for the people's betterment, and extension workers were almost obsessed with

reaching the farmer and meeting needs too boundless for complete fulfilment by the perennially under resourced extension service.

### *“Organized” Extension Work*

Writing in his year-end report of 1919, Dean Rutherford categorized extension work as “organized” and “unorganized.” By organized he meant the work the extension department did through the agricultural societies, homemakers’ clubs, boys and girls’ clubs and the Grain Growers Association. The extension department furnished judges for competitions and short courses at the College, organized institutes in co-operation with various organizations and excursions to the College experimental farm. Unorganized extension work—the better farming train, the dairy and poultry car, etc.—in contrast, was not directly under the oversight of the Department of Extension. The extension service was financed through monies from the provincial legislature through the Education Department: it was part of the regular university budget. The Agricultural societies received grants from the Department of Agriculture for carrying on one or more of the various activities outlined in the Agricultural Societies Act—membership, exhibitions, seed grain fairs, standing field competitions, ploughing matches and stallion shows.

The agricultural societies were the main focus of the extension service. These societies were preoccupied with an extraordinary range of technical matters pertaining to farm management and production. They served as the most important site for learning about the solution or practical problems originating in the everyday processes of raising stock, planting various crops and marketing one’s goods. The nature of the technical learning process fostered a friendly spirit of competition amongst pioneering settler communities. Each of the activities—be it a ploughing contest or a livestock showing—attempted to motivate farmers to be more effective and efficient farmers and to encourage them to be more reflective in attitude towards their production activities. The presence of professional judges, sanctioned by the university, introduced a tension into the learning process: farmers’ common-sense knowledge was now placed in dialogue with that of experts. The agricultural societies were the primary means of rationalizing farming, or applying science and technology to the substance of agricultural work. By the end of 1925, their numbers would double from 1910 figures to a membership of well over 20,000.

The exhibition was the “major activity in the historical development and impact of the agricultural societies” (Baker, n.d., p. 7). The available

government grants favoured the holding of exhibitions (there were considerable funds for prizes). In some societies they persisted as the "sole aim of existence" (Baker), and many of the setbacks endured by agricultural societies were linked to "attendant financial risk involved in the operation of the annual fairs" (Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report*, 1938, p. 28). Agricultural societies promoted a dizzying array of activities besides the premier event, the fair: ploughing matches, good farming competitions, standing crop competitions, combined seed crop and cleaned seed competitions, summer fallow competitions, farm garden competitions, spring stock shows, livestock sales, seed fairs, poultry shows, short courses in agriculture (99 in 1922), agricultural society rallies, courses in stock judging for boys attending farm boys' camps, and functions held in conjunction with annual meetings.

The Cut Knife Agricultural Society director's report of December 15, 1915 provides a small window on the everyday working realities of an ordinary society. The president reported that in the first year they had to feel their way "carefully and almost in the dark, none of us having had any experience in work of this description." They now had 186 members and believed that "everyone in the district in any way connected with agriculture should make it a point not only to be a member of his agricultural society, but to take an active interest in its welfare." Nothing was too mundane if it served the interests of the farmer. The directors offered prizes for gopher competitions, and in the spring 10,123 gophers lost their pesky lives, with boys and girls receiving 44 dollars in prize money. The directors felt "that this money was not thrown away," particularly because the "number of gophers actually killed in consequence of the competition probably far exceeded this number." The report on the exhibition reveals something of the struggle to maintain the educational value of the fair. The directors thought that some of the horses on the grounds should have been in the show ring, and that, as for swine, anyone could have made from 15 to 20 dollars by "simply loading up on a couple of loads of good grade swine and showing them on that day." Hall exhibits were "very satisfactory", proving to be the "surprise of the day." But it was imperative that hall exhibits be in place at night before the show to prevent "confusion, and consequent dissatisfaction" (Cut Knife Agricultural Society, Directors' Report, 1915). While it is clear that technical-instrumental learning predominated in the agricultural societies, Cut Knife illustrates that men and women had to learn how to organize themselves through communicative processes. Agricultural societies were voluntary associations run by ordinary people who were acquiring knowledge and skills pertaining to democratic self-organization.

In the early twenty-first century, despite the earnest rhetoric of the learning society, our liberal-democratic societies are still inclined to think of adult learning and education apart from that of children. This was not the case amongst the progressive leadership of the extension movement. By 1915, farm leaders recognized that they had to teach the youth the principles and practices of good farming in order to ensure the future of rural life. J.G. Rayner, who became director of extension in 1920, labelled the work amongst farm youth "one of the most striking developments in Extension work" (Rayner, n.d.). In her annual report for 1920-1921, Abigail DeLeury, director of the Saskatchewan Homemakers' Clubs, articulated an early 20<sup>th</sup> version of a just learning society. "Our people just now feel the pressing need of greater community effort," she exclaimed,

and see the necessity of co-operation with all the adults in the community for the creating of good environments for the youth of the country. Experience along the lines of community effort has pointed out to our organization, that to be fruitful for community life or for education, there must be joint responsibility of adults and children with adults supplying leadership and delegating responsibility to the children. A child campaign alone is a social abnormality. (DeLeury, Homemakers' Clubs Report, 1920-1)

In 1915 the Extension Department, working closely with the agricultural societies and other farm organizations, invented a new activity: a mid-summer holiday for farm boys. Held in conjunction with the major Regina exhibition, the Farm Boys' Camp attracted 200 boys and provided competitions in stock and grain judging as well as weed identification. The boys also listened to lectures and participated in recreational activities. By 1918, Rayner, then the agricultural representative with the Department of Agriculture, assumed direction of the boys and girls' clubs. Before 1918, girls had been involved only in competitive classes in cooking and sewing, held in conjunction with the agricultural society annual fairs. Now, they had their own camps where they learned domestic science, good farming practices (girls and women tended to have responsibility for poultry) and, through participating in debates, public speaking, dramatics and social events, acquired "valuable training in citizenship" (Rayner, n.d.). Farm boys and girls' clubs were enormously successful through the 1920s. In 1924, E.E. Brockelbank was appointed to the extension staff to organize and promote new programs. By 1927, five farm boys' camps were established, and even

when the agricultural societies fell into serious decline in the 1930s, the youth wing was full of energy.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, small groups of rural women felt the need for some organization which "would draw them together socially and give them opportunities to discuss questions of mutual interest" (Retrospect and Prospect, 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Saskatchewan Homemakers' Clubs, 1936, p. 13). Isolated women's clubs—like the Prosperity Homekeepers Society in the Rocanville District (organized in 1907) and the Open Door Circle of Mair (organized in 1909)—existed. But in January 1911, after an agricultural society-initiated organizing tour by Lillian Beynon in the fall, representatives of isolated women's clubs convened in Regina. Out of these discussions emerged the Saskatchewan Homemakers' Clubs, dedicated to the "promotion of the interests of home and community" (Retrospect and Prospect). Miss Abigail DeLeury was appointed as director of women's work for the university (the Extension Department had oversight responsibilities) in 1913, a position this able woman held until 1930 when she was succeeded by Bertha Oxner. The domestic-sounding name of this organization belies its presence in Saskatchewan affairs as a powerful, and at times, even radical voice in defence of lifeworld interests.

The educational curriculum of the Homemakers' Clubs was framed within the largely taken-for-granted way that prairie men and women divided the world into two domains: one world, largely inhabited and ruled by men, was the realm of material production (the system-realm); the other, governed by women, was the home and community, the worlds of symbolic and social reproduction (the lifeworld). In her opening address at the founding conference, Lillian Beynon ("Lillian Laurie" was her pen name as author of the women's page for the *Manitoba Free Press*) noted that there had been some dispute regarding "separating the work of men and women," but if women were to succeed, they had to specialize. "The farmer will not have time to learn all the secrets of housekeeping, nor will his wife have time to learn all about farming, if she is going to master her own profession of homemaker." If men needed to study—fewer were now laughing at book farming than in the old days—so much more "should women study the minds of their children that the soil there may be prepared to learn rightly the lessons of life."

The secrets of Homemaker ideology are contained in these few excerpts. Women accepted the bifurcation of the world; by no means did they accept their inferior status and their exploitation by the male-dominated world. Indeed, the theme of the drudgery of farm women's life, with constant

reference to men's deafness to their needs, pervades the conference proceedings of Homemaker assemblies through the teens and twenties. Beynon's adoption of the discourse of professionalization signals several important social and ideational developments. For one thing, farming was clearly being constituted as an "expert culture" and the new forms of knowledge and technology had very high status (to be scientific and efficient was highly valued). Secondly, women recognized that these developments render them powerless and inferior in status. To gain equality with men, they have little choice but to argue that women are not natural born housekeepers and that their work is a domestic science. Thirdly, the lifeworld was being rationalized and opened up to reflective public learning processes. Traditional, common-sense notions about health, nutrition, child-rearing, hygiene, gardening, consuming, ventilation, raising chickens, or architecture were all subjected to criticism. In the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Saskatchewan farm women almost exploded with desire to learn about themselves, others and their immediate and far flung worlds. Nothing, from international relations to church union, was outside their ken. The local clubs—they grew from 14 in 1914 to 200 by 1924—were the educative hub of the Homemakers' organization. Women also attended district conventions and the annual meeting held on the University of Saskatchewan campus attracted around 200 each year. For overworked rural homemakers, the trip to the university was one of the year's special events. Obtaining "hired help" was a persistent problem for farm women, and the week away was highly treasured. There they conducted their business meetings, listened to lectures, participated in recreational activities and tasted the delights of city life (including a leisurely soak in the tub free from distractions). No doubt farm women returned home energized for the arduous tasks of meeting the cavilling needs of children and men and the work of the farm.

Women were encouraged to study all manner of subjects and situations. But health concerns of children and mothers were the centrepiece of the Homemakers' lifeworld curriculum. The educational process was anchored in this simple assumption: the life of pioneering farm women was extremely exhausting and time-consuming, and this situation was not simply in the nature of things. Homemakers' leaders like Mrs. Dayton, president of the Manitoba Home Economics Clubs, spoke boldly about the way farm men had all they needed in the way of machinery. Women, in sharp contrast, did their washing by hand. "We should see it," Mrs. Dayton declared to the 1916 annual convention, "that the mother and the child have at least as good a

chance in life as the little colt and its mother" (Report of the Proceedings of the Homemakers' Clubs of Saskatchewan, 1916). Women could neither be healthy nor have the time to learn how to care for their children more effectively if they were consumed by farm labour.

By World War I Homemakers' clubs were increasingly demanding knowledge about child welfare. In 1919-1920, for instance, they held 52 short courses of two to five days duration on home nursing, eugenics, household science, child welfare and dressmaking and millinery; child welfare exhibits and clinics were now a general feature of Homemaker fairs. The Homemakers' leadership agitated incessantly for more and better maternity care for women. This demand meant establishing community nursing programs and hospitals. By 1921 Abigail DeLeury could celebrate the Homemakers' pioneering role in getting medical inspection of schools and nursing care. In fact, they were among our earliest advocates of preventative approaches to health care. There was lots to prevent, if Dean Rutherford's report from the School Hygiene Branch in 1921-1922 was accurate. There were many cases of bad teeth, adenoids, enlarged tonsils, malnutrition, tuberculosis, defective sight and hearing. They didn't stop at health care, though. A militant women like A.V. Thomas of Winnipeg encouraged the Homemakers to struggle for the legal rights to the guardianship of children and equal property rights, that the "wife and husband have equal rights in the home; equal wages or salaries for equal work" (Proceedings of Annual Convention of Homemakers, 1916). Early twentieth century women in organizations such as Homemakers were developing a different idea of politics. In the still pertinent words of Thomas, "We women have not gone out to politics; they have come in, and troubled our children, and our homes, and we cannot get away from politics" (Proceeding of the Annual Convention of Homemakers). These women were discovering that democracy was not solely about representative politics or control over economic processes. It was, fundamentally, about the possibilities for self and collective self-expression within associational life. The lifeworld was the primary locus of their influence.

### ***"Unorganized" Extension Work***

Various branches of the Department of Agriculture were also involved in a wide variety of adult educational efforts and ventures with the farm population. Dairy, field crops, livestock and the co-op branches of the Department were especially active in the field. An innovative attempt to meet the needs of special culture groups was reported by the Dairy Commissioner in 1920 when a multi-lingual man was appointed to work with non-English

settlers. He held meetings in schools, but more often visited homes to instruct the settlers in methods of production, handling and marketing. The 1921 report of the Field Crops commissioner describes a program designed to assist farmers to control grasshopper infestations. "Taken in the totality," observes W.B. Baker, "the educational efforts of the department of agriculture were an important educational force in promoting the interests of agriculture within the province" (Baker, n.d., p. 13).

The good farming trains were one of the most innovative and creative adult educational ventures, operated by the Department of Agriculture in co-operation with the railways and the extension department. These "schools on wheels" started rolling in 1908. Each train had fourteen cars and coaches. Some carried well selected animals, while others contained things like mechanical appliances for the farm home and barn and poultry appliances. Others were fitted for teaching and demonstrating tillage and crop production and for home management demonstrations. There was even a nursery car where the children could be cared for while mothers attended lectures. Equipped with the best instructors the college could provide, the agricultural college on wheels covered the CPR lines east and west of Saskatoon from Alberta to the Manitoba border. The train made two or three stops per day and offered a well-orchestrated curricular mix of demonstration and lecture. "The spectacular form of this service," says J.G. Rayner, "attracted large audiences and it was a useful means of focusing attention on the problems of agriculture society during the years of the rapid development of this great prairie land" (Rayner, n.d.). In 1922, according to the Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture, 32,774 persons came out to see the trains. The school on wheels toured until the outbreak of the Depression in the late 1920s.

### *Some problems in extension agricultural education*

"It appears that the act of extension," says the late Paulo Freire in one of his earliest works,

in whatever sector it takes place, means that those carrying it out need to go to 'another part of the world' to 'normalize it,' according to their way of viewing reality: to make it resemble their world. Thus, in its 'field of association' the term extension has a significant relation to transmission, handing over, giving, messianism, mechanical transfer, cultural invasion, manipulation, etc. All these terms imply actions which transform the world. (Freire, 1973, p. 95)

This provocative statement alerts us to potential dangers inherent in the pedagogical act of extending knowledge and technique to farmers. With reference to the ideal of disinterested critical-rational argument, one can identify normative constraints. Saskatchewan agricultural extension educators certainly worked within a normative framework. They knew what a "good farmer" was, and spoke often of the "good rural home" and the necessity of having a "sound rural philosophy." A strong undercurrent—the problem of the indifferent farmer—tugged at extension's noble aspirations. Some Saskatchewan farmers clearly evaded extension's reach. This troubled extension's missionaries for scientific and efficient farming. So they invented the "educational picnic" and the "model good farmer"—successful farmers were identified and other farmers encouraged to visit and learn from their exemplary crops and livestock—to reach those who seldom attended agricultural society meetings, did not subscribe to any agricultural papers and who probably lacked "faith in his Agriculture College and in the white collared worker." The problem of the indifferent farmer precipitated reflection on farmer readiness to learn (or, more critically, receptivity to extension's program). Like other progressive pedagogues of the time, extension philosophers like Rayner believed that a problem-centred approach could solve the motivational conundrum. The farmer, Rayner postulated, would be receptive to suggestion when a particular problem pressed urgently in upon him (Rayner, "Some problems in the field of agricultural extension"). The secretary of the Kindersley agricultural society wrote to S.E. Greenway, extension director, in February 1918, bemoaning the lack of interest in short courses. His solution was to adopt the "successful methods" of the chautaugua (Secretary, Kindersley Agricultural Society, to S.E. Greenway, February 14, 1918). His solution was to adopt the "successful methods" of the chautaugua (Secretary, Kindersley Agricultural Society, to S.E. Greenway, February 14, 1918). Saskatchewan agricultural extension workers seemed to recognize the contradiction inherent in the extension process. Rayner knew that extension might create dependent relationships. The community had to take "full responsibility" for the activity. They had to request help before help was given. He urged a collaborationist approach to problem-defining and resolution to counter the invasive potential of expert-mediated knowledge. These early twentieth century adult educators grappled with how one could create democratic, public learning spaces.

Nonetheless, hostility toward the Agricultural College persisted through the first two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. W.E. Wabon, an agricultural agent for the Department of Colonization, Agriculture and Natural Resources, wrote candidly to the extension director in April 1926, arguing that the

Agriculture College was not “entirely fulfilling the purpose for which it was intended.” Fewer students were in attendance than ten years ago and the college had not conducted its research aggressively enough. But his sharpest criticism, which has contemporary resonance, was reserved for the academic agriculturalists. Wabon thought there was a “grave danger” that they were becoming out of touch with the “actual farmer.” Scientific discovery was uncoupling from practical application. He wondered if the college professor could “sit in the farmers’ kitchen with his feet on the stove and converse with him in the language the farmers’ neighbour would use in talking over agricultural matters.” Wabon also believed that the academics were not sensitive enough to the requirements of the market. The university-based agriculturalists were free to experiment. The farmers had to have more nerve to carry on knowing that they were the ones who had to look at the ledger at day’s end (Wabon to Rayner, April 1, 1926). Some issues in adult educational history never change.

In sum, this case study contains a liberatory moment worth claiming for the present. The leadership of the University of Saskatchewan in the first three decades of the twentieth century designed its curriculum in response to the economic and lifeworld needs of its public. The agricultural extension service was enacted as an integral part of the university’s mandate. While the knowledge mediated to the farmers was technically oriented, both the university’s relationship with the agricultural societies and its pedagogical procedures fostered a critical-rational discourse. The University of Saskatchewan’s relationship to women and their emergent associations was not subject to strict patriarchal constraint. Women challenged the gendered splitting of the world, opening up all domains of experience to criticism—in the service of their own liberation and that of their societies.

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