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# The CANADIAN SIOUX

## *Refugees from Minnesota*

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AT THE END of the Sioux Uprising of 1862, fewer than two thousand of the approximately 6,300 Minnesota Sioux were accounted for. Some eight hundred of the Lower Sioux and nearly all of the Upper Sioux had fled to the Dakota prairies, where pursuit that autumn was impracticable. Besides those who later surrendered or died during the military campaigns of 1863 and 1864, some three thousand eventually settled down on the Sisseton and Devils Lake reservations in Dakota Territory or on the Fort Peck Reservation in Montana. The remainder, after drifting back and forth across the border, finally settled in the British possessions to the north. They were granted tracts of land after that region was transferred from the Hudson's Bay Company to Canada and largely severed their ties with their American brethren. Since that time they have been pretty much ignored by Americans. Yet their subsequent history, closely

paralleling that of the Santee Sioux in the United States, deserves to be told for the light it sheds on Indian policy in the two countries.

News of the uprising did not reach Fort Garry until nearly three weeks after it had begun. From that time until the first parties of Indians arrived late in December, the population was in a state of nervous expectation. The Sioux had occasionally appeared in the Red River Settlement since 1821 and had always professed friendship for the British, brandishing George III medals on their visits. Nevertheless, the settlers there, comparatively defenseless and believing the most extreme reports of the horrors committed in the Minnesota River Valley, were understandably apprehensive.<sup>1</sup>

According to a later historian, none of the eighty-six Sioux who appeared at Fort Garry on December 28 had been involved in the outbreak, and only fifteen were from the lower bands. Contemporary accounts paint a different picture. The *Nor'-Wester*, a newspaper published at Fort Garry, said that one of the Indians boasted of having killed thirteen whites; the Indians' apparel, it added, showed that they had been plundering. "We loathe the very idea of the Hudson's Bay Company welcoming these

<sup>1</sup> *Nor'-Wester* (Red River Settlement), September 11, 1862; Contran Laviolette, *The Sioux Indians in Canada*, 25, 48 (Regina, Saskatchewan, 1944); Alexander Begg, *History of the North-West*, 1:349 (Toronto, 1894). Information on early contacts between the Sioux and the Red River settlers is found in Alexander Ross, *The Red River Settlement: Its Rise, Progress, and Present State*, 55, 162-164, 324-332 (Reprint edition, Minneapolis, 1957).

wretches," editorialized the paper, "seeing that they are only just fresh from butchering innocent families in Minnesota."<sup>2</sup>

The welcome extended them was extremely cool. After meeting them at the Sale River and unsuccessfully trying to induce them to turn back, Governor Alexander C. Dallas of Rupert's Land reluctantly allowed them to come to headquarters and gave them lodging in the courtroom at the fort. There they spent the next three days "eating, drinking, making peace and making merry," according to the *Nor'-Wester*. Their mission seems to have been to determine the feelings of the local Indians and métis toward the Sioux; they made no appeal for asylum or even for food, though they must have been hungry. On December 31 they left the fort and headed back to Devils Lake, where they were spending the winter. The *Nor'-Wester* warned that the bread and pemmican given them by the authorities were the surest means of encouraging them to return.<sup>3</sup>

Although reports reached Fort Garry later in the winter that the uprising's leader, Little Crow, was going to visit the settlement, he did not actually appear there until late in May, 1863, when a party of about eighty, including a few women, arrived and asked for an interview with the authorities. The request was granted, and Little Crow displayed British medals and flags that he and his men had inherited from their fathers. The latter, he said, had been assured in the War of 1812 that if they ever got into trouble with the Americans, they should appeal to the British and the "folds of the red flag of the north would wrap them round, and preserve them from their enemies."<sup>4</sup> He complained that his people had been deceived in the exchange of prisoners (at Camp Release, near present-day Montevideo, the previous September) and asked Governor Dallas to write General Henry H. Sibley requesting the release of the warriors then in custody. In his letter to Sibley, Dallas remarked that Little Crow had stated "in general terms their wish to

make peace, but if refused they must fight in self defence."<sup>5</sup>

Little Crow made two other requests of the Hudson's Bay Company authorities: that he and his people be allowed to settle north of the border and that they be given provisions and ammunition. Dallas rejected the first outright, saying that there was no game for them to hunt in the vicinity of the fort. Since they were evidently starving, he gave them some provisions, but he refused to issue them ammunition, even though they insisted that they would use it only for hunting. He pointed out that he could scarcely intercede for the Indians with Sibley while at the same time providing ammunition to the American officer's enemies.<sup>6</sup>

AFTER LITTLE CROW and his people left, Fort Garry was not troubled by the Sioux until November 20, 1863, when a small party arrived, followed by a much larger group on December 11. They kept coming until there were about six hundred and camped at Sturgeon Creek, along the Assiniboine River about six miles west of the fort. Having been deprived of their winter food supplies and other property by the campaigns of Generals Sibley and Alfred Sully, they were in a state of extreme destitution and largely unarmed. Although many were believed to have been deeply implicated in the uprising, driving them away by force would have been tantamount to murder, and they were aided from both public and private sources.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Joseph J. Hargrave, *Red River*, 266 (Montreal, 1871); *Nor'-Wester*, January 24, 1863.

<sup>3</sup> Hargrave, *Red River*, 266; *Nor'-Wester*, January 24, 1863.

<sup>4</sup> *Nor'-Wester*, February 9, May 12, June 2, 1863; Hargrave, *Red River*, 290, 291 (quotation).

<sup>5</sup> Dallas to Sibley, June 3, 1863, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, St. Peter's Agency file, in National Archives, Record Group 75.

<sup>6</sup> Hargrave, *Red River*, 291; *Nor'-Wester*, June 2, 1863.

<sup>7</sup> Hargrave, *Red River*, 313-316; Dallas to Thomas Fraser, Secretary, Hudson's Bay House, December 11, 18, 1863, in *Papers Relating to the Sioux Indians*, 4, 5 (London, 1864). A photocopy of this was provided by the Public Archives of Canada.

The Sioux were anything but popular in the settlement. "Meet anybody, now a-days, and the topic is at once, The Sioux the Sioux!" commented the *Nor'-Wester* of December 17, 1863. "Are there any more in? Have any gone away? What are they coming for? Are these the actual murderers, or are they merely aiders, abettors and accomplices? How many are there of them?" In earlier years small parties had visited occasionally on specific missions and left soon; but now they were appearing by the hundreds, bag and baggage, with no aim but to get food and escape the "long-knives," as they called the Americans. They would beg from house to house and then return to their tipis. So desperate were they that many sold their children. A Sioux child was valued at the same rate as a young ox. Drought and the partial failure of the fall buffalo hunt had placed the settlers in a position where they scarcely had food enough for themselves, let alone a horde of mendicant Indians.<sup>9</sup>

Governor Dallas faced a real dilemma. "The fact is," he wrote the secretary of Hudson's Bay Company, "we cannot conveniently afford either to quarrel with or to maintain the Sioux, and there is no middle course to adopt"—except, of course, to let them starve, which would have been hazardous as well as inhumane. Besides offering them food, clothing, and even ammunition, he went so far as to provide eight horse sledges for them to carry their sup-

plies and infirm to a place where they could hunt and fish. At first they rejected even this magnanimous offer. They said they preferred to die in the settlement rather than on the plains.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, however, the combination of inducements seems to have worked, for on December 25 they left the immediate vicinity of the fort. Unfortunately, they went only as far as White Horse Plain, about twenty-five miles up the Assiniboine. Then they spread out around the country in small bands, some going to Lake Manitoba, where they caught so many jackfish that by late February they were reported to be selling fish to the settlers. Urged by the authorities of both countries to surrender, a few took the advice and gave themselves up to Major Edwin A. C. Hatch, who had been placed in command of a special battalion then stationed at Pembina. Two alleged ringleaders in the outbreak, Little Six (or Shakopee) and Medicine Bottle, were spirited across the border after being rendered helpless with alcohol and chloroform.<sup>10</sup>

The Sioux remained in the vicinity of the Assiniboine Valley until spring, when they departed with the métis for their annual buffalo hunt. Then late in August an even larger incursion took place, as an estimated 350 lodges, or nearly three thousand souls, descended on the settlement. They were destitute and starving as a result of the destruction of their supplies by General Sully's forces at Killdeer Mountain earlier that month. William Mactavish, who had succeeded Dallas as governor of Rupert's Land, met them at Portage la Prairie and tried to detain them there. But Standing Buffalo, Waanatan, The Leaf, and Turning Thunder, the last three accompanied by their entire retinue, insisted on going on to Fort Garry. Like those who had been there the previous winter, they behaved respectfully, committing no depredations along the way to the fort.<sup>11</sup>

In keeping with protocol, they displayed medals given them by the British long ago

<sup>9</sup> *Nor'-Wester*, January 18, 1864; Hargrave, *Red River*, 315; Dallas to Fraser, December 11, 1863, in *Papers Relating to the Sioux Indians*, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Dallas to Fraser, December 18, 1863, in *Papers Relating to the Sioux Indians*, 4. Dallas later denied having issued any ammunition to the Indians. See Dallas to Fraser, February 24, 1864 (extract), in *Papers Relating to the Sioux Indians*, 10.

<sup>11</sup> William Mactavish to Fraser, December 25, 1863 (extract), in *Papers Relating to the Sioux Indians*, 5; Hargrave, *Red River*, 315; *Nor'-Wester*, January 18, February 5, 18, 1864; Alvin C. Gluck, Jr., "The Sioux Uprising: A Problem in International Relations," in *Minnesota History*, 34:319-323 (Winter, 1955).

<sup>12</sup> Hargrave, *Red River*, 319, 339; *Nor'-Wester*, May 10, September 1, 1864.



*Standing Buffalo*

and reminded the governor of the promise that whenever they needed assistance, they should call on the representatives of the Crown. Mactavish refused them any help but told them they could barter with traders on the plains on the same basis as the native Indians. At this rebuff they apparently became desperate and began seizing whatever they could lay their hands on. According to contemporary accounts, they invaded fields and stole potatoes, corn, and even wheat; they returned to the farms by night and took livestock. They entered houses, took what they wanted and even demanded to be allowed to cook the potatoes they had stolen. Some visited the homes where they had sold children the previous winter and reclaimed the youngsters. Two churches were entered and valuable objects stolen.<sup>12</sup>

This was the last great invasion by the Sioux of the Fort Garry vicinity. Though they drifted back and forth across the border for several years, no sizable numbers returned to the fort. They tended rather to congregate at Portage la Prairie, Poplar

Point, and High Bluff, all pioneer settlements at varying distances up the Assiniboine. In midsummer of 1865 some 680 lodges were said to be scattered at various points to the west of the fort. The Sioux were hungry and living on roots, eggs, and birds, but traders dissuaded them from visiting the settlement because it also was short of food.<sup>13</sup>

Although the Sioux tried to avoid conflict with the local Indians, the latter resented any competition in an area where they claimed exclusive begging rights. Reports of clashes as early as January, 1864, seem to have been unsubstantiated, but in May of that year a party of Chippewa fired into the tents of an encampment of Sioux on Lake Manitoba, killing or mortally wounding about twenty. And in June, 1866, Standing Buffalo and part of his band visited Fort Garry and were attacked as they left. Since four men were killed, the white settlers expected retaliation and called upon the authorities to raise a force capable of keeping the war parties apart. To their surprise, the Sioux never returned.<sup>14</sup>

Despite these periodic visits, few of the Sioux had yet settled permanently outside the United States. Most of those who feared giving themselves up to the American authorities roved over the plains without much regard to the international boundary. As late as 1867 Standing Buffalo and Waanatan were reported, as they had been in previous years, desirous of re-establishing a treaty relationship with the United States government. When a treaty was made at Washington with the Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux on February 19, 1867, Bishop Henry B. Whipple doubted its value because these two chiefs had not been parties to it. After

<sup>12</sup> *Nor'-Wester*, September 1, 16, 1864. Hargrave, writing some six years later, believed that many of these depredations had been committed by local Indians rather than Sioux. See *Red River*, 340.

<sup>13</sup> *Nor'-Wester*, December 3, 1864; July 4[?], 1865; 2 Parliament, 1 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 23, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> *Nor'-Wester*, January 18, May 10, 1864; Hargrave, *Red River*, 318, 396.

the Sisseton and Devils Lake reservations had been established, small bands gradually drifted southward and submitted to reservation life.<sup>15</sup>

A number, however, still distrusted the American authorities and gradually came to spend more and more of their time north of the border. They supported themselves by hunting, fishing, trapping, and working for farmers in the harvest fields. By December, 1869, there were five hundred wintering at Portage, including a group recently arrived from the Mouse (now Souris) River near the international border. More came in 1870. They took no part in the métis insurrection led by Louis Riel in 1869, although rumors of an impending attack were rife when a party of Sioux from Portage approached Fort Garry and, according to one account, were induced to return only by being given presents.<sup>16</sup>

AFTER LONC and delicate negotiations, the Hudson's Bay Company's territorial holdings were transferred to the new Canadian Confederation, and in 1870 the Province of Manitoba was created. The Sioux then became the subject of considerable interest to the federal authorities charged with the management of Indian affairs. Not until the native Cree and Chipewewa had ceded their lands to the Crown in August, 1871, however, could the notion be entertained of granting the refugees a reserve. Less than three months after Treaties 1 and 2 had been signed, Wemyss M. Simpson, the commissioner who negotiated

them, wrote to the secretary of state for the provinces, calling attention to the presence of the Sioux in the Portage la Prairie vicinity: "Since their appearance in British territory," he wrote, "they have, on all occasions, conducted themselves in a quiet and orderly manner, and although they acknowledge the fact of their having no claims upon Her Majesty, they look with hope to her benevolence in their endeavors to live in peace and quiet within her possessions." Although they could not be treated like the native Indians, Simpson thought they should not be left uncared for in the face of a growing scarcity of game, which might "reduce them to a starving and therefore desperate condition." Late in December the lieutenant-governor of Manitoba, Adams G. Archibald, submitted a dispatch in which the matter was more fully treated.<sup>17</sup>

No immediate results flowed from either Simpson's or Archibald's reports, but about a year later Alexander Morris, Archibald's successor, urged that land be purchased for the Sioux. Numbering about five hundred, they worked for farmers in the summer and wintered at Portage, where the settlers complained of the expense and annoyance caused by their begging. They had asked for land as early as 1870, wrote Morris, "and were led to believe . . . that they would be assigned a Reserve, and if so, they would plant crops and could then be removed from the settlement."<sup>18</sup>

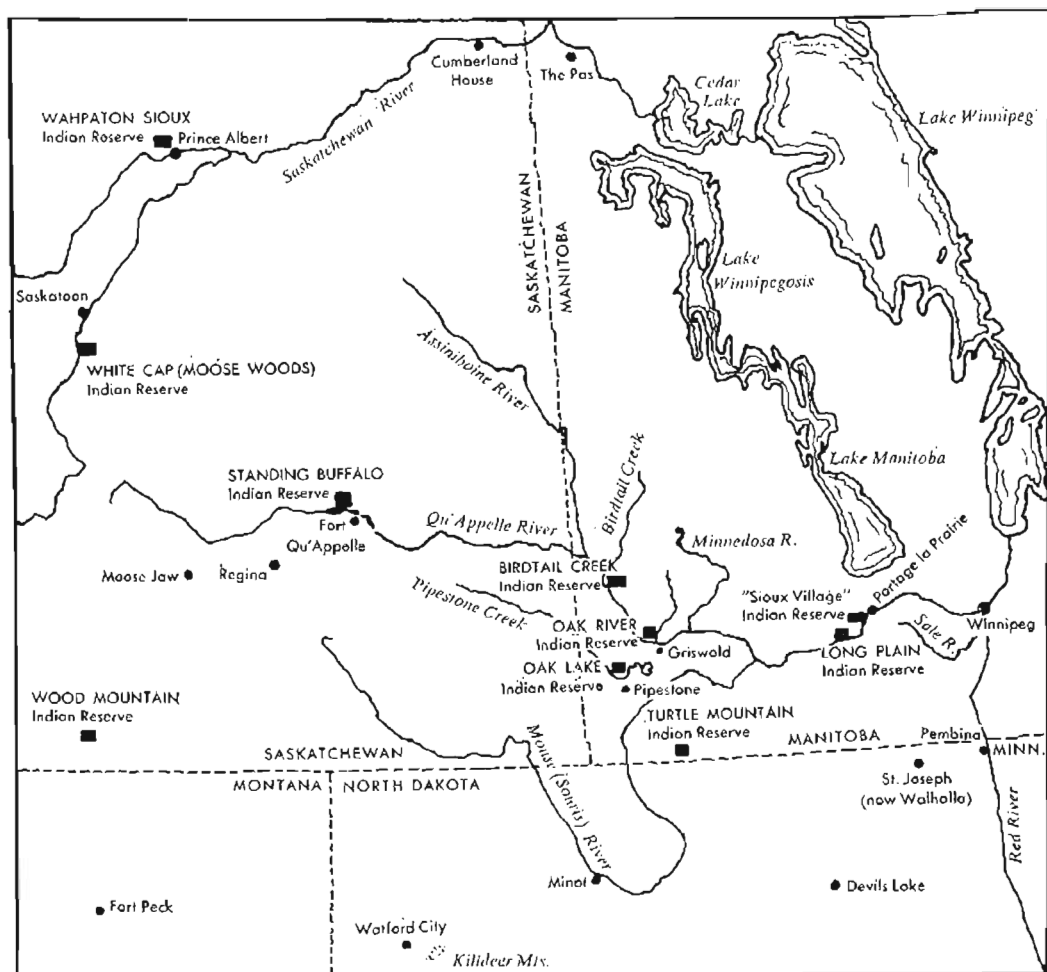
An order in council, dated January 4, 1873, authorized the granting of a reserve of twelve thousand acres to the Sioux. The first location chosen, at the point where the Little Saskatchewan River (now called the Minnedosa) enters the Assiniboine, was rejected by the Indians because it lacked timber and because they wanted two or three smaller reserves instead of one large one. The commissioner charged with the selection of a reserve, in company with the chiefs, then chose two new sites: one on the Assiniboine at the mouth of Oak River and another near the Hudson's Bay Company

<sup>15</sup> Charles A. Ruffee to Charles E. Mix, December 2, 1867, Office of Indian Affairs, Letters Received, Sisseton Agency file, in National Archives, Record Group 75; United States Indian Office, *Reports*, 1869, p. 327; 1871, p. 535; 1872, p. 259.

<sup>16</sup> Lavolette, *Sioux Indians in Canada*, 109; Begg, *History of the North-West*, 1:429.

<sup>17</sup> 1 Parliament, 1 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 22, p. 31; 2 Parliament, 1 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 23, p. 13. For the Manitoba Act and Treaties 1 and 2, see Begg, *History of the North-West*, 1:xl, 2:40-58.

<sup>18</sup> 2 Parliament, 1 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 23, p. 12.



*Reserves where Minnesota Sioux settled in present-day Manitoba and Saskatchewan*

post of Fort Ellice, at the junction of Birdtail Creek with the Assiniboine. They were surveyed in the summer of 1875 and were found to contain roughly eight thousand and seven thousand acres, respectively. These locations apparently represented favorite hunting grounds of the Sioux, for none had taken up permanent residence anywhere except at Portage la Prairie. With the establishment of the reserves, the Sioux, now said to number about 1,450, were encouraged to locate themselves there and begin building houses.<sup>19</sup>

The Canadian Sioux, like their American counterparts, were at first reluctant to settle down on their reserves. For a few years the bulk of them continued to winter at

Portage or in the Turtle Mountains. Besides the possibility of occasional donations from the white settlers at Portage, the town afforded a market for such furs as the Indians might collect during the winter, and the Turtle Mountains at that time provided good hunting at all seasons. It should also be noted that not all the Sioux in Canada made even a gesture in the direction of settling down on the reserves. There was a considerable band under White Cap and the son of Standing Buffalo whose favorite camping place was the Qu'Appelle Lakes,

<sup>19</sup> Lavolette, *Sioux Indians in Canada*, 111-113; 3 Parliament, 1 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 23, p. 5; 2 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 8, p. 9; 3 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 9, p. xi.



*Entrance to Standing Buffalo reserve, Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan*

in present-day Saskatchewan. When two commissioners appointed to treat with the plains tribes met with White Cap in 1875, he told them that his people had been in the Qu'Appelle region for thirteen years and wished to be left as they were, with the privilege of hunting with the métis, and did not want to settle on a reserve with the other Sioux.<sup>20</sup>

Even those who desired to locate permanently were not all accommodated by the two reserves set up in 1875. Besides the Wahpeton at Birdtail Creek and the Sisseton (plus a sprinkling of Mdewakanton) at Oak River, there were a number of Wahpekute roving in the vicinity of the Turtle Mountains, where the infamous Inkpadduta, leader of the Spirit Lake massacre of 1857, was supposed to have lived for a time. For their benefit a reserve was created in 1877 near Oak Lake and surveyed the following year. Covering about four square miles, it was located along Pipestone Creek and

consisted mostly of open meadows and potentially arable land. Because some of this band refused to settle on the Oak Lake reserve, another one was set up about 1883. It consisted of a single square mile of land on the north slope of the Turtle Mountains.<sup>21</sup>

Although the Standing Buffalo and White Cap bands, which separated in 1874, refused to join their tribesmen on the reserves, they continued to ask and receive aid from the Canadian government. Given agricultural implements and seed potatoes in 1877 and instructed to plant at the Qu'Appelle Lakes, they were without oxen and hence accomplished little the next season. When a reserve for them was proposed, the two chiefs quarreled, each wanting the same location. In the summer of 1878 they informed David Laird, then Indian superintendent for the North West Territories, that the Qu'Appelle vicinity was not a suitable place for their reserve and asked to be allowed to settle on the South Saskatchewan River.<sup>22</sup> The impasse was resolved by establishing two reserves, one at the Qu'Appelle Lakes, the other at Moose Woods on the South Saskatchewan, about eighteen miles south of Saskatoon. They were surveyed in 1880 and 1881, though apparently the Qu'Appelle reserve, which was named for Standing Buffalo, had been officially designated in 1878.

<sup>20</sup> 3 Parliament, 3 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 9, p. xxvii, 43.

<sup>21</sup> 3 Parliament, 5 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 10, p. xvii; 5 Parliament, 2 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 4, p. 65; Lavolette, *Sioix Indians in Canada*, 115. The exact date that the Turtle Mountain reserve was established is uncertain. See 6 Parliament, 1 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 6, p. 182.

<sup>22</sup> 4 Parliament, 1 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 7, p. 57, 60; 2 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 4, p. 95, 98, 106; Lavolette, *Sioix Indians in Canada*, 116-118.





*This Presbyterian church is on the Birdtail Creek reserve at Beulah, Manitoba.*

Neither band was in a hurry to settle down. For several years it was hard to get an accurate census at Standing Buffalo because the Indians were seldom all there at one time and because they objected to being counted. White Cap spent most of his time off his reserve, sometimes at Prince Albert, sometimes as far away as the Cypress Hills, in extreme southwestern Saskatchewan. Life at Moose Woods was hard for those who did stay. The surveyor who visited the reserve in 1880 said that in the previous three years forty Indians had died and the survivors were mostly elderly people. The agent reported that when he arrived there in May, 1881, he found many destitute, and three or four who had died were mere skeletons. He helped the Indians plant a small crop and built eight houses.<sup>24</sup>

Gradually the Sioux acquired a status essentially like that of the native Indian tribes. In 1878 an agent, Lawrence W. Herchmer, was appointed for the Birdtail Creek, Oak River, and Oak Lake bands. Except for periodic visits by Indian inspectors, the Standing Buffalo reserve was allowed to shift for itself until the middle 1880s. White Cap's band at Moose Woods received little direct supervision, although in 1882 a farming instructor was hired for a four-month period in the spring and summer. There were other temporary appointments in the following years, and in 1888

William R. Tucker was named farmer-in-charge, a post he held for twenty years.<sup>25</sup>

AS IN the United States, the primary aim of Canadian Indian policy in the plains region was to make independent farmers of the Indians. Since the Sioux had gained valuable experience in the harvest fields of white settlers before being located on lands of their own, it was to be expected that they should be well ahead of the native Indians in agricultural development. To a degree this expectation was justified. It was a source of repeated wonder to the inspectors that these Indians should be doing so well, comparatively speaking, at farming. After a visit to Birdtail Creek in 1890, one of them remarked, "I have not on any reserve seen so many Indians so diligently [*sic*] employed (each one on his own farm) at one time—the most remarkable point being, that as they have no farmer to oversee them they set themselves to work and pursue it with much judgment and industry."<sup>26</sup>

Despite such evidence of progress, the

<sup>24</sup> 4 Parliament, 4 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 6, p. xiii, 124, 125, 134; Laviolette, *Sioux Indians in Canada*, 118.

<sup>25</sup> 4 Parliament, 1 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 7, p. 13; 5 Parliament, 1 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 5, part 2, p. 191; 8 Parliament, 2 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 14, p. 186; Dominion of Canada Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Reports*, 1887, p. 75; 1897, p. 122.



Sioux did need some help and supervision before they could become successful farmers. For the first few years of Herchmer's tenure as agent, all but the Birdtail Creek band spent only the growing season on the reserves and wintered at Portage or elsewhere. One of the agent's main tasks was to persuade them to give their year-round attention to farming. In the belief that teaching by example would be useful, he opened a demonstration farm just off the reserve and employed as many of the Indians as possible there, paying them in cash as well as in experience. Each year he professed to see substantial progress toward self-sufficiency. As early as 1880 the Birdtail Creek band raised enough wheat, corn, potatoes, and vegetables to last them until the next crop and were able even to sell three bushels of seed corn to a destitute Chippewa band. As elsewhere on the Great Plains, the principal reliance was on wheat, although the Indians preferred to raise corn, and they showed marked ability to grow and preserve potatoes and vegetables. Cattle raising was promoted for a time, but as the supply of native hay diminished with

repeated mowings, most of the cattle were sold off. At Moose Woods there was an excellent supply of hay, which enabled the Indians there to remain stock raisers down to the present time.<sup>20</sup>

The Indians did not wish to place their reliance entirely on agriculture or stock raising. After being assigned reserves, they continued to hunt and trap, though the game diminished steadily. As late as 1879 they were able to earn enough from the sale of furs to buy necessary ammunition, matches, tea, tobacco, and flour. As white settlement spread, some of the Indians found employment in cutting logs and putting up hay for the settlers, and nearly all of the men continued to work in the harvest fields. Herchmer lamented in 1882 that the Indian found it easier to work for the settlers than to farm. At Standing Buffalo the reserve was virtually abandoned during the harvest season, for the men took their families with them. As towns grew up along the railroads, the Indians were able to find employment there, and the women sold baskets, moccasins, mitts, and other articles to the townsfolk.<sup>21</sup> All in all, the Sioux got along reasonably well despite not receiving annuities from the sale of lands, as the native Indians did.

Though without treaty obligations to the Sioux, the Canadian Parliament did appropriate regular sums for their support and civilization. In 1880-81 Parliament appropriated them \$7,000. This was reduced to \$4,000 in each of the next three years and then to \$2,000 for the next several years, plus supplemental grants from time to time when emergencies arose. Most of the money was spent for employees' salaries and for implements, seed, and livestock needed to get the Indians started farming. On most of the reserves no rations were issued except during seeding and haying, when they were deemed necessary to keep the Indians from leaving their fields to hunt or earn money.<sup>22</sup> The repeated claim by the agents that the Sioux were "almost self-supporting" was accurate in the sense that the Indians were

<sup>20</sup> 7 Parliament, 1 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 18, p. 158. For similar comments, see Isaac Cowie, *Company of Adventurers: A Narrative of Seven Years in the Service of the Hudson's Bay Company During 1867-1874*, 188 (Toronto, 1913); Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Reports*, 1904, p. 108.

<sup>21</sup> 4 Parliament, 2 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 4, p. 70; 7 Parliament, 4 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 14, p. 215; 5 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 14, p. 59; Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Reports*, 1880, p. 77; 1897, p. 122, 129; 1906, p. 150; 1909, p. 111.

<sup>22</sup> 4 Parliament, 2 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 4, p. 71; 5 Parliament, 1 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 5, p. 42; Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Reports*, 1880, p. 77; 1887, p. 169; 1888, p. 63, 163.

<sup>23</sup> 4 Parliament, 4 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 6, part 2, p. 187; 5 Parliament, 1 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 5, p. 191; 2 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 4, p. 171; 3 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 3, p. 188; 4 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 4, part 2, p. 207-209; 6 Parliament, 1 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 6, part 2, p. 212; 7 Parliament, 1 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 18, p. 42; 8 Parliament, 2 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 14, p. 186; Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Reports*, 1887, p. 75; 1889, p. 57.



*Contrasting houses: an unoccupied log cabin (left), built about 1928, and a frame residence, built about 1961, at Oak River reserve, Griseold, Manitoba*

feeding themselves on a day-to-day basis. To build an economic base capable of maintaining them indefinitely, however, they required government assistance.

As part of the acculturation program carried on by the Canadian government, religious bodies were encouraged to open Indian mission schools. Among the Sioux the Birdtail Creek group seems to have led in education. When Herchmer arrived to take up his duties as agent, he found a Presbyterian missionary already working among the Indians, whom he represented as very devout. Many were able to read and write in their native language, some in English. Indians on the other reserves were still entirely "heathen," though a Church of England mission had been built at Oak River. There were no missions at Oak Lake or Turtle Mountain for many years, and those established in the 1890s seem to have met with little success. The Standing Buffalo reserve acquired a Catholic day school in 1886. Though, like all the rest, it was plagued by poor attendance, it struggled on until 1895, when it was closed and the children sent to the boarding school at Lebreton, Saskatchewan, founded in 1890 by the Oblate Fathers. A day school under Methodist auspices was operated at Moose Woods for about fifteen years, beginning in 1890.<sup>29</sup>

Although the Indians at Birdtail Creek were the most advanced, possibly because the agent had them under his immediate

supervision, their reserve did not prove the most attractive. As time passed, more and more of the Indians moved to Oak River, since the beginning much the largest in population. The land there was good, the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway passed nearby, and there were towns, such as Brandon, close enough to provide a ready market for crops. Oak Lake and Turtle Mountain remained somewhat backward in acculturation. Occasional cheerful reports by agents notwithstanding, there seemed general agreement that the Oak Lake people had little disposition to "better themselves"; they preferred to hunt, fish, and work for settlers rather than improve their own lands. The people at Turtle Mountain, though self-supporting as long as game was plentiful, were inclined to wander and were constantly entertaining parties of Sioux from across the border, only six miles away.<sup>30</sup>

Standing Buffalo was also characterized as somewhat unprogressive. Besides spend-

<sup>29</sup> 4 Parliament, 2 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 4, p. 11, 72; 6 Parliament, 1 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 6, p. 119; 7 Parliament, 1 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 18, p. 64, 150; 3 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 14, p. 151; 8 Parliament, 2 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 14, p. 145; Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Reports*, 1880, p. 77; 1889, p. 58; 1895, p. 138, 143; 1908, p. 161.

<sup>30</sup> 6 Parliament, 1 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 6, p. 121; 7 Parliament, 1 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 18, p. 43; Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Reports*, 1887, p. 76; 1888, p. 164; 1895, p. 143.

ing much of their time off the reserve, the Indians of this band built their houses in a ravine extending back from the lake rather than up on the prairie where the best land was found. Not until the early 1890s did they begin moving up on to the "bench," and then only under pressure from their agent. The White Cap band made a better record for itself. Once the alarming population decline had been arrested and a successful cattle-raising economy established, the Moose Woods reserve earned the praise of most of the inspectors who visited it.<sup>31</sup>

**HIGH MORTALITY**, not only at Moose Woods but at all of the Sioux reserves, disturbed the agents. Until about the end of the nineteenth century, the death rate usually exceeded the birth rate, sometimes dramatically—as in 1885, when eleven out of the eighty-eight heads of family at Oak River died, together with seventeen children under the age of three. The agents conjectured that the high death rate, chiefly from pulmonary diseases, was caused by a change in diet from heavy reliance on meat to a greater use of cereals and vegetables. Some blame was also attached to the transition from an outdoor life, with tipis the only shelter, to the congested conditions of

unsanitary log cabins. Moreover, the Sioux were simply not reproducing as rapidly as the other Indian tribes of the region. This the agents could not explain.<sup>32</sup>

As in the United States, agents inveighed against the Indians' overindulgence in whiskey, which they believed caused some of the deaths. If their reports can be trusted, Herchmer and his successor, J. A. Markle, were reasonably successful at keeping Indians and whiskey apart and even instilled in their charges a willingness to abstain when the temptation presented itself, which it did increasingly as railroads were built and towns sprang up.<sup>33</sup>

Whatever their success as temperance campaigners, there is no doubt that the agents were on the way toward helping the Indians achieve self-sufficiency by the mid-1880s. Then the series of droughts that caused so much trouble on the American Great Plains began. On Indian reservations in Canada, as in the United States, much of the ground that had been gained was lost. The first bad year was 1886; then, with a few exceptions, the cycle of drought continued until 1895, when a return of more adequate rainfall brought better crops, and the progress toward self-sufficiency resumed. By the time of World War I the Canadian Sioux were self-supporting to much the same degree as white farmers on the Great Plains.<sup>34</sup>

Meanwhile, two more reserves had been created. At the time the Moose Woods reserve was established, the Indians assigned to it were spending much of their time in and near Prince Albert, where seasonal jobs were available. As early as 1880 a farming instructor was employed to look after destitute Indians, including 750 Sioux, in the Prince Albert area. The figure may have been exaggerated, but there were a number of Sioux in the vicinity, both Teton and members of the White Cap band, who still lived in tipis and had apparently never come under civilizing influences. No specific provision was made for these people until 1890, when some tentative moves

<sup>31</sup> 7 Parliament, 2 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 14, p. 161; 3 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 14, p. 81; 4 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 14, p. 215; 8 Parliament, 5 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 14, p. 186, Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Reports*, 1906, p. 150; 1908, p. 161.

<sup>32</sup> 5 Parliament, 2 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 4, p. 64; 4 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 4, p. 61; 7 Parliament, 2 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 14, p. 162; Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Reports*, 1895, p. 143; 1897, p. 123.

<sup>33</sup> 5 Parliament, 2 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 4, p. 64; 3 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 3, part 1, p. 70, part 2, p. 188; 4 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 4, p. 61; Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Reports*, 1895, p. 143.

<sup>34</sup> 7 Parliament, 1 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 18, p. 43; 4 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 14, p. 56; 5 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 14, p. 58; Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Reports*, 1880, p. 77; 1887, p. 76; 1888, p. 63; 1889, p. 58; 1895, p. 138, 142; 1897, p. 122.



*Early photograph taken on one of the Canadian Sioux reserves*

were taken to select a reserve for them. About a year later a school was opened under Presbyterian sponsorship.<sup>35</sup>

The designation of a reserve for these Indians was complicated by their lack of interest in farming and their wish to be close to Prince Albert. Not until 1894 was a suitable tract found, a block of four sections at Round Plain. It consisted mostly of burned-over timberland, with hay meadows scattered here and there. It recommended itself as a home for Indians because there were fish in the nearby river and berries grew profusely. Apparently these attractions were not sufficient, for very few families could be persuaded to move on to the reserve. In 1908 two sections in an adjoining township were added in hopes that these would prove more suitable.<sup>36</sup>

Round Plain (now called the Wahpaton Sioux reserve) has remained the poor relation among those occupied by the Canadian Sioux. In 1908 the agent described the buildings as one-room, sod-roofed log huts, of less value than those on any of the other reserves under his jurisdiction. Tuberculosis and scrofula still took a heavy toll of the Indians there; few of the children reached maturity. Those who camped near Prince Albert earned their food and clothing but lived "miserably in every other way." Although in 1910 he thought he saw a shift from berry picking and the sale of wood and hay to cattle and grain raising, three years later only thirty-seven of the sixty-six Sioux were on the Wahpaton reserve, and they were still living in the old way.<sup>37</sup>

The other reserve created in the 1890s constituted a belated recognition of the little band of Sioux that had been in Canada longer than any other. When the first reserves were set up in 1875, a few Indians remained at Portage la Prairie, sinking deeper into poverty as the years passed. About 1886 they were "taken in hand," as a later inspector expressed it, by local white citizens. A school was started, and the Indians were induced to begin saving money

<sup>35</sup> 4 Parliament, 4 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 6, p. ix; 7 Parliament, 2 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 14, p. 137, 199, 240; 3 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 14, p. 222; 4 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 14, p. 179, 217; Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Reports*, 1880, p. 102. The Teton were members of the Sitting Bull band, who had fled to Canada after the Battle of the Little Big Horn in June, 1876. Long after the refugees from Minnesota had settled down on reserves, these Plains Sioux were still dwelling in tents and trying to eke out a living by hunting, fishing, and occasionally working on farms or in towns like Moose Jaw. In 1913 a reserve was created for them at Wood Mountain in southern Saskatchewan. See Laviolette, *Sioux Indians in Canada*, 120.

<sup>36</sup> 7 Parliament, 8 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 14, p. 178; 8 Parliament, 4 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 14, p. 132; Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Reports*, 1893, p. 174; 1904, p. 147; 1908, p. 160.

<sup>37</sup> 11 Parliament, 3 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 27, p. 125; 12 Parliament, 3 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 27, p. 140; Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Reports*, 1908, p. 160.

to buy a tract of land. When they had accumulated \$400, they purchased twenty-six acres on the Assiniboine River within the limits of the town. The Presbyterian church built a chapel for them on this land, and a nonreservation Sioux village developed. Its occupants supported themselves mainly by working for farmers and townspeople. In 1898 the Canadian government finally took notice of the little community and granted a 109-acre lot in a location less subject to flooding. But as before, the Indians preferred to stay where they were. At last the government acceded to their wishes and exchanged the lot previously set apart for a much smaller (twenty-five acres) but more acceptable one just west of the city. They eventually moved there, and most of the band remained, even when, in 1934, the government purchased a much larger tract adjacent to the Long Plain Chipewewa reserve.<sup>38</sup>

Although a measure of forced acculturation was present in Canadian Indian policy as in that of the United States, the pressure seems to have been less. The agents strove to supplant wandering with sedentary habits, but this was a matter of economic necessity. The fact that as late as 1904 nearly half the Sioux were classified as pagan indicates that no such religious persecution was directed against their aboriginal beliefs as prevailed in the United States.

The disdain felt for Indian customs is reflected in the agents' reports, which stigmatize the dances as "give-away affairs" and report with approval their gradual

abandonment and the regularization of marriage practices. Now and then someone would become righteously indignant and take vigorous action. In 1902 Inspector Alexander McGibbon arrived at Oak Lake to find the Christian faction planning a Christmas tree and social, while the pagans were getting ready for a powwow and dance. When McGibbon learned that the latter were building a dance house in the brush, he and some Indian allies found it and leveled it. "No more dancing-houses will be heard of at this place," he grimly predicted.<sup>39</sup>

More characteristic, however, was the attitude of an agent writing in 1908. Commenting on the generally high morality of the Sioux, he remarked, tolerantly, "Sometimes, perhaps, from our point of view they are a little lax on the marriage question; but a transfer of a good horse will quickly and quietly settle a disagreement or damages and set things running again as before." Evidence also of a growing tolerance was the substitution in the religious census of 1916 of the term "aboriginal beliefs" for "pagan."<sup>40</sup>

IN GENERAL, Canadian Indian policy has not been characterized by the sharp fluctuations and reversals that have been seen in the United States. There was no attempt to hurry the Indian into citizenship by breaking up the reservations as in the Dawes Act of 1887, and hence there was no comparable dissipation of the Indians' land resources and no need for such legislation as the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. By the time of World War I the Canadian Sioux had long since settled down to a placid life as small farmers, though continuing to derive a portion of their income from off-reservation employment. Government assistance was limited to the services of an agent, partial support of schools, and occasional issues of seed grain when drought or hail had wiped out the Indians' crops. Until after World War II life for the Sioux in Canada was a steady linear pro-

<sup>38</sup> Lavolette, *Sioux Indians in Canada*, 114; 8 Parliament, 4 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 14, p. 78; 9 Parliament, 1 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 27, p. 87; 2 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 27, p. 89; 3 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 27, p. 98; 11 Parliament, 3 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 27, p. 94, 104; 12 Parliament, 1 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 27, p. 105, 113; 3 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 27, p. 110; Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Reports*, 1904, p. 93.

<sup>39</sup> 9 Parliament, 4 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 27, p. 207.

<sup>40</sup> Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Reports*, 1908, p. 107; 1916, part 1, p. 126.





*Unoccupied house  
on the bleak  
Wahpaton Sioux  
reserve north of  
Prince Albert,  
Saskatchewan*

gression, marked neither by spectacular improvement nor by noticeable retrogression.

Perhaps the most dramatic fact about the Canadian Sioux in the twentieth century has been the tremendous increase in their numbers. From the time they were settled on reserves until just about the turn of the century, their total population declined steadily. Birdtail Creek, for example, dropped from 143 in 1884 to sixty-five in 1900, and Oak Lake fell from seventy-eight in 1884 to thirty-seven in 1896. For the entire group of Sioux descended from the Minnesota refugees the lowest point was reached in 1899, when they totaled 897. They increased to 903 in 1904 and to 917 by 1916. The climb continued in later years, and on January 1, 1964, the population of the seven reserves occupied by these people was 1,922—more than twice their numbers a half century earlier.<sup>41</sup> As in the United States, the causes of this impressive population growth were a generally higher birth rate and a lower death rate, the latter the result of improved medical treatment.

Unfortunately, the increase in numbers has not been accompanied by a corresponding improvement in the Indians' economic condition. Since World War II the Canadian Sioux, like other plains tribes, have suffered an economic setback caused by changes in the pattern of agriculture in the wheat-growing regions. World surpluses have depressed prices, with the severest effects being felt by the small operator. The Indian, necessarily a small operator by virtue of the land available to him, has

been further handicapped by his inability to use the reservation lands as collateral for loans. The result has been that the Indians have almost ceased raising wheat, which was formerly their principal cash crop. Since technological advances in farming have reduced the need for seasonal labor, the Indians have been hard pressed to make a living. Many have been thrown on the relief rolls. Cities and towns provide some jobs, but there is no parallel in Canada for the massive migration away from the reservation that has taken place in the United States in recent years; hence Indians tend to stay on the reserves, recipients of provincial and federal welfare.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> 5 Parliament, 3 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 3, p. 207; 8 Parliament, 2 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 14, p. 142; 5 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 14, p. 491, 493, 498; Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Reports*, 1904, part 2, p. 76-79; 1916, part 1, p. 126; Department of Citizenship and Immigration, Indian Affairs Branch, *Traditional Linguistic and Cultural Affiliations of Canadian Indian Bands*, 25, 26, 27, 28 (Ottawa, 1964). These figures should be taken as approximate, for they vary widely from year to year. Since the figures for Moose Woods were not given in 1899 or 1904, the 1900 and 1906 numbers were substituted in arriving at totals. In 1964 there were 343 other Sioux in Canada, presumably descendants of the Teton who crossed the border in 1876 and later.

<sup>42</sup> Letter to the author from N. J. McLeod, November 18, 1965, and interviews with Mr. McLeod, August 13, 15, 1966. Before his retirement Mr. McLeod was regional director of Indian affairs for Saskatchewan. He reports that except for a few of the prairie Indians "who have continued to raise beef cattle or have left their reservation to become engaged in other industries the great majority are today dependent upon a monthly relief cheque for their existence."

On the surface the Sioux reserves in Manitoba and Saskatchewan present a favorable appearance to a visitor from the United States. The economic distress of their occupants is partially masked by an ambitious housing program that on some reserves has placed most of the people in neat new dwellings. Oak River presents the most satisfactory prospect. It has the largest amount of good land, the largest number of farmers actually working their land, the largest number of new pastel-painted houses. Birdtail Creek, with its widely scattered houses, its weathered church, its unused school with shattered windows, has the appearance of partial abandonment, despite the fact that the population there has increased from seventy-three in 1916 to 175 in 1964. Oak Lake, too, has its quota of new houses and an attractive school building, but the visitor is likely to be more impressed by the number of employable young men with nothing to do but race their cars back and forth along the dusty road that bisects the reserve.

Standing Buffalo and Moose Woods (now officially called White Cap) give much the same appearance. On both there are new houses, attractive school buildings, old but well-maintained churches. When the annual

powwow takes place at Standing Buffalo in August, Indians from the other Sioux reserves gather, along with members of other tribes in western Canada and the northern United States. For a few days the hills of the Qu'Appelle Valley echo to the sound of drums and the Indians perhaps forget their economic plight. But behind the facade are the grim facts. Poor like the other Sioux, the people at Standing Buffalo are beset by factionalism—the ravine versus the prairie upland—and they are said to be more dependent on the agency than other bands. Cattle raising gives the people at Moose Woods a somewhat better economic status, and employment is available in Saskatoon and at the Dundurn Army Base adjacent to the reserve.<sup>43</sup>

Dreariest of all is the Wahpaton Sioux reserve near Prince Albert, the northernmost point reached by the Sioux people. There are no new houses here; scattered over the reserve are log houses, many of them unoccupied. Although some land is cultivated, practically none of it is farmed by the Indians themselves. Employment—what there is—must be found in Prince Albert. By contrast, the Indians living in the Sioux village at Portage la Prairie have work available across the street at a mushroom-processing plant. Their community, some of whose houses are quite new, gives an appearance of neatness and order. Making no attempt to farm, they have not been affected by recent changes in agriculture. Like their ancestors nearly a century ago, they earn at least part of their living by working for their white neighbors.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Interviews with H. A. Matthews, Superintendent, File Hills-Qu'Appelle Agency, Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan, August 12, 1966, and William Eagle, resident of the Moose Woods reserve, August 13, 1966; letter to the author from R. B. Kohls, Superintendent, Duck Lake Agency, Duck Lake, Saskatchewan, April 28, 1967.

<sup>44</sup> Letter to the author from D.A.H. Nield, Superintendent, Portage la Prairie Agency, May 8, 1967. According to Mr. Nield, the people at Portage la Prairie find employment as carpenters and as farm laborers, in addition to that furnished by the Campbell Soup Company of Canada plant adjacent to the Sioux village.

*A dirt street in  
"Sioux Village" at  
Portage la Prairie,  
Manitoba*





equality with the rest of the population, to the end that he might participate fully in the collective life of the nation. Neither country has entirely succeeded. It is probably fair to say that Canada has had fewer obstacles to contend with. Settlement was slower, and the typical settler was less savagely anti-Indian in sentiment. Those Indians with a basis for comparison have noticed the difference. In 1914 Frederick H. Abbott, secretary of the Board of Indian Commissioners, visited the Standing Buffalo reserve and asked the chief if his people would like to return to the United States. "No," was the reply, "we have visited our friends in the United States many times—we would not trade places with them. We are getting along all right. Our government treats us right."<sup>45</sup> This was a bleak period in the history of American Indian policy, and perhaps the chief would have answered differently had he been asked the same question in the 1930s and early 1940s. And one must not discount the natural feeling of loyalty to the country and locality of one's birth. Yet Canadian Indian policy has been on the whole more enlightened than United States policy. Canadian administration has been less subject to the spoils system and to the vagaries of economy-minded legislatures.<sup>46</sup>

Despite these seeming advantages, Ca-

nadian Indian policy has yielded, for the Sioux, much the same results as American Indian policy: an economically depressed class, half assimilated, yet not fully accepted. Their aboriginal culture modified beyond recognition, the Sioux have not wholly embraced the white man's culture. The recipients of a dwindling number of services not afforded the general population, they seem in both countries as yet unprepared to undertake their own support unaided. The thought inevitably suggests itself that, in the white man's campaign to eliminate the features of the Indian heritage that he deemed undesirable, he may have vitiated in the Indian the qualities of character necessary to success as an independent citizen in a changing society.

<sup>45</sup> Frederick H. Abbott, *The Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada*, 22 (Washington, 1915).

<sup>46</sup> The tenure of agents was generally longer than in the United States. Markle, who succeeded Herchmer at the Birtle Agency in 1886, remained until 1901, and his successor, G. H. Wheatley, stayed at least fifteen years. See 6 Parliament, 1 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 6, p. 121; 9 Parliament, 2 session, *Sessional Papers*, no. 27, p. 126; Department of Indian Affairs, *Annual Reports*, 1916, p. 48.

THE MODERN PHOTOGRAPHS used in this article were taken by the author in August, 1966. The picture of Standing Buffalo on page 16 is from the Minnesota Historical Society picture collection; that on page 24 is from the Gunn Collection, Manitoba Archives.

### *Encampment on Qu'Appelle Lakes during August powwow at Standing Buffalo reserve*





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