

Urban Calgary 1884-1895 *

by M. L. FORAN **

The urban development of Calgary is usually associated with the twentieth century, for it was in the years 1901-1916 that the population increased from a modest 4,000 to over 56,000.¹ Certainly the first decade of Calgary's corporate existence could hardly be classed as auspicious. Visitors and officials often referred to "the village of Calgary"; parliamentarians hotly criticized the town's right to a permanent post office, while even native sons, luxuriating in the pre-war population boom, spoke rather benignly of the "frontier town of the 1890's".² However, American historiography contains many well-documented works which highlight the role of small communities in frontier societies,³ and, when viewed in this light, the function of early Calgary was primarily urban. In the first place, by exhibiting overt signs of commercial confidence and aggressiveness, and by acting as a catalyst for regional aspirations, Calgary's metropolitan role defined itself from the outset. Secondly, by the instantaneous adoption of traditional institutions and values, Calgary acted as an acculturating agency modifying the direct influence of a frontier environment.

I. — THE METROPOLITAN DIMENSION

In November, 1844, when Calgary was incorporated as a town, scarcely 500 people inhabited the rude shacks and temporary dwellings on both sides of the unbridged Elbow River. Although population increased steadily to about 3,800 in 1890, the depressed economic conditions of the early 1890's limited further growth and by 1895, Calgary's population probably still numbered fewer than 4,000. More significant than actual numbers however is the fact that Calgary was always the largest community in the North-West Territories during this period, accounting for about 17 per cent of the total population for the Alberta district in 1891.⁴

Yet Calgary did not dominate an empty hinterland. By 1890 all homestead entries around the town had been taken up, and by the end of the period the rich farmlands of central Alberta had been opened up to settlers. By 1894, it was reported that the Calgary district had 28,400 acres under

* This formed the basis of a paper read at the annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, Kingston, Ontario, June 1973.

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¹ E. J. HANSON, *Local Government in Alberta* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1956), p. 27; *Calgary Municipal Manual*, 1969, p. 146.

² Personal files of Dr. J. W. G. MacEwan (hereafter cited as MacEwan), "Why Go To Calgary?", an article written by James A. LOUGHEED.

³ These are far too numerous to document. For good examples see R. C. WADE, *The Urban Frontier* (University of Harvard Press, 1959); G. STELTER, "The Urban Frontier, A Western Case Study, Cheyenne, Wyoming, 1867-1887" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Alberta, 1968).

⁴ *Census of Canada*, 1890-91, Vol. IV, p. 399.

cultivation, or almost half the total for Alberta.⁵ In the same year over 500,000 bushels of oats were harvested, easily the best of any district in the North-West Territories.⁶ Along the primitive but well-used access trails to Edmonton and Fort Benton, Montana, small communities sprang up to service their respective farming and ranching districts. When rails were laid to Edmonton and Fort Macleod in this period, the small towns of Olds, Innisfail, Red Deer and High River increased in size and prosperity. But it was Calgary that supplied the communication nexus. The town's focal position was unique and indisputable, commanding ready access to the metropolitan centres of Winnipeg, Toronto and Montreal, the British Columbia mining fields and Pacific trade, the ranching hinterland of the south, and the rich soils of the Red Deer River Valley in central Alberta.

The coming of the Canadian Pacific Railway to Calgary in 1883 ensured the primacy of the town as a transportation centre. By 1890, the former North-West Mounted Police fort and trading post had replaced Fort Macleod as the headquarters of the thriving cattle industry, and was described as "the centre of trade to an extensive cattle trade . . . the chief source of supply to the surrounding mining districts and the seat of a thriving lumber industry".⁷ Even before the hinterland to the north and south was linked to Calgary by rail, the town enjoyed a position of commercial pre-eminence.

As regards the country immediately around Calgary — say for 50 or 60 miles on every side — its trade all centres to Calgary running up to 100 miles at Red Deer. The farmers and ranchers all trade in Calgary, and their cattle and horses come here for shipment while all stock brought into this section of the country are landed at Calgary and are thence distributed. All agricultural implements needed throughout the area that are purchased in the territories are purchased in Calgary.⁸

An examination of some available account books supports this contention. Dr. R. G. Brett's Sanatorium at Banff received most of its supplies from more than ten Calgary merchants,⁹ while the North-West Mounted Police freely purchased goods in Calgary that were usually supplied by eastern manufacturers.¹⁰ Within twelve months of its establishment in 1892 the Calgary Malting and Brewing Company was receiving large orders from all over the North-West Territories as well as from Manitoba and British Columbia.¹¹ Control of stone quarries around Calgary remained in the hands of local businessmen, trade being so brisk that the town's leading contractor remarked in 1891 that he could not meet all demands.¹² This

⁵ *Annual Report of the Department of the Interior*, 1894.

⁶ *Ibid.* It was also reported that the Calgary district had harvested 50,000 bushels of wheat and 25,000 bushels of barley. Also, about 55,000 head of livestock were in the Calgary district alone.

⁷ *Dominion Illustrated*, June, 1890.

⁸ *The Western World*, August, 1890.

⁹ Glenbow Historical Library and Archives (hereafter cited as Glenbow), Dr. R. G. BRETT, "Brett Hospital Banff Account Book, 1883-1890."

¹⁰ *Canadian Sessional Papers* (hereafter cited as C.S.P.), No. 15 of 1892.

¹¹ Glenbow, A. E. Cross Papers MSS.

¹² *The Tribune* (Calgary), hereafter cited as *Tribune*, April 15, 1891.

stone, excellent for building, was sent to Edmonton, Innisfail, Brandon and Winnipeg, and it was proudly reported in the local press that Calgary stone had been used to build the courthouse at Portage la Prairie.¹³ Commercial hegemony was also extended by the local brickyards which supplied bricks as far west as British Columbia, and where the construction of smelting works created a steady demand.¹⁴

Calgary's location as the centre of the lumber industry was also instrumental in placing the town in a position of commercial dominance. The annual reports of the Crown Timber Agent in Calgary contain many references to the marked influence of lumber mills on the economic growth of the Calgary district.¹⁵ The two largest mills had their headquarters in Calgary, and in the boom building year of 1891 both companies sold over one million feet of timber.¹⁶ Although by 1895 there were 10 mills reported as serving the Alberta district, for almost the whole period 1884-95, the area within a 100-mile radius of Calgary was dominated by these locally based mills.¹⁷ The account books of James Walker's Bow River Saw Mill show that a marked volume of business was transacted outside Calgary,¹⁸ while W. H. Cushing's sash and door factory, which was among the first manufacturing establishments in Calgary, enjoyed a wide reputation and clientele.¹⁹ With adequate supplies of both timber and building stone, the emergence of a viable construction industry is not difficult to imagine. Individual contractors from Calgary travelled all over the district and sometimes to other provinces.²⁰

The importance of the cattle industry to Calgary in these early years was given credence by the generally unsuccessful efforts to introduce large-scale crop growing.²¹ Annual reports from government officials stationed in the area indicate clearly the tremendous reliance placed upon the cattle industry in bringing wealth and prosperity to the west. Sales from the Cochrane Ranch alone amounted to over \$80,000 in 1895, a figure which exceeded the Calgary civic budget for that year by about 350 per cent.²² The Calgary district alone had over 150 ranches with more than 50 head

¹³ Leishman McNEILL, *Tales of the Old Town* (Calgary: The Calgary Herald [n. d.]), p. 15.

¹⁴ *The Western World*, August, 1890, p. 145.

¹⁵ *C.S.P.*, No. 13 of 1885, No. 6 of 1887; *Department of Interior Annual Reports*, 1893, 1896.

¹⁶ *Department of Interior Annual Reports*, 1889-95. Mills referred to are Eau Claire Lumber Company and Bow River Saw Mills and Planing Company.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* Prior to the establishment of the Eau Claire Mill in 1887 there were at least two other lumber yards in Calgary owned by S. J. Hogg and E. Dyck. Also in 1891 John Lineham opened a mill on his property at Sheep Creek near Calgary. Lineham had extensive political, property and business interests in Calgary.

¹⁸ Glenbow, Bow River Saw and Planing Mills, "Letterbook of Lumber and Contracting Business, 1884-1903."

¹⁹ *Tribune*, April 8, 1887.

²⁰ One man, Thomas Underwood, who had an assessment rating of \$500 in 1887, rose to be described in 1914 as "a modern business tycoon".

²¹ *C.S.P.*, No. 6 of 1890, No. 15 of 1883, No. 15 of 1896.

²² D. H. BREEN, "The Cattle Compact" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Calgary, 1968), p. 34.

of stock, while the cattle population totalled approximately 50,000 head.²³ Calgary itself must have provided a lucrative consumer demand judging by the one rancher who supplied Calgary butchers in 1885 with 250,000 pounds of beef "to meet the Christmas demand".²⁴

That Calgary was considered a fertile field for the investment of ranching capital is a singular factor emphasizing the town's commercial dynamism. Besides their substantial investments in Calgary real estate, ranchers occupied positions on the boards of directors of several companies interested in the long range future of the town.²⁵ The town's small but important manufacturing base present by 1895 was closely related to the livestock industry, local stock owners figuring prominently in the ownership and management of at least two-thirds of all establishments.²⁶ In 1891, when the controlling interests in the celebrated and ostentatious Alberta Hotel incorporated themselves into a company with a capital stock of \$99,000, ranching interests provided the chief stockholders.²⁷ Cattlemen were also prominent on the elitist board of directors of the Calgary General Hospital joining such social luminaries as Senator James A. Lougheed, Bishop Pinkham, Judge Rouleau and banker E. B. Braithwaite. Ranching interests enjoyed a prestigious position on the toasting ladder at town banquet tables, while the Ranchmen's Club, formed in 1893 with its assorted membership of Calgary professional men, businessmen and ranchers,²⁸ further attests to the fusion of general interests. Complementing this presence of ranching interest in Calgary was the fact that local businessmen began to invest in the livestock industry.²⁹ Thus it could be argued that as entrepôt for reciprocal capital investment, and as symbol of a growing industry's vitality, Calgary from the outset was destined to be no mere trading centre, or dusty cattle town.³⁰

Yet it would be erroneous to conjecture that early Calgary saw its future irrevocably tied and subservient to the cattle industry. One has only to examine the town's attitude towards immigration, agriculture, irrigation

²³ C.S.P., No. 15 of 1894; *Department of Interior Annual Report*, 1894.

²⁴ C.S.P., No. 8 of 1895. Beef in Calgary sold at between 10-15 cents per pound.

²⁵ Electric Lighting Company, Street Railway Company. In addition, The Natural Gas Company, many railways charters, Athletic Association, Turf Club, Calgary Rink Company, The *Calgary Herald*, the town waterworks and proposed Water Power companies, all were in part controlled by ranching interests.

²⁶ Tannery, creamery, soapworks, cold storage plant, pork packing plant. Only brewery, grist mill and lumber concerns could be classed as vital manufactories not associated with the livestock industry.

²⁷ *North-West Territories Gazette*, April 1, 1891.

²⁸ *Tribune*, Jan. 3, 1890, Jan. 30, 1894; Glenbow, "The Ranchmen's Club — Historical Sketch, 1891-1952."

²⁹ Two such individuals were George Alexander, one of Calgary's top ratepayers, owner of town waterworks [and], who by 1892 had invested over \$10,000 in Calgary real estate; and D. W. Marsh, Mayor in 1889 and among the town's 10 biggest ratepayers in that same year. Merchant until 1900 when he retired to devote full time interest in ranching. First President of Western Stock Growers Association, 1896.

³⁰ For further information on this subject see L. G. THOMAS, "The Rancher and the City: Calgary and the Cattlemen, 1883-1914," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, 4th series, VI (June 1968), pp. 203-215.

and railway promotion to ascertain that the fashioners of town policy envisaged an urban, even metropolitan future for Calgary.

The promotion of immigration was accorded high priority in town affairs. Local officials exercised constant vigilance over the Dominion Government's Immigration Office in Calgary to ensure that new arrivals receive a favourable impression of their new surroundings.³¹ Immigration occupied a special place on one of the Town Council Committees by 1889, and this latter body was most active in forwarding a steady stream of suggestions to the Dominion Government as to methods of improving existing procedures.³² The town authorities were not interested in promoting town settlement,³³ and it is true that after 1890, with almost all land in the vicinity taken up, the destinations of most arrivals were the new communities of Olds, Innisfail, Red Deer and Edmonton.³⁴ Such developments were viewed favourably by both press and private opinion,³⁵ and it was only when it was alleged that the Calgary Immigration Agent was deliberately encouraging settlers to choose Edmonton — where he was purported to have business interests — that local ire was aroused.³⁶ It appeared, even at this early stage, that the concept of a populated hinterland did not include the encouragement of a potential rival for commercial hegemony.

The co-ordination of activities designed to further the prosperity of the Calgary district was provided by the Agricultural Society. Often working in conjunction with the Town Council, this organization promoted lectures on agriculture by visiting experts, lobbied consistently for the location of the Dominion Government's proposed experimental farm and ardently cultivated the attention of visiting farm delegations.³⁷ As early as 1893 the Agricultural Society dispensed with the lack-lustre policy of holding agricultural exhibitions. In its stead was substituted the forerunner of the modern Stampede. The 1893 Fair combined agricultural and commercial exhibits with pony races, trotting matches, polo games, athletic and novelty events. The *Herald's* claim that fairs should be essentially vehicles for town and country interaction³⁸ was in part borne out by high attendances, and entries from all over the North-West Territories.³⁹ Throughout this whole period the Agricultural Society was financed by town grants and dominated by

³¹ *The Herald* (Calgary, hereafter cited as *Herald*), April 9, 1890.

³² Glenbow, Calgary Council Minutes (hereafter cited as C.C.M.), April 2, 1889, March 8, 1890, June 7, 1890; *Tribune*, April 18, 1888, Feb. 8, 1889; *Herald*, July 22, 1885.

³³ C.C.M., June 23, 1889, May 19, 1891.

³⁴ Three-quarters of arrivals to Calgary district headed north in 1892, C.S.P. No. 15 of 1892; see also C.S.P., No. 15 of 1896; *Tribune*, Nov. 16, 1895 reported 53 homestead entries in Calgary district compared with 513 for Red Deer, Wetaskiwin and Edmonton.

³⁵ Glenbow, J. GILLESPIE, "Diary of a Calgary Stonemason, 1893-1915," May 31, June 29, Oct. 28, 1893. Both Calgary papers carried weekly editions which devoted large spaces to reporting the prosperity of these areas.

³⁶ *Tribune*, Sept. 16, 1891.

³⁷ C.C.M., Jan. 30, 1892, May 9, 1894, June 26, 1894; C.S.P., No. 6 of 1891.

³⁸ *Herald*, June 19, 1886.

³⁹ *Gillespie Diary*, June 20, 1893; *Tribune*, June 22, 1893.

local merchants, who in spite of some rural opposition and diffidence⁴⁰ provided the district's only viable voice of rural aspirations.

This function of a small centre acting as a catalyst for a wide field of general demand can be seen to advantage through another channel. The last decade of the nineteenth century saw irrigation come to southern Alberta. The initial movement to gain the necessary Dominion legislation⁴¹ was spearheaded by Calgary residents. As early as 1892, well before the movement gathered momentum, the Calgary Town Council passed a resolution endorsing any such memorial action to the Dominion government.⁴² Although much of the credit for pioneering this agitation has been attributed to William Pearce,⁴³ Dominion Superintendent of Lands and Mines, the fact remains that Pearce enjoyed the active support of many prominent local businessmen. In addition to organizing the first Irrigation Convention held in the West, these men were instrumental in establishing the Irrigation League.⁴⁴ As well as dispatching its delegates to various meetings throughout the area, the League extended its influence to outlying districts where it organized and addressed public gatherings of interested farmers.⁴⁵

The Calgary Irrigation Company was the first organization to take advantage of the North-West Irrigation Act passed in 1894. When government pressure forced William Pearce, the organizer of this company, to relinquish control in 1897,⁴⁶ ownership passed directly into the hands of two Calgary businessmen. Indeed opposition to the early monopolistic policies of the Calgary Irrigation Company had emanated directly from local sources. In 1894 the Dominion Government disallowed an ordinance passed by the North-West Assembly providing for the erection of irrigation municipalities with corporate functions.⁴⁷ This action had vitally affected farmers in the Springbank area who, having organized themselves into an Irrigation League, had intended to take advantage of the ordinance.⁴⁸ News of the disallowance, and of Pearce's possible influence in securing same, provoked a storm of protest in Calgary. The Springbank League found many spokesmen among Calgary Lawyers and businessmen.⁴⁹ So strong was this Calgary backing

⁴⁰ *Tribune*, Oct. 3, 1888; G. MACEWAN, "Early History of the Calgary Exhibition" (Pamphlet prepared by Calgary Exhibition Society [n. d.]), p. 9.

⁴¹ Essentially these provisions, incorporated in the North-West Irrigation Act of 1894, enabled the establishment of companies with authority to divert water.

⁴² *C.C.M.*, Nov. 18, 1892.

⁴³ Pearce, a crucial figure in Calgary's early history, was a permanent resident in town, where he possessed substantial vested interests.

⁴⁴ For information on Convention and League, see *C.C.M.*, Feb. 26, 1894; *Herald*, *Tribune*, March 7, 8, 9, 10, 1894; Glenbow, The Wesley Orr Papers, MS "Diary of Wesley Orr" (hereafter cited as *Orr Diary*), March 5, 8, 18, 21, 1894.

⁴⁵ *C.C.M.*, March 20, 1894; *Tribune*, Aug. 22, 1894; *Orr Diary*, April 4, 1894.

⁴⁶ Public reaction forced the Government's hand. Pearce, being a senior government official, was certainly in no position to assume the leadership of a private company whose business dealings impinged on the area of his official jurisdiction.

⁴⁷ *Tribune*, May 7, 1895.

⁴⁸ A. F. MITCHNER, "William Pearce, Father of Alberta Irrigation" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Alberta, 1966), p. 68.

⁴⁹ *Herald*, Feb. 26, 1895; MITCHNER, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

that even the powerful Pearce, staunch friend of government and Canadian Pacific Railway, was forced to yield and in the words of the *Herald* "an amicable compromise was effected".⁵⁰

Calgary's role in the irrigation movement points up two meaningful conclusions. The manifestation of organized effort on the part of locally centred political and economic pressure groups indicated a growing sense of urban self-determination. Furthermore, the divisiveness in the aftermath of the successful lobby emphasized the ability of a growing community to allow the need for group action to transcend, at least temporarily, individual and vested interests.

Railway promotion provided another avenue by which Calgary attempted to exert metropolitan influence. Between 1887 and 1895 no fewer than five railway charters were secured by local businessmen.⁵¹ For example, almost every town merchant of note was involved in securing a charter in 1889 to build a railroad to the border,⁵² while the Alberta Southern Railway Company with a capital stock of \$1 million and headquarters in Calgary was considered to have boundless prospects.⁵³ Local ambitions were quite clear. When constructed, these lines would not only give the town ready access to the coalfields of Rosebud and Anthracite, but also place Calgary "on the shortest route from San Francisco to Liverpool by 2,000 miles".⁵⁴ Although these charters failed to materialize and the cost of laying rails north and south of Calgary ultimately fell to the Canadian Pacific Railway, the period was marked by local vigor and confidence in the future of the town. Local entrepreneurs were continually probing the British capital market hoping to entice interest in their charters.⁵⁵ One Calgary lawyer brought a law-suit against the English firm of Praed and Lloyd for failing to honour its commitment regarding the construction of the Alberta and Great North-West Line. The *Tribune* remarked in 1889 that the mere issuance of a charter was sufficient to raise the price of land in Calgary.⁵⁶ Calgary entrepreneurs refused to believe that the world-wide depression of the 1890's could possibly thwart their ambitious railway plans, and thus the breaking of the economic clouds in 1896 saw an intensification of activity in railway schemes by individuals whose confidence had never really been dimmed.

Calgary acted as the voice of Territorial aspirations and consciously promoted diverse schemes designed to further the economic prosperity of

⁵⁰ *Herald*, March 5, 1895.

⁵¹ Chinook Railway Company (1887), Calgary Alberta and Montana Railway Company (1889), Red Deer Valley Railroad (1892), The Rocky Mountain Railroad and Coal Company (1891), Alberta Southern Railway Company (1894). For information see: Glenbow, E. A. LUCAS, "Articles on Calgary's History", fol. 2; *Statutes of Canada*, 52 vic. II, C. 51, 52; 54-55 vic. C 58.

⁵² Glenbow, City of Calgary Papers MSS (hereafter cited as *C.C.P.*), fol. 2.

⁵³ *Orr Diary*, March 1, 3, 22, April 17, 1894.

⁵⁴ *The Globe* (Toronto), April 2, 1895.

⁵⁵ *Orr Papers*, fols. 5, 8.

⁵⁶ *Tribune*, March 26, 1889.

its district and hinterland. When the British Government evinced interest in the possibility of establishing in Canada a Remount for the Imperial Cavalry, the Calgary Town Council was most active in presenting arguments to various political and military leaders upholding primacy of claim for the Calgary district.⁵⁷ Equally spirited were the efforts of Calgary-based organizations to have the Dominion Government's proposed sanatorium for consumptives located in the Calgary area. Promotional pamphlets, together with special copies of a Council resolution, were forwarded to many Canadian figures of political, economic and social prominence.⁵⁸ In fact, so ardent was this campaign that one enthusiast, in a burst of inspirational fervour, suggested the absence of poisonous reptiles as a buttressing argument.⁵⁹ The Agricultural Society and Town Council led the way in lobbying for the construction of an experimental farm in the Calgary district,⁶⁰ while in 1894 these two bodies officially committed the town to a grant of \$25,000 if the 1895 Territorial Fair was held in Calgary.⁶¹

Calgary's role as co-ordinator of general interest also manifested itself through political activity. The goals of the *North-West League* established in Calgary in 1885, were formulated clearly to promote the ambitions of the general district. Dominated by Calgary businessmen, this *League* pledged itself to agitate for representation for the Alberta district in the Dominion Parliament, local control over local affairs, local municipal options regarding liquor traffic, and lower pre-emption prices.⁶² By 1895 there was a *Provincial Rights Association* with its headquarters in Calgary. This body, like the *North-West League*, was active in disseminating information through the district extolling the advantages of provincial status for Alberta.⁶³

Calgary was quick to supply those essential services associated with a metropolitan centre. In 1886 the Imperial Bank of Commerce opened offices in Calgary⁶⁴ and within weeks had advanced the Town Council its first loan. By 1890 the Bank of Montreal had expended over \$50,000 in constructing its handsome stone building.⁶⁵ These two financial bodies were joined by at least two other private banks during this period, all of whom vied with each other for local business. Insurance Companies also entered the local scene in the 1890's with the opening of a branch office of the Equitable Life Insurance Company. In 1886 Calgary was the resident centre of a Supreme Court judge, and the town's first courthouse, erected in 1888, cost over \$40,000. Calgary lawyers were on hand to represent any litigant

⁵⁷ *C.C.M.*, May 2, 1893; *Herald*, Jan. 26, March 1, April 21, 1893; *Orr Diary*, April 4, 1893.

⁵⁸ See GLENBOW, *Calgary the Denver of Canada*. This was the official pamphlet produced by the Town Council promoting Calgary's claim. See also *C.C.M.*, April 20, Sept. 24, 1895; *Tribune*, April 30, July 9, 1895.

⁵⁹ *Calgary, The Denver of Canada*.

⁶⁰ *C.C.M.*, Jan. 30, 1892.

⁶¹ *C.C.M.*, July 10, 1894.

⁶² *Tribune*, Oct. 21, 1885, April 3, 1886.

⁶³ *Tribune*, April 5, 16, June 4, Nov. 16, 1895; *C.C.M.*, May 29, 1895.

⁶⁴ MCNEILL, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁶⁵ R. CUNIFFE, *Calgary-in-Sandstone* (Historical Society of Alberta, 1969), p. 12.

whether he be rancher, farmer or town dweller. Indeed judging by the plethora of lawyers in Calgary, it is not surprising that the North-West Territories easily led all other areas and provinces in Canada in its proportion of professional men to total population.⁶⁶

Early Calgary's industrial base reflected the needs of the district. The first commercial flour mill was opened in 1893, and in 1891 Calgary possessed the only moulding and planing mill, meat curing plant, awning and tent factory in the Alberta district. By the end of the period a brewery, tannery, cold storage works and pork packing plant were serving regional demands. The *Herald's* gleeful comment in 1892 is a good indication of the town's buoyant attitude. "No town at even double our population could boast the establishment of five entirely new and important industries in one year."⁶⁷

II. — URBANISM WITHIN CALGARY

Calgary always possessed a strong communal voice. Public meetings, delegations and petitions were numerous and provided a useful gauge of general sentiment. Possibly nothing illustrates more adequately the communal approach to problems than the incident which saw public pressure force the Federal Government to remove from duty an unpopular Stipendiary Magistrate.⁶⁸ High public feeling manifested itself through large indignation meetings, and it was remarked that the \$100 needed to dispatch the Mayor to Ottawa to lodge a formal town protest was raised with far greater alacrity than the town incorporation fee a year earlier.

The most volatile agent of public expression was the Town Council. Candidates for elected municipal posts were often chosen at a public meeting, and judging by the inaugural speeches of victorious mayors, the needs of the public at least tokenly synonymous with civic office.⁶⁹ Certainly Calgary's fire brigade was reputed to be one of the best in the country, while a town waterworks and sewerage system within seven years of incorporation revealed a strong sense of civic consciousness and responsibility. The appointment of a permanent Health Officer, the acquisition of the Bow River Islands from the Dominion Government for park purposes, and the maintenance and extension of a town cemetery were further examples of official concern for public expectations.

A reliable index of the town's commercial dynamism reflected itself in the continuing interest in real estate. There was no initial speculative boom and most land fell into the hands of locally based real estate agents, five of whom expended a total of \$200,000 in town lots in 1889.⁷⁰ Many people

⁶⁶ Computed from *Census of Canada, 1890-91*, Vol. IV, pp. 450-451.

⁶⁷ *Herald*, April 22, 1893.

⁶⁸ For information on the above, see M. L. FORAN, "The Calgary Town Council, 1884-1895: A Study of Local Government in a Frontier Environment" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Calgary, 1970), pp. 106-112.

⁶⁹ For good example see *Herald*, Jan. 25, 1894.

⁷⁰ Glenbow, J. G. FITZGERALD, "Calgary Business Directory, 1885"; *Tribune*, Dec. 11, 1889.

with excess funds channelled them into real estate, accounting in part for the rise of many original settlers to positions of relative prosperity. The names of many local merchants continually appear, random-like, on the land sale registers of the period,⁷¹ indicating the steady, somewhat pragmatic, but certainly not irrational economic temper of the community. By 1890 a block of land on Stephen Avenue which sold at \$100 in 1885 was worth \$5,000 with the value of lots around the town "keeping [pace] in proportion with the business centres".⁷² Possibly the whole general attitude was best summed up by Inspector A. R. Cuthbert of the North-West Mounted Police when he commented on the current penchant of his men towards real estate investment in Calgary.

Men who formerly placed their savings in the bank now invest them in town lots, there being many opportunities for successful investment in a place the size of Calgary.⁷³

The diversification of the town's work force was begun in these initial years. In 1885 half of Calgary's permanent buildings were purely retail establishments, and even the information supplied by a local business directory on the town's largest employer indicated that such employees were prospective farmers and ranchers.⁷⁴ Only three trades were represented in the town while the occupation "labourer" rarely appeared on the Collectors' Rolls for the years 1887-89.⁷⁵

The 1890's brought substantial changes. Immigration Agent T. Z. C. Miquelon reported 23 classes of skilled artisans in Calgary by 1891.⁷⁶ Church records reveal occupations like bar steward, salesman, clerk, plumber and labourer, appearing beside the traditional rancher, blacksmith, harness maker, etc.⁷⁷ The *Tribune* had begun using the term "working man" as early as 1888,⁷⁸ before the railway construction, and the opening of lands to agriculture created a viable though seasonal demand for unskilled labourers. The inevitable strike appeared when carpenters struck for higher wages in 1892.⁷⁹ Town industries were bonussed on the condition that they place men in permanent employ and apparently numbers were sufficiently numerous to warrant organized gatherings or "workmen's socials."⁸⁰

This period also witnessed the widening economic gap between the upper and lower echelons of society, which, combined with the emergence of social problems, can serve to emphasize the urban nature of early Calgary. Luxurious residences began to appear in what the *Tribune* referred to as

⁷¹ Glenbow, Records of the North-West Land Company, MSS. "Register of Town Lots, Deeds and Transfers executed by the C.P.R. Townsite Trustees, 1883-1903."

⁷² *Dominion Illustrated*, June 28, 1890.

⁷³ *C.S.P.*, No. 15 of 1893.

⁷⁴ Glenbow, G. R. ELLIOT, "Calgary, Alberta, Industries and Resources, 1885".

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*; *C.P.P.*, "Collector's Roll for the Town of Calgary, 1887-89".

⁷⁶ *C.S.P.*, No. 7 of 1892.

⁷⁷ Glenbow, Church of the Redeemer, "Baptisms, Marriages and Deaths, 1884-1891". Knox Presbyterian Church, "Papers and Records, 1884-1914" (on microfilm).

⁷⁸ *Tribune*, Sept. 14, 1888.

⁷⁹ *Tribune*, May 4, 1892.

⁸⁰ *Gillespie Diary*, May 7, 1894.

"the better district" of the town. Surrounded as they were by spacious gardener-tended lawns, these mansions costing upwards of \$6,000-\$10,000 were a continual source of pride to the town.⁸¹ Tickets to exclusive balls often cost the equivalent of three days pay for the average labourer.⁸² At least two-thirds of all town councillors during this period owned ranches or properties outside town limits and in 1889, when the average town assessment was in the vicinity of \$700, at least 50 individuals held property worth \$10,000 or more.⁸³ This exclusive group, dominated by merchants, professional men, ranchers and senior government officials, owned most of the large commercial blocks that were being erected by 1889, as well as holding controlling interests in such profit making organizations as the Rink Club, Athletic Association and Turf Club.

On the other hand there appeared to be more widespread poverty in the town than the authorities were prepared to admit. One employer remarked that "it was very difficult for some people in these days",⁸⁴ a statement given credence by the seasonal nature of work, and the possible presence of private debt holding.⁸⁵ Many people apparently were forced to face the long winter months with inadequate fuel supplies, while the local immigration hall became a refuge house in cold weather.⁸⁶ The depressed economic conditions which influenced the enquiry into civic finances in 1895 also finally elicited the official admission that the plight of the needy was greater than ever.⁸⁷ Even the press, which usually directed its recriminations against the perennial itinerants, admitted that the town had a permanent problem with its own destitute.⁸⁸

An examination of population statistics and wage rates tends to corroborate the above statements. According to the 1891 Census, Calgary possessed 12½ per cent of the total white population of the North-West Territories. Yet in the years 1889-1890, the town was attributed 30 per cent of all births and 50 per cent of marriages recorded in the Territories.⁸⁹ Church records reveal that the majority of these directly involved Calgary residents.⁹⁰ It would thus appear valid to assume that the town had a far more balanced proportion of women to men in an age bracket — 20 to 40 —

⁸¹ W. R. Hull's house cost over \$15,000; William Pearce's residence was described as the most luxurious in the West; plumbing in P. Turner Bone's house cost three times as much as the average dwelling; Senator J. A. Loughheed's mansion was so magnificent and ornate that the *Herald* gave weekly reports on its construction. These homes figured prominently in promotional magazines advertising the town.

⁸² Tickets ran to over \$5.00. Labourer's wage was \$1.75 per day.

⁸³ *C.C.P.*, "Collection Roll, 1889".

⁸⁴ Glenbow, T. STROM, "Reminiscences of the Eau Claire Lumber Company".

⁸⁵ For evidence of this debt holding see marginal comments in "Sewerage Time Sheet", Nov. 29, 1890, *C.C.P.*, fol. 22.

⁸⁶ STROM, *op. cit.*; *Orr Diary*, Feb. 19, 1894; *C.C.M.*, Feb. 19, 1889, Sept. 18, 1894.

⁸⁷ *C.C.M.*, Sept. 19, 1895.

⁸⁸ *Tribune*, Feb. 12, 1890; *Herald*, May 6, 1891.

⁸⁹ *Census of Canada, 1890-91, Vol. IV, p. 399; C.S.P., No. 3 of 1890.*

⁹⁰ See Church of Redeemer Records and Knox Presbyterian Church Records, *op. cit.*

which saw males outnumber females in total figures for the North-West Territories by a ratio of two to one.⁹¹ The town's per capita income was thus lower than in a typical frontier town, even though it could be argued such a wider diffusion of purchasing power had a beneficial effect by promoting a more uniform commercial growth.

Wages for the unskilled were quite low. For example, the top wage on the sewerage construction was less than \$50 per month.⁹² Skilled artisans could expect \$50-\$60 per working month.⁹³ Since most work was seasonal this would appear to place a sizeable percent of the population in an economic bracket lower than even the few municipal employees who earned between \$45-\$70 per month.⁹⁴ This accounts for the very keen competition for municipal positions, and when one considers the high remuneration paid by the Council for part-time professional service, the disparity is thrown into sharper relief.⁹⁵ Seen in this light the 46 applications for the one advertised teaching position with the School Board⁹⁶ are not so remarkable.

Along with the manifest symbols of urban growth were the inevitable social problems. Calgary had a sewerage system and waterworks within seven years of town incorporation. Electricity was available after 1887 and by the end of the period the town could boast its own hospital as well as many fine commercial buildings. Indeed well before 1895 the town had assumed the self-imposed soubriquet, "The Sandstone City". Yet prostitution and gambling flourished and the youthful crime rate was a source of constant concern.⁹⁷ Although violent crimes and barroom brawls were rare, petty thievery and vagrancy were common. The Church, as the traditional voice of social protest, began to give way to secular societies. Temperance organizations, women's charitable associations and the Young Men's Christian Association rose to pressure the local authorities into taking some degree of initiative in areas of moral and social concern.⁹⁸

III. — CALGARY'S SOCIAL CHARACTER

Calgary was never a frontier town in the sense that it delineated the advance of civilization. A strong legacy of Victorian propriety existed in Southern Alberta before the rails of the Canadian Pacific Railway brought urban life to the Bow River Valley. The ranching community strongly adhered to the social values of the British landed gentry, a class to which many had belonged before coming to Canada. These people looked to Calgary as the natural hub of their own life.⁹⁹ The almost exclusively

⁹¹ *Census of Canada, 1890-91, Vol. IV, p. 408.*

⁹² *C.C.P.*, "Sewerage Time Sheet", Nov. 29, 1890.

⁹³ *C.S.P.*, No. 7 of 1892.

⁹⁴ *C.C.P.*, "City of Calgary Pay Sheet", 1896; *Tribune*, Nov. 23, 1895.

⁹⁵ Health Officer, \$40 per month for one fifth of his time; Solicitor, \$60 per month for one quarter of his time according to *Tribune*, Nov. 23, 1895.

⁹⁶ *Herald*, March 16, 1892.

⁹⁷ *Tribune*, Nov. 15, 20, 1889, Aug. 10, 1892, Nov. 23, 1895.

⁹⁸ *C.C.M.*, Nov. 29, 1889, 1890.

⁹⁹ THOMAS, *op. cit.*, pp. 203-215.

Anglo-Saxon population of early Calgary held similar social ideals to those of the ranchers. One individual writing in Calgary's first Business Directory in 1885 thankfully referred to the fact that respect for the Sabbath coincided with the early arrival in the town of permanent merchants.¹⁰⁰ These leaders of Calgary's business community, generally staunch Methodists or Presbyterians, were determined in their efforts to have the town reflect the civilized standards of the day, even if it meant shunning "Chinamen" as inferiors, or dragging brothels out of town. L. G. Thomas sees the Calgary of this period as consciously striving to promote the image demanded of it by the powerful and conservative ranching society. "Calgary . . . was large enough to accommodate an influential group who had both social and economic reasons for nurturing an amiable relationship with the ranchers."¹⁰¹

The strong British flavour of Calgary's early society was clearly observable. The Mounted Police, many of whom were well-educated Englishmen,¹⁰² provided the town with displays of pomp and ceremony as well as that symbol of the aristocracy, a coterie of military officers. In addition to keeping law and order, the Mounted Police contributed to Calgary's social life through their cricket-team, band and annual ball. Formal balls in Calgary predated town incorporation and throughout the period these waltz-dominated affairs were frequent, expensive and often quite exclusive. By 1895 Calgary had staged its first locally produced opera which was described by one feminine enthusiast as "perfectly splendid".¹⁰³ Polo and lawn tennis were introduced in this period while baseball failed to threaten seriously the primacy of cricket. The English hunt, too, was a feature event. The *Herald* spoke of "ladies in their handsome toilets driving in carriages to the brightly coloured marquee where they could command a good view of the commencement of the hunt".¹⁰⁴ Civic and official functions were marked by a high degree of formality, and when Liberal leader Wilfrid Laurier visited Calgary in 1894 he was not only feted formally and diplomatically by the Conservative Town Council, but was presented with an incisive and erudite summation of Territorial grievances.¹⁰⁵

Social and economic organizations were numerous. Doctors, lawyers and merchants organized individual associations which attempted to exert some degree of control over the social and economic behaviour of their members. Religious and political organizations flourished, and in 1895 the town could boast literary, scientific, historical, dramatic and musical societies, shooting, tennis, bicycle, hunt, turf, and curling clubs, as well as hockey, cricket, baseball, soccer and lacrosse teams. It is doubtful that such organizations were loosely organized. Members of the executive were usually business and professional men, and it was the experience of larger bodies

¹⁰⁰ "Fitzgerald Directory, 1885".

¹⁰¹ THOMAS, *op. cit.*, p. 212

¹⁰² For information on N.W.M.P. in this respect see G. M. MACINNIS, *In the Shadow of the Rockies* (London: Rivingtons, 1930), pp. 329-330.

¹⁰³ Glenbow, T. ALLISON, "Diary and Personal Papers".

¹⁰⁴ *Herald*, Aug. 10, 1892.

¹⁰⁵ *Tribune*, Sept. 26, 1894.

such as the Board of Trade to contact established organizations for constitutions and notes of procedure.

Two major cultural forces were the masons and the Churches. The first masonic society was formed as early as 1883¹⁰⁶ and two years later elicited the comment that "the masons were running the town."¹⁰⁷ By 1890 there were at least five masonic orders in town whose strength was evidenced by high and exclusive memberships and at least two individuals with district and regional authority. These masonic orders were bastions of conservatism indulging in such pursuits as paper chases, old English dinners, elocution lectures and slide exhibitions of the Sudan War.¹⁰⁸ Even in the years of straitened finance and falling membership, one Lodge could not bring itself to relax discriminatory regulations against Catholics and Irishmen.¹⁰⁹ Their moral and social influence was clearly observable. Members who violated the moral code were severely disciplined, as witness the expulsion of one member from the United Roses Lodge for frequenting a town brothel.¹¹⁰ In areas of social concern the masons were quite active. In addition to furnishing relief to needy Englishmen, the masonic orders greatly aided in the movement to induce the civic authorities to undertake the construction of a general hospital. A visiting dignitary in 1891 aptly summed up what he thought was the chief function of the masons: "What is considered essential for the preservation of our institutions . . . should . . . be ascribed to by members of this Order."¹¹¹

The Church provided another powerful social influence in early Calgary. Present since the days when the town's only general store acted as both ballroom and chapel, the major denominations¹¹² were also quick to establish permanent churches. That most people attended church is revealed through the average Sunday congregations of over 300, while the Methodist Church collected over \$1,800 and recorded total receipts in excess of \$3,000 in 1891.¹¹³ The same Church could afford to pay its minister an annual salary of over \$1,000 as early as 1887.¹¹⁴ No less prosperous was the Anglican Church, which, with its hierarchical array of family pews and its weekly parade of uniformed Mounted Police, received the distinction of becoming a diocesan centre in 1888. Powerful executives provided the liaison between Church and community, exercising constant vigilance over

¹⁰⁶ Glenbow, The George Murdoch Papers MSS (on microfilm) Diary entry Sept. 19, 1883.

¹⁰⁷ Murdoch Papers. Part of a written defence by Murdoch on his own tenure of civic administration, 1884-1885.

¹⁰⁸ Glenbow, United Roses Lodge S.O.E.B.S., "Minute Book" (hereafter cited as "S.O.E.B.S. Minute Book"), Aug. 6, 1891, Feb. 22, 1892, Sept. 1, 1892, Dec. 21, 1893.

¹⁰⁹ "S.O.E.B.S. Minute Book", Oct. 5, 15, 1891.

¹¹⁰ "S.O.E.B.S. Minute Book", Feb. 25, March 17, 1892.

¹¹¹ "S.O.E.B.S. Minute Book", Jan. 21, 1891.

¹¹² Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian.

¹¹³ Glenbow, Central Methodist Church, "Minute Book 1883-1914" (on microfilm) (hereafter cited as "Methodist Church Minute Book").

¹¹⁴ "Methodist Church Minute Book", Annual Meeting, 1887.

congregation size and fervour, as well as the inspirational quality of the sermons.

Buttressed by local government and education systems that were closely aligned to Eastern Canadian practices, it is thus not surprising that the society of early Calgary was remarkably traditional. The presence of the frontier manifested itself more through unpaved streets and speculative zeal than it did through contempt for tradition and social ignorance. In the early twentieth century an English publisher referred to the Calgarian as "a true son of the British Empire . . . possessing a wide Imperial patriotism".¹¹⁵ Such superlatives contain more than just a hint of accuracy when applied to early Calgary.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing discussion has hinged around the efforts of a small community to co-ordinate regional aspirations and to provide leadership and initiative in promoting the economic growth of its hinterland. In this respect the view that Calgary was primarily the urban expression of cattle interests should be qualified. Although it is undeniable that Calgary was heavily dependent upon the cattle industry for its economic prosperity, any argument which suggests the synonymy of the two may be too simplistic. The directors of early civic policy were not cattlemen but merchants who readily understood that the key to future economic prosperity lay in furthering policies designed to develop the whole district. Agricultural growth and commercial expansion were seen as being equally important as stock raising in the realization of these goals.

The urban aspirations of early Calgarians led them to borrow substantial sums in order to provide themselves with the benefits associated with contemporary town life. Thus in contrast to towns and cities with earlier civic beginnings, Calgary demanded a central role for its pioneer Town Councils. Also the Council was the only body with the financial resources necessary to further promotional policies. Thus it is not surprising that for the most of the period Calgary's small population could not support a viable Board of Trade whose functions were assumed by the Town Council. The same was true for the Agricultural Society which was almost entirely dependent on the Town Council for survival. However, the expertise wielded by the Calgary Civic authorities predictably could not accommodate the demands made upon them by an urban oriented, albeit small, community. By World War I, Calgary, like many Western Canadian towns, found its municipal system in sad disarray. In the light of the preceding discussion it could be argued that the heavy pre-war population influx exacerbated rather than caused this municipal chaos.

Finally it could be projected that Calgary's small size imposed major financial limitations on its ability to duplicate certain social services and

¹¹⁵ S. L. BENSUSAN, Gen. Ed. *Twentieth Century Cities: Calgary* (London: Hodder and Stoughton [n.d.], pp. 6, 20.

institutions. Societies which needed little financial support flourished in early Calgary, whereas those which called for substantial expenditure had difficulty in maintaining themselves. Unlike the literary societies or bicycle clubs, private schools, the Young Men's Christian Association and a public library struggled for survival during this period. An extension of this argument would help explain the central role for those institutions such as the Masons and the Churches which were able to survive the financial barrenness of a frontier environment.

When Canada entered the Laurier era and Clifford Sifton's immigration policies began to realize the dream of a populated North-West Territories, Calgary was in a ready position to assume a primarily urban function. Yet the town's economic and commercial purposes were clearly defined by 1895. Rails, stretching in all four directions, were tangible evidence of the metropolitan role envisioned and encouraged by ambitious locals. The rapidly increasing municipal debt contrasted sharply with the slow population growth while the small manufacturing base provided overt manifestations of commercial confidence. Finally the presence, on the prairies by 1895, of a pro-British conservative and non-egalitarian society¹¹⁶ supplies at least qualitative Canadian support to Earl Pomeroy's statement that "the West of the nineteenth century was a copy of the East that it tried to be".¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ For elaboration of this non-egalitarian aspect see FORAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-47.

¹¹⁷ E. POMEROY, "Towards a Reorientation of Western History," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLI, No. 4 (March, 1955), p. 597.