Aboriginal and Colonial Geographies of the File Hills Farm Colony

by

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Abstract

Canadian government archives have primarily shaped scholars’ analysis of the File Hills farm colony on the Peepeekisis Reserve in south eastern Saskatchewan. While these colonial archives are valuable for research, they emphasise particular points in the government’s telling of the colony story. They focus on the construction, management, and intentions of the colony, but neglect the experiences and perspectives of Peepeekisis community members affected by the colony scheme. My thesis makes use of government archives, and is also based on Aboriginal oral histories about the colony and its long-term consequences. My central argument is that a more critical interpretation of archives and oral histories will enrich the historical and geographical record about the colony. I demonstrate how oral histories and archive documents can converge and diverge, but combining the two is particularly important to nuance the colony narrative. A critical viewing of texts and oral histories from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also reveals that colonialism in the prairie west was highly spatalised and grounded in “betterment” sciences that sought to control and discipline Aboriginal peoples through the manipulation of space, heredity, and environments. Betterment sciences shaped Indian Affairs policy and the farm colony is a remarkable example of how betterment was applied on the ground. Finally, oral histories offer powerful insight into Aboriginal identities that survive in spite of colonial constructs and strategies. Oral histories of Peepeekisis community members are particularly important for highlighting peoples’ everyday geographies and lives only hinted at in colonial archive documents. Part of what makes this thesis original is that it is based on collaborative research. I sought
Peepeekisis band permission to conduct this project, and Peepeekisis community members’ oral histories form an important part of this thesis and they have provided guidance on the documenting of their oral histories in this thesis.
Statement of Co-Authorship

Chapter 5, Blood and Controlled Environments, contains portions of a co-authored manuscript by C Drew Bednasek and Anne Marie Claire Godlewska.
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Telling a Story that Needs to be Told

Chapter 1: Introduction

Canadian government archives and academic texts tell a circumscribed story about the File Hills farm colony. According to these texts, Indian agent, William Morris Graham, founded the colony on the Peepeekisis Reserve in south eastern Saskatchewan in 1901. The primary objective of the colony was to prevent “regression” to Aboriginal cultures and ways of life after residential schooling. Graham, with the assistance of some local residential school principals, selected graduates from various schools to settle on Peepeekisis as colonists and live in Euro-American-style houses, cultivate crops, go to church, and live a “civilised” life, well away from reserve influences.\(^1\) Constantly watching graduates and enforcing discipline through rules forbidding many Aboriginal culture expressions were key. The construction of the colony was problematic: original members of Peepeekisis were displaced to a small land base along the northern side of the reserve, and rifts soon developed between colonists and original members. While the

\(^1\) In this thesis, I make three distinctions amongst people on the Peepeekisis Reserve. Anyone who either forcibly or willingly settled on the sub-divided portion of Peepeekisis I will refer to as a “colonist” or “colony member.” It is common today to hear people on Peepeekisis refer to colonists as “placements.” Anyone from a family residing on Peepeekisis before the colony I refer to as an “original member.” This term can be problematic as original membership is disputed in the community. Finally, and to avoid contributing to distinctions and divisions, I will frequently use the term “Peepeekisis community members” to refer to all residents of Peepeekisis.
narrative in government and academic texts appears simple, the story about the colony is not straightforward, nor has it been completely told.

My thesis is an attempt to write a more nuanced historical geography of the colony. I make three arguments in this thesis. My central argument is that a more critical analysis of archives and oral histories about the farm colony will enrich the historical and geographical record. While engaging with Aboriginal oral histories makes this thesis unique, the thesis also critically examines how stories in texts and oral histories converge, diverge, and correspond which is essential to enriching the historical record. Second, I argue that a critical interpretation of texts and oral histories demonstrates how colonialism in the prairie west during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries was highly spatialised and grounded in “betterment” sciences that sought to control and discipline Aboriginal peoples through the manipulation of space, environments, and heredity. The farm colony is an extraordinary example of how betterment sciences influenced and shaped Indian Affairs policy. Third, I argue that Aboriginal oral histories offer powerful insight into the human spirit that survives apart from colonial constructs and strategies. Oral histories can capture some of the experiences and perspectives of Aboriginal peoples only hinted at in archive documents.

2 I reluctantly use “Aboriginal peoples” as an umbrella term to describe the original inhabitants of North America, regardless of their nation or status. “Aboriginal peoples” thrusts yet another externally framed and validated collective term onto the original inhabitants of North America. “Indian,” “Indigenous,” or “First Nations” would probably be more accepted by the peoples of the prairie west. However, here, in 2009, in Canada, and in an Ontario university, the term “Aboriginal peoples” seems to be the most commonly accepted term amongst academics—but who knows for how long. Ideally, we would refer to people by their nation (e.g. Cree, Assiniboine, Dene, Sioux, and so on). I recognise this fault in my own work: I have not had enough time to fully explore archives to delineate the exact ethnicity or nation of everyone I discuss. The term “Indian” is occasionally used in this thesis in the contexts of status and to capture the historical use the term. And the term “First Nations” is frequently used interchangeably with “Aboriginal peoples.”
Why the File Hills Farm Colony?

The roots of my project go back to the first year of my PhD. I have a great interest in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century colonialism, and I was initially fascinated by the historical connection between South African apartheid and Canadian Indian residential schools and reserves and the exchange of knowledge about modelling spatial strategies between colonial countries: particularly the use of space to promote discipline, re-socialisation, and re-education. While searching for the sources documenting this connection, which no longer exist, I stumbled upon a small literature about model and utopian Aboriginal communities in North America. Some of the most notable utopian communities, described in the work of Jean Usher, Michael Ripmeester, and Paige Raibmon, were the work of religious organisations seeking to re-educate and re-socialise Aboriginal peoples through moral training.3 The literature on the File Hills farm colony was notably different: while Christian-influenced, it was a government venture initially concerned with making First Nations into self-sustaining individuals, free of government support, and integrated into Canadian society. I was intrigued by the harnessing of all of these energies, including the construction and administration, to the aim of “assimilation,”4 and the linking of assimilation to spatial organisation and discipline.

4 First Nations successfully resisted assimilation policies, and Aboriginal peoples have significantly contributed to, and helped shape, Canadian society, in both the historical and the contemporary contexts. When the word “assimilation” is used in this thesis, I am primarily referring to the Canadian government’s colonial mechanisms (reserves, residential schools, legislation, enfranchisement and so on) used to try to absorb Aboriginal peoples into the body politic in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Throughout the nineteenth century, assimilation policies were not consistent in Canada or anywhere else in the British
Most Canadians have never heard of the colony largely because there is a dearth of writing on the subject. The two most accessible sources of stories about the colony are Canadian government documents and academic texts. Both are largely one-sided colonial accounts of what happened on the colony. Canadian government archives and Annual Reports present the colony as a scheme to reduce government costs for Indian Affairs and document how the colony extended the assimilative grip of residential schools back to reserves once children completed school. Contemporary scholars, drawing from these problematic documents, have discussed the intentions behind the colony. Sarah Carter’s work on the colony is by far the most extensive, but her work along with that of John Milloy, J. R. Miller, and Jacqueline Gresko, fails to recognise and critique substantial contradictions in archive documents. They do not engage with Aboriginal oral histories or explore the long-term consequences of the colony for the Peepeekisis community. All of the scholars frame the colony as an isolated colonial Empire. During the 1830s and 1840s, liberal humanitarians argued persuasively that all peoples were “essentially similar” (Harris, 2002, 8). By the late 1840s and 1850s, after uprisings and mutinies in the empire caused concern and fear, and Darwinism began influencing “scientific” ideas about race, liberal humanitarianism faded. Policy then centred on force, not education, and racial categories hardened (Ibid, 8-12). British assimilation strategies undoubtedly influenced post-Confederation policies in Canada. Assimilation strategies imposed by the new Canadian government were arguably more brutal than British policy in Canada. The expansion of the residential school system and the signing of the Indian Act and treaties not only worked for assimilation through education and Christianisation, but legislated identity and spatial separation of Aboriginal peoples onto reserves. Late nineteenth and early twentieth century assimilation policy was clearly not aimed at making Aboriginal peoples equal to non-Aboriginals. Some individuals (e.g. Clifford Sifton) supported polices to make Aboriginal peoples “self-sufficient,” which would render them free of government financial assistance. Other individuals (e.g. Frank Oliver) considered assimilation policies a waste of money that, if successful, would make Aboriginal peoples too competitive in the labour market. In more recent times, the terms “social genocide” and “apartheid” have entered the discourse. These terms, although not used here, are significant because they do not diminish the brutality of assimilation. They might also more fully capture the desire of government officials at certain times: the complete disappearance of Aboriginal peoples.


6 Ibid.
scheme within Canadian history worthy of honourable mention in the historical record. In this dissertation I seek to: 1) create and disseminate a more nuanced understanding of the farm colony based on both Aboriginal and colonial narratives; and 2) advocate for more engagement by historical geographers with oral histories.

There are significant geographic dimensions to the File Hills colony story. The colony was a colonial strategy to draw a boundary between the “civilised” File Hills colonists and the rest of the Aboriginal population. It involved a colonial imagination linking spatial control to re-education and re-socialisation. Geographers, with an interest in colonialism, have been influenced by postcolonial theory over the past three decades. This literature has placed the emphasis of analysis on what Chris Philo has described as a “preoccupation with immaterial cultural processes, with the constitution of intersubjective meaning systems, with the play of identity politics through the less-than-tangible, often-fleeting spaces of texts, signs, symbols, psyches, desires, fears and imaginings.” While this type of analysis can be helpful, I can sympathise with criticism that argues for more emphasis on the “on-the-ground-workings of colonialism” and the “material consequences” and “continued relationships” of colonialism. Postcolonial theory, as Jane Jacobs argued, is grounded in difference, and its theoretical underpinnings did not easily link to the “specific, concrete and local conditions of everyday life.” I do ultimately see the material and immaterial consequences of colonialism as equally important and inseparable, but the “specific” the “concrete” and the “local conditions of

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8 Catherine Nash, 2002.
everyday life” have not received sufficient attention. In the case of the farm colony, more attention needs to be placed on the actual affects and effects of the colony, and on the very real consequences for First Nations.

Engaging Aboriginal oral histories has the power to link ideas and on the ground experience in powerful and new ways. As a geographer, I see that putting-foot-to-ground and engaging with colonised peoples, with a strong sense of their past as they see it, is the most effective way to understand how the “material” and the “immaterial” link. I have a deep suspicion of colonial documents, and the fetishising of them, but that does not mean they are irrelevant and should be ignored. As Thomas Richards has argued, archive documents of the late nineteenth century, while full of fantasises and fiction, are particularly valuable in research for showing how empire is “united not by force but by information.” Although this “information” is skewed to one perspective, it paints a detailed picture of the mind and imagination of colonisers. That said, engaging with Aboriginal oral histories is a more responsible methodology. All efforts have been made to make this thesis both ethical and collaborative. I asked the Peepeekisis Chief and band council for permission to conduct this project, and Peepeekisis community members have been actively involved in the documenting of their own oral histories. Working closely with Peepeekisis community members meant that this thesis is not a distant study: I could not have completed this study without the direct collaboration of the generous people of Peepeekisis. Engaging with oral histories also reveals the impacts of colonialism and colonised people’s perspectives and experiences of colonialism. In my dissertation, oral

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10 Thomas Richards, The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire, 1993, 10.
11 Working closely with a group can bring up many judgment issues. Some personal information and potentially hurtful remarks made about other community members during the course of personal interviews do not appear in these pages. This omission is a choice and the consequence of my collaborative and consultative methodology.
histories bring to bear on historical geography a far larger and more diverse selection of
narratives; specifically the experiences, perspectives, and histories that Peepeekesis
community members preserve in their stories. These stories will not provide a simple
“truth” or an exact history, because neither exists, or, at any rate, is accessible to us.

How I Tell the Story

My thesis is divided in seven substantive chapters and a conclusion. Chapter 2
contains a literature review and a discussion of my methodology. In this chapter, I focus
on the limitations and strengths of engaging with postcolonial theory and Aboriginal oral
histories. I contend that oral histories are particularly important for addressing some of
the weaknesses in postcolonial theory, especially in giving colonised peoples a voice in
their own experiences and histories. My methodology also discusses current trends in
historical geography research and the possibility of opening the field more to oral
histories. I also discuss the steps I took in starting my project and carrying it out. Chapter
3 is a contextual chapter about the colonisation of the prairie west. I draw primarily from
secondary sources about pre-contact histories of Aboriginal peoples, the introduction of
diseases, treaty-singing, and the policies behind residential schools and on-reserve
agricultural programs. I show that the colonisation of the prairie west was all about land,
space and place. From the signing of treaties, to the building of the railroad and the
“populating” of the prairie west by homesteaders, to the construction of the residential
school and reserve systems, the annexation of land and the spatial confinement and
segregation of the Aboriginal peoples from settler society was calculated and
geographical. Chapter 4 centres on Canadian government archives about the construction
and administration of the farm colony. This chapter picks apart the problematic paper trail in the archive documents and argues that the countless contradictions, re-telling of stories, ethical infringements, and editing of documents raises much suspicion about their reliability and credibility in the narrative of the colony. Chapter 5, which contains portions of a co-authored published manuscript, argues that betterment schemes, largely shaped by pseudo-sciences, such as eugenics and eugenics, and moral purity movements, significantly influenced Indian Affairs policy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.  

12 Principally drawing from American ethnographer David Mandelbaum’s fieldnotes on the Peepeekisis Reserve, oral histories of Peepeekisis community members, and critical reading of archive documents, I show: 1) that the selection of residential school graduates for the colony rested on a blood quantum system with preference for students who looked non-Aboriginal or who had some sort of non-Aboriginal lineage; and 2) the scheme used space to control and alter behaviour. Eugenics-like and eugenics-like thinking shaped the construction and administration of the colony. Chapter 6, which contains part of a forthcoming published manuscript, focuses specifically on Aboriginal oral histories about the colony with a focus on two themes: 1) Oral stories about the brutality of the colony: many of these narratives focus on Graham’s actions and colonial mechanisms that strictly controlled band members. 2) Stories about everyday life on Peepeekisis.  

13 Of great importance are the places and people that form the heart of community members’ stories. What is most important about these oral histories is that people of the Peepeekisis resisted colonial mechanisms and their lives were not subsumed by colonialism. Chapter 7 examines community members’ collective memory about the

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12 C Drew Bednasek and Anne M. C. Godlewska, “The Influence of Betterment Discourses on Canadian Aboriginal Peoples in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries,” forthcoming 2009.
colony. The chapter largely focuses on a current effort by some community members to create a curriculum for the Peepeekisis Reserve school. I argue that the curriculum is an example of the community coming to grips with internal colonisation, and I document its efforts to move forward with a greater knowledge of its past and its potential for the future.

I am not so naïve to believe that I can tell the whole story of the File Hills farm colony, but my thesis is a small attempt at telling a story that needs to be told. This project does not seek to elucidate and explain current politics on the Peepeekisis Reserve, or what steps might be taken to resolve contemporary issues generated by the colony experiment. I only briefly discuss the history of the Peepeekisis band prior to the introduction of the colony. Both are important potential research projects. Finally, while I cannot represent all that happened on the colony, I think the story told here compellingly opens the historical and geographical record of the File Hills farm colony.
Re-placing and Re-positioning Colonial Geographies

Chapter 2: Literature Review

But if the aim is to understand colonialism rather than the working of the imperial mind, then it would be seem essential to investigate the sites where colonialism was actually practiced. Its effects were displayed there. The strategies and tactics on which it relied were actualized there. There, in the detail of colonial disposessions and repossessions, the relative weight of different agents of colonial power may begin to be assessed.

(Cole Harris, “How Did Colonialism Dispossess? Comments from an Edge of Empire,” 2004, 166)

The truth about stories is that that’s all we are.

(Thomas King, The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative, 2003, 2)

This chapter, a review of relevant literatures, also intends to ask questions and challenge current theories and methodologies within historical geography. Recent debates within the field have examined the analytical relevance of the colonial imagination compared to the “on-the-ground workings of colonialism.”¹ Postcolonial theory, highlighting the importance of the colonial imagination, has shaped much scholarship in the social sciences and humanities. The way in which postcolonial theory critiques immaterial expressions and strategies of colonialism has profoundly influenced geographers.² Thus historical geographers have considered the role of the colonial imagination in city planning, exploration, the shaping of governmental and educational

¹ This term is used in Cole Harris, “How Did Colonialism Dispossess? Comments from an Edge of Empire,” 2004.
institutions in the Western world, and so on. But relying solely on the colonial imagination is problematic. Demand is increasing for: 1) greater emphasis on the “material consequences” and “continued relationships” of colonialism; and 2) engagement with colonised peoples’ perspectives and experiences of colonialism in their research. Some geographers, historians, and anthropologists are seeking to materialise their research by attempting to understand the actual effects of colonialism on colonised peoples. While acknowledging that material and immaterial forms of colonialism are equally important and inseparable, I argue that scholars need to pay more attention to the realities of colonialism and its long-term consequences.

Working with colonised people is an effective method in grounding colonial studies, helping to decipher the diverse impacts of colonialism, while balancing and enriching historical and geographical records. Within studies involving Aboriginal peoples, engaging with oral histories provides vivid details of colonialism and broadens the narrative to include the perspectives, experiences, geographies, and histories of colonised peoples. Aboriginal oral histories cannot provide simple “truth” or exact

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history any more than colonial documents do, but they can assist in constructing a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of historical events.

This chapter is organised in four sections. First, I review literatures that emphasise the connection between colonial imagination and spatial organisation. Second, I consider literatures that seek to materialise colonial studies by questioning scholars’ reliance on the analysis of colonial imagination. Third, I look at the significance of Aboriginal oral histories in societies and their potential to balance and enrich histories and geographies. Finally, in summarising the methodology used in this thesis, I discuss my engagement with colonial imagination in archive documents and Aboriginal oral histories in fieldwork interviews.

The Colonial Imagination and Spatial Organisation

The colonial imagination has profoundly shaped colonial and postcolonial studies over the past three decades. Influenced by Edward Said’s Orientalism and Cultural and Imperialism, many scholars have directed their attention to intangible expressions of colonialism, such as textual analysis, language, and representations of imperial thinking. While recognising the ground workings of colonialism, the use of military might in the acquisition and accumulation of land and resources and domination of “inferior” races inhabiting that land, Said argued that the success of colonialism and imperialism, resides in subtle practices of assimilation and the manipulation of knowledge, ideas, forms, images, and imaginings.\(^5\) Most importantly, he recognised the fundamental significance

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of geography in colonial and imperial endeavour: colonialism, Said contended, is a “struggle over geography.”

In addition to Said, Michel Foucault’s and Timothy Mitchell’s works on discipline, surveillance, and education, have highlighted the use of space in colonial endeavours. Colonial and postcolonial scholars regularly cite Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, attracted to his ideas on the subtle mechanisms of monitoring and disciplining the body to behave in specific ways in specific places. Timothy Mitchell’s *Colonising Egypt* demonstrated how the English occupation of Egypt was not only a struggle over the physical and resource geography of the country, but also attempted to alter Egyptians’ experience and use of places. Egypt’s colonisation, Mitchell argued, linked spatial order to personal discipline. With education at the core of its strategy, the colonial government sought to mould disciplined citizens who would, within the colonisers’ political association, use particular places at particular times. Beyond the transmission of information and political orientation, education became a tool to reshape the Egyptian body into a colonial subject with particular habits, tastes, and use of space.

The colonial imagination has greatly influenced some geographers interested in Aboriginal studies. Matthew Hannah explored how United States reservations contributed to assimilation by spatially restricting First Nations in making them sedentary. Hannah argued that the U.S. government established the reservation system “not only [as] an attractive ideology of individualism based on private property, but also as a coercive

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6 Ibid.
9 Ibid, 75-76.
system of behavioral restriction, a system of social control.”¹¹ Cole Harris’ *Making Native Space* also considered how reserves functioned to distinguish First Nations from settler society. Harris argued that British Columbia’s reserves not only restricted the movement of First Nations peoples and distinguished their space through mapping, naming, and numbering, but they also constituted Euro-American spatial organisation, which often profoundly undermined Aboriginal socio-spatial logic.¹² The B.C. government deliberately positioned First Nations on many small reserves, rather than a few larger ones, thereby diminishing the potential for military-style attacks on white settlements, placing them closer to industrial markets (thus creating a cheap labour source), and strategically removing Aboriginal peoples from the path of capitalist development. Like residential schools and missions, reserves were strictly regulated. In many cases, the government restricted First Nations to traditional land that included only their villages, gravesites, fishing sites, and cultivated fields limiting Aboriginals’ competition for available resources and forcing them into wage labour or poverty.¹³ The government strategy of relinquishing traditional areas, sometimes not extensive, to First Nations, was not only a gesture of appeasement, but aimed at promoting social consistency, as reserves—especially small reserves—permitted the government constant surveillance.

**The Colonial Imagination and Intimate Spaces of Colonialism**

Recent analysis by scholars interested in the link between spatial order and personal discipline has focused on intimate scales. Ann Laura Stoler’s persuasive work

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¹¹ Ibid, 414.
¹³ Ibid, 268.
on intimate geographies has argued that scholars of colonialism, familiar with structures of power (especially the classificatory language around race and biology), are insufficiently focused on how these categories worked on the ground.\textsuperscript{14} Colonisers sought to produce new “structures of feeling” in the hearts and minds of the colonised by disciplining bodies. Paige Raibmon has also noted how colonialism worked on intimate scales to control and transform individuals. During the late nineteenth century, the colonial construction of domestic space on the Northwest Coast equated “civilised” space with “civilised” lifestyles within Aboriginal homes.\textsuperscript{15} The imposition of Euro-American Victorian standards of domesticity to control behaviour in this most intimate space was designed not only to alter First Nations’ interaction within a “civilised” domestic arrangement, but also to “civilise” their behaviour in the public sphere. Jean Barman has argued that the government invaded the privacy of the home to separate women from the world, impose Victorian/Christian notions of gender roles, and desexualise everyday Aboriginal life.\textsuperscript{16} Single family homes, Barman suggested, were a domestic arrangement designed to prevent multiple families living under one roof and engaging in “naughty deeds.”\textsuperscript{17} Similarly, Mark Francis noted that Victorian colonialism took a materialist approach in linking assimilation to the adoption of European material goods: in lacking material wealth, Aboriginals lacked “civilisation.”\textsuperscript{18}

The intimacy of colonialism goes far beyond the domestic, into the realms of the biological and environmental. Many scholars have pointed out the significant influence

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{17} Ibid, 258-259.
\end{footnotes}
on academic and societal circles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of
“sciences,” such as Darwinism and Neo-Lamarckism. These sciences provided a
theoretical framework for the hierarchical ordering of human beings and linked efficiency
and intelligence with physical environment. Geographers, and scholars from many other
disciplines, predisposed to the intellectual climate of the period, readily applied these
theories to their thinking. The discipline of geography distinguished itself in Anglo
academic institutions by applying ideas of Darwinism and Neo-Lamarckism to justify
and expand colonialism. Contemporary scholars have noted how geographers of the late
nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Ellen Semple, Ellsworth Huntington,
Halford Mackinder, and Griffith Taylor, introduced the environmental determinist
theories that sparked an interest in biological racism.19

Colonial and postcolonial scholars have also paid attention to expressions of
colonialism “on” as well as “in” colonised bodies.20 The literature regularly considers the
training, sculpting, disciplining, and monitoring of the body. Foucault’s work on the
Mettray colony shows how networked systems, which included medicine, education,
psychology, and public assistance, achieved both supervision and assessment,21 designed
to normalise bodies, rendering them useful and docile. The actual condition (mental and
physical) of bodies was the central focus of the network of medicine, education,
psychology, and public assistance. According to Mary Ellen Kelm, the Aboriginal body
was an object of scientific inquiry open to inspection, diagnosis, and treatment that

19 In particular, see Brian Hudson, “The New Geography and the New Imperialism: 1870-1918,”
September 1977; Richard Peet, “The Social Origins of Environmental Determinism,” 1985; David N.
Livingstone. The Geographical Tradition: Episodes in the History of a Contested Enterprise, 1992, and
“Climate’s Moral Economy: Science, Race and Place in Post-Darwinian British and American Geography,”
1994; Geoffrey J. Martin and Preston E. James, All Possible Worlds: A History of Geographical Ideas,
1993.
21 Michel Foucault, 1977, 306.
offered both the advancement of science and social improvement. Aboriginal peoples’ bodies, health, and interactions, as well as conflicts in gender and race, became the site of a struggle between perceptions of modernity and the primitive. Medical narratives, Kelm argued, linked social medicine and the “Indian problem.” The involvement of medical professionals was not a benevolent or humanitarian aspect of imperialist ideology: “In the colonies, the doctor is an integral part of colonization, of domination, of exploitation . . . we must not be surprised to find that doctors and professors of medicine are leaders of colonialist movements.” Medical doctors enacted colonialism at the scale of the body: obtaining information, standardising relationships, examining and improving the body, and extending the occupier’s hold through reinforcing colonial power.

**Grounding Colonial Geographies**

The work of Said, Foucault and Mitchell, unarguably important for understanding colonial geographies, effectively illustrates dispossession through othering, naming, and spatialising. As Derek Gregory argued, Said’s work is largely concerned with understanding European time-space inscriptions, and both Said and Foucault overlook gendered strategies of dispossession and largely fail to note non-European agency. Colonised places are portrayed as impenetrable, totalising and antihumanist. Gregory also indicated that Mitchell’s work is largely concerned with understanding European time-

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22 Mary Ellen Kelm, “Diagnosing the Discursive Indian: Medicine, Gender, and the ‘Dying Race,’” 2005, 373.
23 Ibid, 372.
24 Franz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 1965, 134
25 Ibid, 121-122 and 126-128
27 Ibid, 175.
28 Derek Gregory, 1994, 175-177.
space inscriptions and that he did not examine gendered strategies of dispossession. I would argue that is highly flawed. Mitchell’s opening chapter considered Egyptians’ perspectives of the World Exhibition. Moreover, his enframing theory examined women and their marginalisation in the colonisation of Egypt. Said’s ideas about geography and spatial theory, Audrey Kobayashi has also contended, are not critical and developed enough to move beyond understanding how distance constructs narratives of the Other. She argues that racialisation and domination depend on the spatiality of the relationship between the Occident and the Orient.

Literatures on intimate geographies are equally problematic. Ann Laura Stoler illustrates how the real and imaginary are intricately linked. Her work on Dutch colonialism notes that the colonial archive is filled with proposals, non-implemented plans, brief experiments, and unsuccessful projects. She argues that these colonial schemes were not examples of achievement, but “blueprints of distress,” and the failure to put plans into practice caused “administrative anxiety.” Stoler suggests that the archives were in fact an epistemological site—a collection of intentions sometimes made “real” by implementation, sometimes remaining part of the colonial imagination. While Stoler’s work moves us away from viewing colonialism as impenetrable and totalising, it still concentrates on colonial power and strategies.

34 Ibid: 158.
Within geography, some scholars are increasingly directing their attention to material expressions of colonialism and the everyday lives of colonised peoples. Jane Jacobs, for example, argued that postcolonial theory is grounded in difference, and its theoretical underpinnings showed scant understanding of the everyday lives and conditions of colonised people. Specifically within historical geography, recent discussion compares the significance of “on-the-ground workings of colonialism” with the less tangible forces of colonialism typically examined in postcolonial literature. While geographers have favoured research projects that seek to understand the Western imperial mind and its attempts to map, survey, and classify the non-Western world, Cole Harris has argued that while understanding the complexities of the imperial mind is not exceptionally useful, knowing how colonial powers operated and how effective they were is crucial for evaluating colonialism’s geographies. Harris affirmed that to move beyond the partial truths of colonial discourse we need to study the site of colonialism—its effects and dispossessions. For Harris, understanding the ground workings of colonialism is vital, as the colonial discourse stated and supported in the metropole only became partial truth on the ground.

For Aboriginal peoples in North America, it is impossible to separate strategies of real and imaginary colonialism from everyday lives. Colonial archives can only hint at the effects of colonialism. What did Aboriginal peoples think of the colonialism they endured? How did they react to dispossession? Did colonialism actually consume their

37 See Cole Harris, 2004; Alan Lester, Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth Century South Africa and Britain, 2001; Daniel Clayton, Islands of Truth: The Imperial Fashioning of Vancouver Island, 2000.  
38 Cole Harris, 2004, 166.
lives? How did they resist colonialism? Oral histories offer us testimony to reinterpret perspectives and nuance the historical and geographical understanding of colonialism.

**Aboriginal Oral Histories**

Demand to engage with Aboriginal peoples in research is increasing. Aboriginal scholars such as Peter d’Errico, Winona Stevenson, Vine Deloria Jr, and Devon Mihesuah have argued that colonial history and the postcolonial present for Aboriginal peoples do not parallel the experiences of other colonised peoples and cannot be framed in the same context. Some geographers are working to decolonise research and make it more collaborative. Jay Johnson and Brian Murton have suggested that the concept of place offers a “common ground” from which contemporary Aboriginal perspectives can address colonial concepts of nature. Renee Pualani has outlined an approach to Aboriginal methodologies that allows Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars to contribute to Indigenous knowledge in a respectful manner. Engaging with Aboriginal perspectives in research requires understanding the complexities of value systems and personalities within Aboriginal communities. Scholars need to be cautious when applying metanarratives that simplify Aboriginal peoples’ diverse contexts and experiences.

Engaging with oral histories is one way for non-Aboriginal scholars to collaborate with Aboriginals, but the method is not without its critics. Winona Stevenson argues that

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42 Ibid. Also see Anne Godlewska, Jackie Moore, and C Drew Bednasek, “Cultivating Ignorance of Aboriginal Realities” (forthcoming) for ways on decolonising the high school curricula.
re-telling by non-Aboriginals could result in distorting or mutilating Aboriginal stories.\textsuperscript{44}

For Stevenson, “Who gets to tell the stories?” is personal. The dispossession of Aboriginal peoples from their land, many years of racism, and unwillingness by colonial governments to settle land claims makes it personal.\textsuperscript{45} Lenore Keeshig-Tobias argues that stories are not just for entertainment; they are influential and express some of the most “intimate perceptions, relationships and attitudes of a people. Stories show how a people, a culture, thinks. Such wonderful offerings are seldom reproduced by outsiders.”\textsuperscript{46} A poorly told story can further marginalise Aboriginal peoples.\textsuperscript{47}

Other scholars have criticised the validity of oral histories as a methodology for historical inquiry, questioning the accuracy of people’s memories, social or subjective biases, lack of statistical data, and the challenge to traditional forms of history.\textsuperscript{48} Toby Morantz has argued that the blending of Western history and Aboriginal oral history is impossible: the historical tradition of each conceptualises and remembers history in ways that, when combined, provide limited historical understanding.\textsuperscript{49} Morantz does acknowledge the validity of comparing accounts about a specific event involving local peoples and a larger colonial society.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, 73.
\textsuperscript{49} Toby Morantz, “Plunder or Harmony?: On Merging European and Native Views of Early Contact, 2001, 63. Morantz believes that “cultural expertise” (52) and opposing “objectives” (55) are two major reasons why Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal history cannot be written as one. I cannot accept these arguments as she seems to portray the writing of history as a one-sided endeavor. Critical histories take various narratives into account—regardless of how neatly they do or do not fit into a chronology or grand narrative.
\textsuperscript{50} Toby Morantz noted Joanne Rappaport’s \textit{Cumbe Reborn: An Andean Ethnography of History} (1994) and Richard Prince’s \textit{First-Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People} (1983) as two successful studies that used oral history and archives to examine specific events.
Combining Aboriginal oral history and Western history is problematic but not impossible. Oral history can reveal intricate connections and contradictions between reality, myth, and ideology. Listening to oral stories in the spirit in which they are told can add to historical understandings not available in documents.\textsuperscript{51} I do not accept Morantz’s contention that the memories of people from oral traditions are incommensurable with those of written traditions. Her central argument fossilises Western history and collective memory in linear time rather than place. Aboriginal oral history is described as a process conveying life lessons, changing as it is passed down and occasionally dropped if it does not serve the needs of the society.\textsuperscript{52} There may be some truth to these characterisations but arguably they exaggerate incompatibility because they are based on caricatures.\textsuperscript{53} Although Western history is preserved in written texts, it is the continuing task of critical historians to reinterpret the work of others and excavate past wrongs. And Aboriginal oral histories are not entirely lesson-based and free from references to actual dates.\textsuperscript{54} As Deirdre Keenan argues, a problem exists with conceptualising people as outside or inside, especially when we “share overlapping histories.”\textsuperscript{55} The argument that cultural conditioning prevents Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples from speaking about each others’ history is poorly conceived.

Stories are fundamentally important to all societies, and the ways different societies remember knowledge and construct narratives is varied. Maurice Halbwachs has argued that although collective memory is socially constructed, it is individuals within a

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Toby Morantz, 2001, 56.
\textsuperscript{54} See the Peepeekisis First Nation land claim document (2004) as one example that remembers dates and is compatible with Western history.
group who remember.\textsuperscript{56} Paul Connerton has maintained that acts of transfer, bodily practices, and commemorative ceremonies are most important in preserving memories amongst individuals and societies.\textsuperscript{57} Adding to the discussion of the significance of narratives for individuals and amongst communities, Julie Cruikshank has argued that narratives provide a structure for experiencing the material world and that “local stories intersect with larger social, historical, and political processes.”\textsuperscript{58} Her work on the Yukon shows how stories told by First Nations provided order and continuity in making important connections in a quickly changing world.\textsuperscript{59} She delineates the differences between oral tradition and oral history, terms that have shifting definitions but are often conflated.\textsuperscript{60} Oral tradition, she points out, “can be viewed as a coherent, open-ended system for constructing and transmitting knowledge,” providing evidence about the past while demonstrating the social construction of the present. \textsuperscript{61} Conversely, oral histories tend to follow two different paths. The first relates to social history and explains “the complexities of daily life and the contradictions inherent in relations of power.” The second concentrates on the construction of narratives and how these influence and anchor memory amongst social groups.\textsuperscript{62} The social, geographical, political and historical significance of stories and memory within groups and individual experience cannot be overestimated.

Collective and individual memories and oral stories are susceptible to fragmentation, “recycling,” and redefinition. Halbwachs argues that maintaining

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{56} Introduction by Lewis A. Coser in Maurice Halbwachs, \textit{On Collective Memory}, 1992, 22.
  \item \textsuperscript{57} Paul Connerton, \textit{How Societies Remember}, 1989, 39-40.
  \item \textsuperscript{58} Julie Cruikshank, \textit{The Social Life of Stories: Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory}, 1998, xii.
  \item \textsuperscript{59} Ibid, xiii.
  \item \textsuperscript{60} Julie Cruikshank, Notes and Comments: Oral Tradition and Oral History: Reviewing Some Issues, 1994, 403.
  \item \textsuperscript{61} Ibid, 408.
  \item \textsuperscript{62} Ibid, 408.
\end{itemize}
memories requires a social framework; once a society or social structure is disrupted, memory becomes more individualised, possibly fragmented. But as Stephen Bann points out, fragments of histories provoke valuable debate around whole and partial truths, and make us question whether fragments allow us to identify a whole. Brian Neville and Johanne Villeneuve argue that remembering and forgetting create a “recycling” process that discards irrelevancies, while preserving parts instrumental to transformation and mediation, thus sifting “value and void.” Similarly, oral traditions undergo continual analysis, evaluation and refinement. David Cohen has noted how less powerful clans in Uganda keep oral traditions “viable, active, debated, discussed, and revised in daily activities, gestures, and speech.” In passing oral traditions from generation to generation, the promulgation of intelligence and knowledge is more “inclusive” than “exclusive.” While most oral societies accept that the elders know and remember more, their authority is not absolute, and knowledge is circulated and discussed amongst all community members, ensuring that oral remembrance remains a dynamic and effective way of confronting past, current, and future circumstances.

Many scholars have recognised the advantages of engaging with oral histories. Interviews based on working human relationships can transform the practice of history by allowing the interviewee, as “historian” and source, to recall the past through personal interpretation, revealing “particular aspects of historical experience which tend to be missing from other sources, such as personal relations, domestic work or family life, and

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66 Julie Cruickshank, 1994, 411.
67 Ibid
68 Ibid
they have resonated with the subjective or personal meanings of lived experience.”

Perks and Thomson point out that the main goal of certain oral history projects has been to empower individuals and social groups by emphasising the significance of the research process as much as the historical findings of their remembering and reinterpreting of the past. Anthropologist Cruikshank sees stories as “windows on the way the past is constructed and discussed in different contexts, from the perspectives of actors enmeshed in culturally distinct networks of social relationships.” Ethnohistorians have recognised oral history as a powerful and legitimate way to uncover the experiences and perspectives of peoples lost in traditional Eurocentric forms of historical inquiry. Paul Thompson argues that, while oral histories can be employed to transform the content and purpose of history, their inclusion is not necessarily the radical “instrument for change” that scares off many manuscript-based scholars who claim oral history is “groundless.” Rather, scholars should view oral history as a methodology that can “open up new areas of inquiry” and “change the focus of history itself.”

Geographers, acknowledging that place and stories are intricately linked and complex, have applied oral history methodologies to consider this integral connection.

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70 Ibid.
71 Julie Cruikshank, 1992, 22.
72 For example, see James Axtell, “Ethnohistory: An Historian’s Viewpoint,” 1979. Also see James T. Carson’s “Ethnogeography and the Native American Past” (2002) for a tight synopsis on key works in the discipline of ethnohistory.
“We are,” as Anne Godlewska argued, “the story species.”⁷⁵ Places may act as “memory devices” for the stories we tell to make sense of our histories embedded in place.⁷⁶ Involvement in society generates, valorises and, locates memories⁷⁷, although how one person experiences a place and interprets a story may contradict or reinvent another’s perception of the same.

Who tells stories, what stories are remembered, in what forum stories were told, how the stories still exist, the places people talk about, and the life history of stories is what makes historical culture dynamic.⁷⁸ Cultural memory is linked to power,⁷⁹ and story tellers, whose stories might exist “between ideology, myth and reality,”⁸⁰ wield much influence within society. William Cronon observed that people tell stories “with each other and against each other in order to speak to each other.”⁸¹ Narratives, whether written or oral, inevitably change over time: focus and detail alter, moral purpose shifts.⁸² With their dynamic relationship to past and present, collective and individual, they are susceptible to personal experience, forgetting, manipulation, appropriation, dormancy and revival.⁸³ Oral history, Laura Cameron argues, is not for retelling the past “the way it really was” but is a technique for gathering historical and rhetorical power.⁸⁴

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⁷⁷ Maurice Halbwachs in Linda McDowell, “Culture Memory, Gender and Age: Young Latvian Women's Narrative Memories of War-Time Europe, 1944-1947,” 2004, 705; also see Keith Basso’s “Wisdom Sits in Place: Notes on a Western Apache Landscape” (1996) for an interesting study on Aboriginal naming and place meaning.
⁷⁸ Laura Cameron, 1997, 18.
⁸¹ William Cronon, 1992, 1368 and 1374.
⁸⁴ Laura Cameron, 1997, 16.
Geographers, well acquainted with place literatures, can often engage with oral histories more effectively than other scholars. Andrews, Kearns, Kontos and Wilson contend that although oral historians have discussed geographical themes and specific peoples and places, they treat place in a “superficial” and “euclidian” way as a research frame rather than an “active part.” They argue that oral historians have not considered how theorisation of place relates to place identity, memory, and everyday geographies.85 Within geography, the contested and complex concept of place is “something more than a spatial referent.”86 Geographers, such as John Agnew and Tim Cresswell have highlighted the social characteristics of place as the space in which we form social relations.87

Methodology

Fieldwork is a key aspect to the discipline of geography. Within historical geography, a great deal of fieldwork has traditionally consisted of archival research. For Cole Harris, archives not only provided a research methodology but a way of seeing: “My relationship with the documentary record, rather than with the visible, surviving landscape, has been at the heart of my research life. I have encountered in the documents most traces of the places, landscapes, and human-environment relations that I have sought to understand.”88 There is no standardised approach to archival analysis in historical geography although there a number of guideposts; for instance, Robert Mayhew has argued that printed texts should be contextualised in period and place. Examining the

85 Andrews, Kearns, Kontos and Wilson in Mark Riley and David Harvey, 2007, 348
87 John Agnew, Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society, 1987; and Tim Cresswell, 1996, 3.
“addressee” and “addressee” allows us to look beyond historical copy to examine historical patterns and processes of texts.89 Bronwen Edwards and David Gilbert have pointed out that scholars need to consider the intentions, politics, fantasies, imaginations, and processes that go into city planning.90 Archival fieldwork should, as Gerry Kearns argued, take theory for a walk.91 For Kearns, theory shapes and orders our understanding of places, but a place has to be known before applying theory.92 Theory adds new questions to archives and the opportunity to explore their political nature.93

However wide-ranging historical geographers’ engagement with documentary sources, oral histories present a rich source for complementary fieldwork. On the one hand, oral histories offer possibilities for locating “hidden” histories.94 While uncovering hidden histories in oral history research raises much criticism from those who question its reliability and interviewees’ personal biases, it is still a valid aspect of the field.95 The “political commitment” of geographers has been a prime motivation for exposing hidden histories.96 The notion that parts of a history are concealed, unexplored, or exclude people who do not belong to the ruling or majority class makes the field an “active archive.”97 On the other hand, Kearns argued that engaging with oral histories by getting into the field can provide historical geographers with opportunities to situate theory,

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92 Ibid.
95 Passerini in Mark Riley and David Harvey, 2007, 346.
96 Ibid.
archives, and imaginations in actual places.98 Interviewing people in the field also forms working relationships with communities that contribute to shaping the project.

The purpose of comparing written documents and oral history is to create an enriched history that examines different forms of social analysis, cultural significance, interpretation, and collective memory.99 Aboriginal and Colonial Geographies of the File Hills Farm Colony engages with both archive documents and Aboriginal oral histories. Cole Harris’ Resettlement of British Columbia, contrary to Morantz’s argument, demonstrates the combining of Aboriginal oral histories and documents to construct nuanced and representative histories.100

My fieldwork in archive collections sought to understand the colonial narrative of the colony, particularly how the colonial imagination influenced its construction. Archive collections at the Saskatchewan Archives Board in Regina, the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, the First Nations University in Regina and Saskatoon, the National Archives of Canada in Ottawa, and personal archive collections of interviewees directed my understanding of the colonial narrative and its reworking in different places and contexts. I asked specific questions when reading documents: Who was involved? What were their intentions? What did they think of the peoples they tried to manage? What places are significant in the archive documents? The investigatory work of archives required that I make lists of key words with places, people, and events. Since the academic literature on the colony is scant, attempting to “recreate” some historical representation of the colony had to be a part of my project.

99 Ibid.
Despite the importance of large archive collections, such as the National Archives of Canada and the Glenbow Museum, I found personal archive collections more useful because band members possessed most archive documents, in addition to personal items such as pictures, recorded oral histories, and texts written by relatives. Approximately eighty percent of the official government documents I located were in the homes of Peepeekisis community members who have worked on land claims, or have a personal interest in their own history. This housing of documents by community members presents a fascinating geography in itself, revealing complex memories of the colony and tensions about colonial history and bolstering Deirdre Keenan’s argument that conceptualising people as outside or inside is problematic because we “share overlapping histories.”\textsuperscript{101}

Along with government documents, numerous band members preserved personal written texts, stories about people and places on the colony. The First Nations University in Regina has a large collection of Eleanor Brass’s papers donated to the library by her niece, Patricia Deiter. Eleanor, one of the first babies born on the colony, wrote many essays about the colony and political matters concerning First Nations. Philip and Campbell Brass, like many community members who keep oral histories on videotape and audio cassette, possessed a number of taped interviews that their father, Oliver Brass, conducted in the early 1990s.

I made all provisions to make my field research collaborative and ethical. The fieldwork portion of my project underwent a full review by the Queen’s University General Research Ethics Board. I sent letters of information and consent forms to interviewees advising that their participation was completely voluntary and their stories could be erased if they chose (See appendix 1). Before interviewing anyone, the

Peepeekisis Chief, Beverly Bellegarde, and the Band Council wished to meet with me and listen to what my project entailed. They wanted to ensure that I would not hurt anyone and that I would return my work to the community once completed. I willingly agreed.

Over the course of a year, I conducted approximately twenty interviews in Regina, Saskatoon, and on the Peepeekisis and Star Blanket Reserves. My initial interviews arose from suggestions made by the Chief and Council who provided me with a list of approximately twenty people, who were both original members of the reserves and colonists. From some of these initial interviews, I used a methodology known as snowballing, asking interviewees if they knew others I could talk to, and although many people offered names already familiar to me, this assisted in learning names of younger people who knew stories passed on by their parents or grandparents. Constance Deiter’s book *From Our Mothers’ Arms* provided me with useful insight into interview etiquette. She suggested that cloth or tobacco were considered culturally appropriate gifts on Peepeekisis,¹⁰² but I discovered that this was not always the case, because although some interviewees regarded cigarettes as an appropriate gift, others had no interest in tobacco, and indicated that such a gesture was impractical. Whether or not to offer cigarettes became a delicate decision I had to make during interviews. Although most interviews were conducted in community members’ homes, some people chose to talk outside or at their places of work. One interviewee drove me all over Peepeekisis to show me significant places and the homes of other people I should interview. Interviews lasted from one and a half hours to four hours, and I had the opportunity to interview some

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people more than once. I am greatly indebted to the people who spent many hours with me, shared their stories, gave me input on research questions, fed me meals, and went out of their way to help me.

Even though I am not First Nations, no one refused to talk to me and no one said that I should not be doing this project. In fact, my position as an outsider may have helped my field research. Geographers, such as Beverley Mullings, Andrew Herod, and Kevin Ward and Martin Jones, have brought up interesting points regarding insider/outsider research capabilities.103 Herod argues that it is mistaken to assume that “insiders” elicit “truer” information because the relationship between interviewee and interviewer is a form of knowledge production that can be shaped by various factors.104 Mullings argues that gender, race, age, and class influence the researcher’s approach to and interpretation of interviews as well as which information interviewees choose to share with researchers.105 Although some people asked how I would protect Indigenous knowledge, why I was interested in the colony, or where I had heard about it, I believe my clear position as researcher who wanted to engage with First Nations’ perspectives and experiences about the colony gained me trust amongst community members. As a result of this trust community members shared personal stories and archive collections with me. Ultimately, I experienced only helpfulness, kindness, support, and interest in my work.

My interviews are best described as non-structured discussions. I had a few major

104 Andrew Herod, 1999, 314.
topics I wanted to discuss with interviewees, but the reason for me being there—to talk about the colony—meant that I actually had to do very little questioning or interview “guiding.” After initial introductions and an explanation of the nature of my research, many people just began talking about what they knew. During my interviews, I listened to a history of the colony from many viewpoints of original members and colonists. I asked questions such as: Who has told stories? Why are stories told? How have these stories been passed? What is the history of their stories? Which places and people have importance in these stories and why? I recorded oral histories in note form, as interviewees preferred that I take notes rather than tape record our conversations.

Working with community members presented many opportunities impossible to research conducted at a distance. Apart from my interviews, people gave me legal documents from land claim affidavits and the Trelenburg (1954) and McFadden (1956) hearings. I was also able make copies of the taped interviews that Oliver Brass conducted in the early 1990s. I am greatly indebted to Oliver for doing these interviews before he passed away, and his sons, Philip and Campbell, for allowing me to listen to them (these interviews will be discussed in greater depth in chapter 7).

My experiences of working with an Aboriginal community were rewarding. For many non-First Nations scholars, the reserve is a “don’t-go-there-place” left to the imagination and theorisation. Naturally, there are obstacles to working with any community. Everyday realities such as work schedules and illnesses require flexibility, understanding, patience, and a relaxed attitude. Researchers need to be aware of the social and economic circumstances of any community in which they work. On many reserves in Canada, rates of illness are higher than in the general population (especially
among Elders), people need to travel great distances for groceries and other services, to haul clean water to their homes and have septic tanks pumped. Many suffer great pain when talking about their lives in residential schools, making this work on reserves more sensitive than most. Within anthropology, Margery Wolf argued, the goal has been to improve Westerners’ understandings of other communities, and researchers are now becoming more spontaneous and self-aware when conducting research. I hope that by using archives and oral histories in a complementary way in my work, I will enrich the history of the colony beyond colonial archive narratives. I intend this project to work towards re-placing and re-positioning historical geography by challenging commonly used theoretical and methodological frameworks. More importantly, I hope that the people of the Peepeekisis reserve consider my project meaningful and collaborative.

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107 Before interviewing Peepeekisis band members, my project went through an ethics review at Queen’s University to ensure it would not harm anyone, and I spoke to the Chief the Band Council about interviewing people who may have experienced abuse at residential schools. The band provided me with phone numbers of counselors on the reserve who could come for support. While interviewees regularly talked about their residential school experiences, I never had to call a counselor.
Colonising the Prairies

Chapter 3

“the colonization of the fertile lands of the Saskatchewan, the Assiniboine, and the Red River districts; the development of the mineral wealth which abounds in the region of the North-west; and the extension of commercial intercourse through the British possessions in America from Atlantic to the Pacific . . .”

(Sir John A. Macdonald, November 1867 in Garrett Wilson, 2007)

“. . .The Queen came and borrowed or leased this land. It was only six inches in depth. She came and gave money, it’s not that I’m buying this land she said I’m just leasing it from you, everything below that is yours and now we have no way about that, we don’t own it ourselves, the whitemen is taking everything that is below the six inches they leased [in] . . . Indian country. They’re taking our moose away on us. That is the way they are treating us in our country.”


The narrative of Canada largely excludes Aboriginal peoples.¹ Before the arrival of Europeans on the North American continent in 1492, to the establishment and expansion of the fur trade in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteen centuries, to the appropriation of Aboriginal lands through treaty-making, First Nations have continuously been involved, and have greatly added to, the social and cultural development of Canada. Although some Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars have considered First Nations’ contribution to the narrative of Canada, much work still needs to be done.²

² See: Arthur J. Ray, Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Hunters, Trappers and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay, 1974 and I Have Lived Here Since the World Began: An Illustrated
This chapter focuses on the narrative of Aboriginal peoples in the Canadian prairie west in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many scholars have written about the imaginings and triumphs of the Canadian nation as it sought to spread ideology and control over vast amounts of western land and its original inhabitants. Here, I want to consider Aboriginal peoples in the historical and geographical narrative of Canada, and examine how they contributed to the making of the prairie west and how they were influenced by its colonisation.

I have organised this chapter into five sections. First, I provide some context about the early impacts of colonisation. I will discuss the introduction of trade and the effects of disease epidemics. Next, I explain settler expansion into the prairie west, and how this “peopling” of the prairies was a calculated strategy by the Canadian government to expand the country across the continent. Third, I focus on the colonisation of the prairie west in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I highlight the treaty-making process and explain how the government exploited treaty obligations. Fourth, I examine how the construction of reserves and the residential school system hinged on geography. I argue that the colonisation of the prairie west was highly geographical and involved a manipulation and control of space to re-educate and re-socialise Aboriginal

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peoples. Finally, I discuss failed Canadian government attempts to re-educate and re-socialise First Nations largely due to Aboriginal resistance and poor government policy.

**Historical Geographies of Contact**

While it is not in the scope of my project to provide a substantial pre- and initial contact geography or history of Aboriginal peoples in North America, significant points need to be discussed. Many scholars, including anthropologists, archaeologists, and geneticists, believe that Aboriginal peoples came to North America during the Ice Ages, when sea levels lowered and created the Bering land bridge between Siberia and Alaska. Geologists have identified several times during the Pleistocene age when land bridges were present. Geneticists contend that there is ample evidence supporting the view that people migrated from south and central Asia to North America in multiple ways (with the first occurring approximately 30,000 years ago). Skeletal remains confirm that Aboriginal peoples were diffused across the entire North American continent as early as 11,500 years ago. Many Aboriginal peoples believe that Turtle Island (or North America) is the land of their origin. Different Aboriginal groups have varying narratives which explain how the earth was created and how their ancestors came to live on it. In Cree, for example, the creation of earth and all its contents are the result of energy from a female force known as O-ma-ma (Mother Earth). Many Aboriginal oral traditions of creation and ancestry demonstrate a vivid relationship to the land. Natural environments,

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8 Ibid.
Arthur Ray stated, provide many Aboriginal peoples with symbols, metaphors, and narratives that express philosophical and spiritual beliefs.\(^9\) The land serves as a history book for many Aboriginal narratives.\(^10\) Regardless of what argument is accepted about creation and existence, Aboriginal peoples have indisputably inhabited North America for tens of thousands of years before Europeans landed in 1492 and dramatically altered traditional ways of life.

Trade fuelled Europeans’ interests in North America. Demand in European markets for fish and then exclusive furs ignited an extensive trade network on the continent. The Hudson Bay Company and The North West Company built numerous posts that went as far northwest as Lake Athabasca and Peace River country.\(^11\) Arthur Ray described the growth of the fur trade as “the most pervasive force influencing the economic and political development of Western Canada between 1660 and 1870.”\(^12\) Moreover, this force was a “partnership for the exploitation of resources.”\(^13\) In this partnership, until sometime in the nineteenth century, depending on the region, both sides depended on the fur trade and each other.\(^14\) Over time, Aboriginal peoples grew reliant upon, and demanded, European goods, such as blankets, cloth, knives, files, hatchets, kettles, chisels, firearms, alcohol, and tobacco. The European market, likewise, demanded North American furs. Trade greatly affected the lives of people in both the Old and the New World.

\(^10\) Ibid.
\(^11\) Ibid, 78 and 104.
\(^12\) Arthur Ray, 1974, xi.
\(^13\) Ibid.
\(^14\) Ibid: 91. Changing relationships between the U.S. and the British, negotiations over the U.S./Canadian border, changing demographics both north and south of the border, changes in demand for furs in Europe and the U.S., and new transportation systems made it easier for European and Euro-American trappers to go directly to the source of furs and have less interaction with First Nations (in particular, see Arthur Ray 1974 and 1990).
Partnerships between First Nations and Europeans also brought tremendous social change. Sexual relationships between French traders and Aboriginal women were very significant. In Huron communities, having multiple sex partners was considered normal. Partnerships did not commence until the birth of a child. French traders, who spent much time isolated, naturally took to Aboriginal women. Colonial authorities were alarmed by this fraternising, as it threatened us/Them based trade relations, and potentially the religious and hierarchical order of the colonial communities and took action to stop it. In 1668, for example, authorities from the North West Company forbade bachelors from participating in everyday activities, such as trading, fishing, or hunting, with Aboriginal groups. These activities, as Jennifer Brown pointed out, were typically facilitated by Aboriginal women, which in turn led to many marriages with traders. Furthermore, marriages led to children with mixed Aboriginal and European lineage. The results of the fur trade were not just marked in economics, but in the actual biology of people.

As early as the 1600s, European traders and explorers made their way into the prairie west and ignited a host of positive changes in many Aboriginal communities. Trade again formed the heart of interaction between Aboriginal peoples and Europeans. The introduction of the horse and the gun were particularly beneficial to Aboriginal peoples. Explorer Henry Kelsey reported that First Nations were using guns, which made their way up through the southern plains, to hunt buffalo as early as the 1690s on the

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16 Ibid, 4
17 Ibid. In particular, see chapters three and four for Brown’s discussion about “mixed blood” children and racial categorisation. Brown discusses how “mixed blood” or “Métis” lineage is fixed to the fur trade. Étienne Rivard’s “Colonial Cartography of Canadian Margins: Cultural Encounters and Idea of the Métissage” (2008: 46), which also links Métis lineage to the fur trade, argues that Métis geographies created “new cultural spaces between Indian and European societies [and] spaces conducive to Métis ethnogenesis.”
Saskatchewan River.\textsuperscript{18} The horse, which facilitated hunting, also significantly expanded land trade routes. New technologies improved livelihoods and helped satisfy demand by European traders and markets for items such as buffalo robes and pemmican.

Trade also triggered many social changes on the prairies. Between 1750 and 1880, trade incited new heights and complexities in prairie First Nations cultural expressions. The Cree experienced significant social change as a result of trade.\textsuperscript{19} After 1690, a large number of Woodland Cree moved south into the prairies. This southern expansion, which not only established new alliances between certain prairie nations, ended their reliance on canoes and placed them into trade networks that depended on horses and a seemingly exhaustive supply of buffalo for food and trade.\textsuperscript{20}

By the 1870s, the fur trade began to decline rapidly with devastating impact on First Nations. The decline of the trading market—especially in the prairie west—occurred faster than anyone had estimated, and caused many prairie west First Nations to become dependent on economic assistance.\textsuperscript{21} Great demand for buffalo hides in the U.S. witnessed a disappearance of the animal west of the Rocky Mountains by the 1840s and on the Great Plains by the 1870s.\textsuperscript{22} The Canadian market, which had reoriented itself to serve U.S. demand, saw buffalo herds almost disappear from the Canadian prairies by the late 1870s. Many Aboriginal groups, who depended on the buffalo for trade and food, began to starve (more on this below). Moreover, between the late 1870s and the eve of World War I, high demand for beaver pelts in North America and Europe caused a sharp

\textsuperscript{18} Olive Patricia Dickason, 2002, 170
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, 176-177.
\textsuperscript{20} John S. Milloy, \textit{The Plains Cree: Trade, Diplomacy and War, 1790 to 1870}, 1988, xv. Also see David Mandelbaum, \textit{The Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical, and Comparative Study}, 1979, 15-49.
decline in the beaver population. Fewer beavers pelt may have slightly increased their trading value, but also further marginalised First Nations by forcing them to hunt for less valuable pelts, such as the muskrat. The volatility of the fur trade market between the 1870s and World War I undercut Aboriginal peoples’ livelihood and made them more reliant on government assistance.  

European presence in North America also had devastating results. The introduction of new diseases is the most apparent. Estimating the extent of disease impact on indigenous populations after contact is neither unproblematic nor precise. Scholars and explorers with an interest in indigenous demography have a wide range of pre-contact population estimates. In the sixteenth century, Spanish priest, Bartolomé de las Casas stated that North America was “full of people” up to the year 1549. He estimated that 40 million indigenous people died from new diseases by 1560. In the 1930s and 1940s, scholars, such as Alfred Kroeber, Angle Rosenblat, and Julian Steward, deemed this number much too high and estimated that only 8 to 15 million Aboriginal peoples lived in the Americas prior to contact. Modern scholars, such as Woodrow Borah, Sherburne Cook, N. David Cook, Henry Dobyns, George Lovell, and Carl Sauer, have substantially raised the figure to between 40 and 100 million people in the Americas. Decreasing the scope of analysis, William Denevan suggested in 1992 that the New World alone held 53.9 million people. The variation of numbers is largely due to

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23 Ibid, 57-58.  
25 Ibid. Regional and band estimations are just as problematic and varied. In New England, estimates range between 72,000 and 144,000. Estimates of Mohawk and Virginia Algonquin populations range from 13,700 to 17,000 and 14,300 to 22,300 respectively. In the Canadian Maritime Provinces, estimates range for the Micmac population are between 12,000 and 50,000 (Denevan, 1992, xx).  
Historically, lower estimates further justified the colonisation of North America. Terra nullius (or “empty land) needed to be established on paper to justify colonial expansion in North America. Recently, estimates have been used to support or dispute land claims. Lower estimates, for example, can help refute Aboriginal rights and title to land. Likewise, higher estimates can assist in demonstrating a continued occupation and use of land, thereby establishing Aboriginal rights and title to land. Regardless of exact population figures and mortality rates, most modern scholars largely agree that epidemics ravaged many communities.

Pinpointing the exact number of deaths attributed to the introduction of disease is equally complicated. Throughout North America, numerous disease outbreaks occurred between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. David E. Stannard has argued that the introduction of diseases into North America, along with violence, murder, and starvation, instigated a holocaust of Aboriginal peoples. Stannard noted that some Latin America countries experienced death rates between 82 and 99 per cent. Alfred W. Crosby described what occurred in colonised temperate countries (e.g. Canada, the United States, New Zealand, and Australia) as a “demographic takeover.” Diseases in most temperate countries did not kill substantial numbers of Europeans as they did in tropical Africa, and European immigrants, who had higher birth rates, “swarmed” North

29 Maureen K. Lux, Medicine That Walks: Disease, Medicine, and Canadian Plains Native People, 1880-1940, 2001,14-19. For example: 1616-19, the 1630s, the 1640s, 1658, 1664-6, 1675, 1689-90 1781-2, 1837-8, 1869.
31 Ibid, 86.
America and overpowered and out-populated a decimated Aboriginal population. On the Canadian prairies, it is known that nine significant epidemics occurred between 1774 and 1839. Epidemics of measles, whooping cough, influenza, typhoid, syphilis, tuberculosis, and smallpox most frequently struck Aboriginal communities that had not been exposed to these Old World diseases. Horses, cattle, rats, mice, weeds, and pathogens were effective carriers of numerous organisms and microorganisms to the “New World.” Cole Harris’, who studied smallpox in British Columbia, found that Aboriginal oral histories from the eighteenth century describe the disease as completely wiping out villages. The ruthlessness of such epidemics had many Aboriginal peoples in the eighteenth century believing that smallpox had eyes and could sense who was afraid. The full impact of disease on Aboriginal peoples is difficult to quantify or imagine.

Where epidemics occurred, their immediate and long-term impact on Aboriginal populations was neither linear nor predictable. Along the upper Missouri River, documents show that a smallpox epidemic in 1781 devastated the Assiniboine and Cree people. Over the next thirty years, the Assiniboine not only recovered their prior population but saw it quadruple; the Cree, on the other hand, had not recovered to pre-epidemic numbers by 1822. Through the nine epidemics that swept through the prairies

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33 Ibid, 50-1.
37 Jody Decker, Smallpox Along the Frontier of the Plains Borderlands at the Turn of the Twentieth Century, 2007, 100. Many people would huddle around the sick person and smoke from the same pipe. This lead to even more deaths.
between 1780 and 1840, no Aboriginal population continuously declined. Moreover, between 1823 and 1863, the southern Cree population in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta expanded by ten thousand due to immigration and natural increase. After 1840, smallpox epidemics took larger tolls on Aboriginal groups. In 1869, for example, a smallpox epidemic ravaged the Blackfoot and Cree. Vaccinations, which guarded many Cree from the 1837-1838 smallpox epidemic were not available. Estimates put the Blackfoot mortality rate between 12 and 16 per cent. Cree rates were much higher. Maureen Lux believes the rate to be 40 per cent, which is greater than late nineteenth century estimates that put the mortality rate between 10 and 17 per cent. The range of numbers regarding pre-contact population and the mortality rate demonstrate the contentious nature of the topic.

While reoccurring epidemics clearly affected Aboriginal peoples, it did not eliminate their existence—culturally or physically. As Lux argued, many prairies First Nations retained strong political and social organisations that ensured their people successfully confronted the future. Moreover, improved health care in the twentieth century helped to prevent major episodes of smallpox outbreaks. While the threat of disease epidemics did not dissipate altogether, more substantial challenges confronted Aboriginal peoples in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The intensified colonisation of western Canada through Confederation, treaty-making, Euro-American immigration, and the sudden disappearance of the buffalo from the prairies, not only

39 Ibid, 16.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid, 17. Lux argues that between 600 and 800 Blackfeet died out of a nation of less than 5,000. The DIA estimated their population to be 9,200 in 1871.
43 See Judy Decker, 2007, 100-105. Smallpox outbreaks still occurred but not on the same scale.
44 See John Milloy, 1999. Tuberculosis in the residential school system killed many children from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century.
marked a new relationship with the colonial Canadian government, but initiated additional hardships that Aboriginal peoples had to confront.

**Imagining and Colonising the Prairie West**

Canadian Confederation in 1867 and the subsequent colonisation of the prairie west involved a great feat of imagination. In the United States, generations of scholars, writers, film makers, and members of the general public fetishised and romanticised the idea of the west. The “west,” as Frederick Jackson Turner’s well-known frontier thesis (1893) argued, was a “source of American character” and “a major social force” that sought to tame and “civilise” the wilderness and Aboriginal peoples as the country expanded. American history, Turner argued, is largely a story of colonising western land: “The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development.” The Canadian west also sparked this same image of spirit and character. Between 1856 and 1860, Doug Owram noted how Ontario expansionists wanted to make the west into a promised land. But imaginations of the Canadian west were also countered by realities. As George F.G. Stanley argued, the historical narrative of western Canada, while containing elements of “independence, self-reliance, [and] willingness to strike out on a new path,” was situated in the context of survival and adaptation to the environment. Likewise, Cecilia Danysk argued that the prairie west was a story of contradictions, which involved realities and

46 Ibid, 2-3.
48 Doug Owram in Gerald Friesen, “Recent Historical Writing on the Prairie West,” 1984, 7.
potentials. Pioneers saw great potential in the land waiting to be cultivated, but many
found the realities too difficult to settle and cultivate crops.50

The Canadian west was far more than imaginative. Politically, expansion
westward served to calm fears about American appropriation. The new Canadian
government purchased Rupert’s Land in 1869 and the North-Western Territory in 1870
from the Hudson’s Bay Company. But real concern surfaced in 1866 when James Wickes
Taylor introduced a bill in the United States House of Representatives that would cross
the 49th parallel and annex a swath of land from the Red River to the Saskatchewan
Valley.51 Sir John A. Macdonald was so keen on expansion that it was a central focus of
his party platform in 1867: “[W]e must . . . lay our hand on British Columbia and the
Pacific Ocean . . . ‘From the Atlantic to the Pacific’ must be the cry in British North
America as much as it ever has been in the United States.”52 Expanding westward also
involved nation-building. As Harold Innis argued, “Western Canada has paid for the
development of Canadian nationality.”53 Extending colonialism westward ensured that
the prairies were not lost to the U.S., and the construction of the trans-continental railroad
between 1881 and 1885 appeased the British Columbia government to join the
Confederation.54 The creation of “Canada” hinged on the vast swath of land between
Ontario and British Columbia.

The construction of the trans-continental was fundamental to populating the
prairie west with Euro-American settlers. Its construction turned an imagined

50 Cecilia Danysk, “‘A Bachelor’s Paradise’: Homesteaders, Hired Hands, and the Construction of
colonisation into a reality. Although the last spike was driven into the railroad in 1885, it did not immediately result in Euro-Americans and Europeans populating the prairie west. Initially, the Canadian government used the Dominion Land Act (1872) to attract adult men by providing them with 160 acres. Men needed to prove that they had ten dollars, and they were required to bring forty acres under cultivation and to construct a building or two within three years of settling the land. This scheme, although more enticing than the U.S. deal which offered less land, did not flourish. For one thing, getting to the prairie west was extremely difficult. Homesteaders either had to endure a gruelling journey by wagon and boat in Canada, or they had to go into the U.S. and travel by train as far west as possible and then travel north by wagon. In the Dakota Territory, for example, the population increased from 2,576 in 1850 to 12,887 in 1870, and to 133,147 in 1880. In the entire North-West Territories growth was sluggish: 1,000 in 1870 to 6,974 in 1881, and to 50,000 in 1891.55 The inhospitable climate of the prairie west was largely to blame. Thousands of homesteaders fled Canada and went south or quit farming after realising how difficult it was to make a living.56 This situation was soon to change as new farm technology, better economic conditions, the closing of the American west, and a new immigration policy under the Liberals ignited immigration and colonisation in the prairie west.

The rate at which the prairie west was settled by non-Aboriginal homesteaders in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is astonishing. Between 1896 and 1914 nearly three million people immigrated to Canada. Approximately thirty per cent of those

55 Ibid, 187.
people purchased homesteads in the prairie west. The engineer of this immense immigration plan was Minister of the Interior, Clifford Sifton, who aggressively recruited people from western and eastern Europe. The Canadian government had over one million pieces of literature printed, and it placed agents in Europe (especially Britain) and the United States to attract prospective immigrants. “Populating” the prairies not only resulted in homestead farms, but the railroad fuelled the growth of urban centres. Moose Jaw, Regina, Medicine Hat, Calgary, and Maple Creek, which were either Aboriginal traditional sites or small villages, became major urban centres. The Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) saw the number of passengers it carried increase nearly five times between 1896 and 1914, with much of this growth due to increased ridership in western Canada. The Canadian National Railways (CNR) was also a significant carrier of passengers to the west between 1918 and 1961. Both the CPR and the CNR, Brian Osborne and Susan Wurtele argue, need to be recognised for their role in nation-building activities of Canada. In 1925, both the CPR and the CNR pressed the Canadian government to have a larger role in the processing and transfer of immigrants. The CPR

58 David J. Hall, “Clifford Sifton: Immigration and Settlement Policy, 1896-1905 1984, 289-290; also see Lewis H. Thomas, “A History of Agriculture on the Prairies to 1914,” 1984, 230. In 1902/1903, The Canadian government spent $205,000 in Britain, $161,000 in the U.S., and $60,000 in Europe to attract immigrants. Sifton did not have immigration agents go to Ireland or Wales, as he did not believe they were good farmers or farm labourers (Hall, 1984, 290).
59 George F. G Stanley, 1961, 186. The city of Regina is one of the most interesting examples. Before the Canadian government decided that the railway would go through the southern prairies (not the northern route through Saskatoon), Lieutenant-Governor of the North-West, Edgar Dewdney, and general manager of the CPR, William C. Van Horne selected a site for Regina known by Aboriginal peoples as Pile o’ Bones. Dewdney praised the site for superior soil and drainage, but his critics saw it as land speculation, as Dewdney owned much land around Pile o’ Bone. The controversy stained Dewdney’s political career (E. Brian Titley, The Frontier World of Edgar Dewdney, 1999, 83-84).
60 Harold Innis, 1971, 198. Ridership grew from 2,792,805 in 1890, to 3,029,887 in 1896, and to 15,638,312 in 1914.
61 Brian S. Osborne and Susan E. Wurtele, “The Other Railway: Canadian National’s Department of Colonization and Agriculture, 1995, 231.
and CNR adhered to the “type” of immigrants the government wanted to attract, but at
the core of this policy were corporate interests and the protection of their own
existence.62 Sir John A. Macdonald, as D. J. Hall argued, may have “built” the railroad,
but it was Sifton who “populated” the west and achieved the goal of Confederation.63
While the colonisation of western Canada was undeniably an immense project that
involved great senses of imagination and nationalism, it also required the subjugation and
acquisition of the people who inhabited that land.

The Numbered Treaties

The 1870s and 1880s brought profound changes to the Aboriginal peoples of the
prairie west. The almost complete extermination of the buffalo population on the prairies
by the end of the 1870s put Aboriginal bands into a particularly vulnerable position.
Determining exactly how many buffalo roamed the prairies is impossible. Scholars have
estimated the number to be between 30 and 75 million.64 Why the buffalo population
decreased so fast is controversial and debated. Scholars have identified both the
individual and combined hunting and extermination activities by various groups,
including the Métis, the U.S. Army, and First Nations and non-First Nations hunters, as
why the buffalo population rapidly depleted. There is enough blame to go around: hunters
and traders over killed, and some First Nations hunted beyond subsistence living. The
slaughtering of buffalo on the Plains was so extensive that Colonel Richard I. Dodge
reported that between 1872 and 1874 4,373,730 buffalo were killed by traders and First

62 Ibid, 235-238.
63 David J. Hall, 1984, 281.
64 Garrett Wilson, Frontier Farewell: The 1870s and the End of the Old West, 2007, 251. 30 million is
more widely accepted.
Nations for the robe market. While First Nations capitalised on increased trade, the disappearance of herds severely disrupted ways of life. The buffalo was not only a source of food, clothing, and shelter, but its almost complete extermination on the Canadian prairie within such a short time put Aboriginal peoples into a particularly disadvantaged position from which to negotiate their sovereignty and title with the encroaching colonial government.

The Canadian government’s colonisation of the prairies was largely contingent on establishing some sort of relationship with Aboriginal peoples who inhabited the land. Acquisition of Rupert’s Land and the North-Western Territories not only enlarged the land base of Canada, but it increased the number of Aboriginal peoples in the newly formed country. While the British North America Act of 1867 established Canada as a country, it also shifted the responsibilities and governance of Aboriginal peoples to the Canadian federal government. Aboriginal peoples were not consulted in the buying of western land, and the government admittedly knew little about the land or the people who inhabited it. In 1869, Prime Minister Macdonald stated: “We are in utter darkness as to the state of affairs there; what the wants and wishes of the people are—or, in fact, how the affairs are carried on at all.” What Macdonald did understand is that Aboriginal peoples had title to the land between Thunder Bay and the Rocky Mountains, and to enact his “National Policy” of Confederation, formal negotiations had to be made with the inhabitants of the land.

The Royal Proclamation of 1763 made negotiations for land acquisition mandatory. After the defeat of the French in the New World, many Aboriginal peoples in

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65 Ibid, 269.
eastern and central Canada had to re-establish relationships with the British. Oral and written records indicate that the signing of the Proclamation was a sworn agreement between sovereign nations, including twenty-four Aboriginal nations, the British, and the French. The Proclamation stated that all land not ceded to or purchased by Britain would be distinguished as “reserved land” for First Nations. This is the first instance where land was specifically reserved for Aboriginal peoples. The exact boundaries of the land falling under the authority of the Proclamation were unclear: land west of the Appalachian Mountains and the western borders of Quebec (about a third of the North American interior) was “reserved,” but the western borders were not precisely defined; moreover, the Proclamation did not immediately apply to Rupert’s Land (whatever its boundaries were) or the Arctic (see image 3.1).

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68 John Borrows, “Wampum at Niagara: Canadian Legal History, Self-Government, and the Royal Proclamation,” 1997, 156 and 163. Interpreting the Proclamation as such assumes that First Nations had pre-existing rights over land and resources. Therefore, negotiations are a must for land and resource transfers. Also see Sharon Veene’s “Understanding Treaty 6: An Indigenous Perspective” (1997, 185) for a similar perspective of the Proclamation.

69 Olive Patricia Dickason, 2002, 163.

70 Ibid.
Under the Proclamation, the Crown retained underlying sovereign title of land and held the right to extinguish Aboriginal title to the land. The spirit of the Proclamation was not entirely negative, as the concept of reserved land attempted to control unjust settlement and fraudulent purchases of land reserved for First Nations. However, the Proclamation, as Olive Dickason argues, changed the priorities of treaties: land became

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71 Ibid, 156.
72 Ibid, 163.
the central focus, and peace second. But the most important point of the Proclamation promised that treaty talks had to occur before land could be exchanged. Moreover, land surrendered could only be transferred to the Crown. The Proclamation set off an upsurge of treaty-making. Between 1815 and 1825, First Nations and the British government signed nine treaties which effectively surrendered the land between Lakes Ontario, Erie, and Huron. By 1912, 483 treaties had been negotiated in Canada. The foundations of the Proclamation structured how the numbered treaties would be negotiated in the prairie west.

Between 1871 and 1877, the Canadian government used a series of treaties to open the west for development and for governing First Nations’ interests (see image 3.2). At the negotiation table, the government and Aboriginal peoples came with opposing terms: the government wanted a cheap surrender of First Nations’ land in exchange for an initial sum and annual payments; First Nations wanted larger tracts of land, more compensation for the land ceded, and promises for continued assistance. Scholars have frequently noted how treaty talks were not quick, easy, or entirely one-sided. First Nations, especially in the later treaties, learned how to negotiate from other treaty areas, and they bargained hard even when the Crown had a “take it or leave it” approach to talks. At the Treaty 4 talks in Fort Qu’Appelle, Saskatchewan, Lieutenant

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73 Ibid, 163.
74 Ibid, 164.
75 In John L. Tobias’ “Canada’s Subjugation of the Plains Cree, 1879-1885,” he contends that the role of treaty-making to open land for development is a myth (1983, 519). He argues that treaty-making was primarily due to a fear of violence (1983, 520). While I find this partially true, as the government did not have large funds to fight a war, I cannot agree with Tobias’ rational. Treaty commissioners entered talks with a “take or leave it approach,” which indicated that they were more than willing to walk away without settling.
Governor Alexander Morris knew that negotiations would be complicated and contested. First Nations admitted that they did not entirely understand the issue of land (in regard to ownership), and tension was extremely high between the Cree and the Saulteaux, as they had to think about matters that would have great impact on future generations.\footnote{Blair Stonechild, “Qu’Appelle—Tales of Two Valleys, Treaty Number Four: The Qu’Appelle Treaty,” http://quappelle.mendel.ca/en/tales/treatyfour/treaty/index.html; Garrett Wilson, 2007, 160-161.} What the two finally agreed upon in the numbered treaties is described by James Miller as a “neat blend” of their respective desires.\footnote{James Rodger Miller, 	extit{Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens}, 2000, 223.} Embedded in the treaties was permission to hunt and fish on specified lands, continued annuity payments, reserved land for homes and farming, agricultural equipment, and on-reserve schools.\footnote{Arthur J. Ray, Jim Miller and Frank J. Tough, 2000, 105-106. Exact treaty agreements varied a little in Treaty 1 to 7. For example, Treaty 6 had a medicine chest and the others did not.} Reserve land under the numbered treaties was also intended to be for the “sole and exclusive use” of Aboriginal peoples.\footnote{Richard H. Bartlett, “Indian Reserves on the Prairies,” 1985, 249.} For many Elders, the treaties were vital for preparing their people and future generations for the quickly changing world.

**Image 3.2**
Numbered Treaties 1871-1921.\footnote{James Rodger Miller, 2000, 207.}
Government fulfillment of treaty promises quickly became problematic. In some cases, the government let First Nations select their reserves, and surveyors allocated land as the treaties stipulated. Government officials took an active approach in selecting reserve land for treaties 1, 2, 5, and 7. Reserves were established in the areas of lakes and rivers. Bands had more choice in selecting reserve land under treaties 3, 4, 6, 8, and 10. While the settling of bands on reserves appeared to be in the best interests of First Nations, getting them permanently settled on confined land was a strategy to move them out of the way of the government’s western development plan. Moreover, what happened once First Nations were settled on reserves appeared to be of little interest to the government. Peoples under Treaty 4, for example, made little farming headway because delivery of seed and implements was contingent on them cultivating soil. More than six years after signing the treaty, they had not received the promised farm equipment and many were starving and inadequately dressed for winter. Fulfilling treaty promises, Lux argues, increasingly became seen as a “charitable enterprise” rather than a “legal responsibility.” John Leonard Taylor argues that there is no evidence that the government intended to act in a “wise and benevolent” way (which was language regularly used in numbered treaties). Rather, the treaties were clearly a strategy to prevent trouble with First Nations while taking potential development land with as little cost as possible. Irene M. Spry argues that the loss of common property resources in

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83 D. Aidan McQuillan, “Creation of Indian Reserves on the Canadian Prairies 1870-1885,” 1980, 385-386.
84 Richard H. Bartlett, 1985, 243-244.
86 Ibid, 36.
87 Ibid, 27.
treaties is most tragic.\textsuperscript{89} The creation of reserves confined First Nations and isolated them from a vast amount of land. First Nations prosperity and richness depended on the land they could access.\textsuperscript{90}

Interpretations of the numbered treaties are extremely contentious. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ways of retaining the details of treaties were at odds: the government documented their version of events on paper, while First Nations preserved treaty obligations in oral histories. Sharon Venne most persuasively argues that the written text of the treaties only expresses Canada’s view of treaties and not all of the negotiated agreements.\textsuperscript{91} Oral histories told by Elders take issue with language such as “cede,” “surrender” and “forever give up lands.” They insist that these words were not in the original treaty. Cree, Assiniboine, and Dene law would not allow land to be sold, only shared. Aboriginal leaders believed that the treaty commissioners only wanted use of the land as deep as a plough went down to farm, trees to construct houses, and grass for livestock.\textsuperscript{92} *Elders’ Interpretation of Treaty 4: A Report on the Treaty Interpretation Project* shows how the use of land was consistently misunderstood. First Nations indicated that language such as “leased” or “borrowed” was used, and that the Crown only wanted six inches of soil.\textsuperscript{93} Treaty commissioners also used what they thought were Aboriginal phrases. The phrase “as long as the sun shines, the grass grows and rivers flow” was often used to convey the life of treaties. However, as Sharon Venne argued, Elders would not attach treaties to grass growing because medicines came from the lands.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid, 205.  
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid, 204.  
Second, they would not tie treaties to flowing rivers. What if the water changed direction or dried up? Venne states that it should be “As long as the sun shines and the waters flow.” The water is from a woman, symbolising the birth of a child, and would mean as long as there is life on Earth. Venne also argues that there are discrepancies in the understanding of almost all the major provisions of treaties. The exact details of treaty provisions, such as health care, education, fishing, hunting, and trapping rights, size of reserves, social assistance, minerals right, responsibilities of Indian agents and farm instructors, treaty payments, and citizenship, are highly contested between government and First Nations. Unfortunately, the spirit of the numbered treaties was quickly violated most especially through the twisting of First Nation requests for education into calculated re-education in residential schools and the treatment of reserves as virtual prisons and centres of re-socialisation.

**Re-education**

The theory behind residential schools predates Confederation. In the 1600s, the Jesuits attempted to establish an Aboriginal education system in New France. By the 1680s, the school system had failed. The Jesuits had only educated and Christianised a...

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95 Ibid.  
96 Ibid, pages 194-201. For example: In Treaty 6 Reserves, Chiefs understood that they could reserve as much land as they wanted. Within a couple of years, government surveyors gave them 160 acres per person. Chiefs also understood the role of the Indian agent was to be a servant to them. Many agents, instead, became controlling and determined what cattle, wood and hay could be sold. They also issued passes when the pass system was operating. Many Elders have also been told that treaty annuities were to be $50 for Chief and $25 for Headmen. Annuities were later reduced to $25 and $15, then later to $15 and $5.  
small majority of Aboriginal children.\\(^9\) British North America (BNA) also made attempts to establish residential schools. The British system mirrored industrial schools in Britain that sought to re-educate and re-socialise homeless and delinquent children.\\(^9\)

BNA residential schools also reflected a new relationship between government and Aboriginal peoples. As Anthony Hall and J.R. Miller argue, Britain did not see a need to maintain war alliances with Aboriginal groups after the threat of an American invasion dissipated in the 1830s. This change in relations resulted in British adoption of more aggressive strategies to re-educate First Nations.\\(^1\)\\(^0\)

The Bagot Commission (1842) is the most significant example of this attitude. It initiated an education policy that persisted until Confederation and clearly influenced post-Confederacy assimilation strategies. At its core, the Commission concluded that it was necessary to displace Aboriginal children from the “traditional” influences of their homes, communities, and Elders. Day schools or on-reserve schools allowed children to “regress” to their “savage” culture at the end of each day, erasing all “good” learned in school. The Commission stated that older persons were not assimilable, and therefore education would target young children exclusively.\\(^1\)\\(^0\)\) Moreover, the Commission had a significant influence on the curriculum taught at the newly-established boarding schools. Each school, the Commission concluded, should have a farm where children would learn agriculture skills and develop a new association with the land. Aboriginal children were to learn that individual private ownership of land, not the communal ownership.

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commonly found on reserves, was part of a “civilised” lifestyle.\textsuperscript{102} The literature shows that as early as the 1840s, the government sought to use education and agriculture to try to bring “benefit” to Aboriginal peoples by destroying unwanted cultural practices.

Confederation ushered in even more aggressive strategies to re-educate Aboriginal children. Although the government had already experimented with manual labour schools in Ontario, the idea gained support under the Macdonald government.\textsuperscript{103} In 1879, the government commissioned Nicholas Flood Davin to tour the American Indian school system and talk to high-ranking government officials. Davin visited an industrial school in Minnesota, met with Cherokee leaders who felt that industrial schools had produced positive results, and held meetings with Senior American officials. As a result of his visit, Davin wrote a report outlining a number of recommendations. Davin saw a greater need for church involvement in the residential school system.\textsuperscript{104} The day-to-day running of residential schools would become a joint operation between church and state. The Department of Indian Affairs supplied land, buildings, books, desks, fencing, and miscellaneous equipment; the government provided grants, which was to cover the cost of teachers, clothing, food, and heating. While the DIA and the government were responsible for the financial aspects of residential schools, churches assumed the everyday operation and management of them.\textsuperscript{105} The industrial school system in western Canada was a direct result of Davin’s report. In 1883-1884, the government ear-marked $44,000 for constructing industrial schools in the west.\textsuperscript{106} Davin’s dossier also reiterated

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid, 12-13.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid, 8. Mohawk Institute, Wikwemikong, Mount Elgin and Shingwauk were manual labour schools in Ontario.
\textsuperscript{104} E. Brian Titley, 1986, 135. Also see Nicholas Flood Davin, “Report on Industrial Schools for Indians and Half-Breeds,” 1879.
\textsuperscript{105} E. Brian Titley, 1986, 136.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid, 135.
earlier calls for removing Aboriginal children from the influences of the “wigwam.” The focus of residential schools shifted from day attendance to full-time boarding. While Davin’s report provided a vision for residential schools, his ideas were not particularly new. The Bagot Commission firmly established the notion of displacing children from communities and teaching them vocational skills. Davin’s report is significant in Aboriginal educational history because it developed a systematic strategy for re-educating Aboriginal children within residential schools.107

Exactly how residential schools attempted to re-educate Aboriginal children cannot be generalised. Oversimplifications in much secondary literature about residential schools makes it difficult to decide what is an exaggeration or an essentialisation. While Ward Churchill’s book Kill the Indian, Save the Man is a valuable text for exploring the impacts of residential schools on Aboriginal peoples and communities, some of his statements are difficult to accept. Churchill seems to imply that every child that went through residential schooling developed a narcotic complex that prevented him or her from fulfilling a normal life after graduation.108 Scott Trevithick, likewise, finds in Agnes Grant’s work “an unfortunate predilection for exaggeration, dramatization and over-simplification.”109 Trevethick pointed to Grant’s statement that churches had the power of life and death over Aboriginal children. To his knowledge, churches never had the power to execute students, but Trevethick should view withholding food, providing poor living conditions that led to disease, and not searching for Aboriginal children who ran

away in the cold of winter as a form of power over life and death.\textsuperscript{110} It is not likely to be true that all schools acted in a certain fashion, or all students experienced abuse, or all spaces were constructed in a particular manner. Important differences and local cultures had to exist in a school system that was so expansive. Trevithick most persuasively argues that residential school research needs to be scaled down. Examining the history of school staff, an often invisible and unnamed group in history, is one direction to pursue. Students, similarly, are often left anonymous.

Some smaller studies have effectively demonstrated differences between the actions of school staff and the everyday operations of individual schools. Paige Raibmon’s research about the Coqualeetza residential school in British Columbia found, much to her surprise, that some ex-pupils had positive memories of the school and the principal, George Raley.\textsuperscript{111} David Nock and Sharon Wall, likewise, have conducted a smaller study on the career of E. F. Wilson, the principal of the Shingwauk and Wawanosh residential schools in Ontario. While Nock and Wall do not agree on all points about Wilson’s tenure, they do show how Wilson ran his residential schools. Nock believes that Wilson was a supporter of “cultural synthesis,” not of “cultural replacement.”\textsuperscript{112} Wall completely refutes this notion by stating that Wilson was clearly an assimilationist.\textsuperscript{113} She argues that Wilson held discipline by emphasising Euro-

\begin{footnotes}
\item[110] Ibid.
\item[111] Paige Raibmon, “‘A New Understanding of Things Indian’: George Raley's Negotiation of the Residential School Experience,” 1996.
\item[112] David Nock in Sharon Wall, “‘To Train a Wild Bird’: E. F. Wilson, Hegemony, and Native Industrial Education at the Shingwauk and Wawanosh Residential Schools, 1873-1893,” 2003, 7.
\item[113] Wall makes some really interesting comparisons between Wilson’s administration of his schools and Gramscian theory of hegemony. She argues (2003, 30 and 8) that Wilson balanced coercion and consent, rather than opting for sheer domination of Aboriginal children. In Gramsci’s theory, the state attempts to operate by maintaining passive and coercive consent. Wall pointed to Wilson’s employment of an indirect system of rule as a Gramsci-like example. Wilson’s indirect system distanced him from the punishment or the apparent control of children.
\end{footnotes}
American beliefs and values. He also tried to naturalise students’ lives by making the
school experience appear as “the way things are” in post-graduation life.114 Other smaller
studies by Basil Johnston, Jacqueline Gresko, and Kerrie Hansler are examples of
scholars who have done compelling research on specific residential schools.115

Advocating for smaller scale studies on residential schools by no means implies
empathy for the system or support for its cause. Creating such a system was not right, and
it had significant impact on the physical and physiological wellbeing of many Aboriginal
children. As John Milloy argues, the entire idea behind re-socialisation—the forced
adoption of cultural traits of another group—was violent in nature.116 At the core of the
residential school system was an agenda to trigger radical changes in the lives of
Aboriginal children before they left school and returned to reserves. Education was only
one part of the government’s attempt to assimilate First Nations into the body-politic.

**Re-socialisation**

The government’s strategy of re-socialising First Nations centred on the adoption
of agriculture and permanent settlement on reserves. As J. R. Miller argues “[c]losely
related to schooling was a series of policies designed to encourage Indians, especially
those of the western interior, to adopt agriculture.”117 The promotion of farming after
residential schooling was a calculated attempt to 1) sedentarise First Nations by
encouraging individual farming plots and self-sustainability and 2) create “ideal” social

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Education and Native Responses in the West, 1870-1910,” 1975, “Creating Little Dominions Within the
Dominion: Early Catholic Indian Schools in Saskatchewan and British Columbia,” 1986, and “Everyday
Life at Qu'Appelle Industrial School,” 1991; Kerrie Faith Hansler, “When Two Cultures Meet: Native
116 John S. Milloy, 1999, 42.
117 J. R. Miller, 2000, 269.
family units that adhered to Euro-American notions of domesticity and nuclear familial composition.

One of the most significant points about the numbered treaties is that they ended Aboriginal title to land and began the process of settling bands onto reserves. The creation of reserves and the settling of bands on these reserves was highly geographical and calculated. Although the Department of Indian Affairs made some effort through “gentle persuasion” to locate bands near sources of lumber, fish, and hay, they also tried to group bands in blocks (see image 3.3). Grouping them into blocks (known as agencies), Aidan McQuillan argues, facilitated agricultural instruction and delivery of supplies. Moreover, it reduced the number and area of boundary lines that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginals shared, thus diminishing the possibilities of hostility between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal homestead farmers. But the primary objective of the government’s residential school to agrarian lifestyle plan was to re-socialise First Nations by sedentarising them and promoting self-sufficiency.

118 D. Aidan McQuillan, 1980, 381
119 Ibid, 387. Battleford, Crooked Lakes, File Hills, Muscowpetung, Peace Hills, and Touchwood Hills are examples of reserves created in blocks (agencies).
Aboriginal reserve farming started in the 1880s, but its success was mixed due to DIA policies. To initiate reserve farming, Indian Affairs sent farm instructors to the prairie west. Many of these instructors were ignorant of the climate, and much of the promised farming equipment and seed never arrived. Scholars, such as Noel Dyck and

120 D. Aidan McQuillan, 1980, 394.
Helen Buckley, attribute failures in Aboriginal agriculture to the government’s desire for control and the limited competency of the local Indian agent.\textsuperscript{121} Despite governmental policy that undermined Aboriginal agriculture, and the prevalent conviction that First Nations lacked the initiative, competence, and cultural background to become successful farmers, some Aboriginal farmers, especially in southern Saskatchewan, initially made great strides, even as many non-Aboriginal settlers failed to cultivate anything. While some settlers deserted the prairies for more hospitable climates, First Nations people could not leave, so some experimented with new farming techniques and seed. Some were so successful that they won prizes in local fairs.

The successes were limited and isolated. In the 1880s, the DIA attacked “tribal” and “communist” systems that First Nations used to buy machinery. In particular, the DIA took aim at farmers who pooled their earnings, whether with other farmers or with their band. Pooling resources did not conform to the department’s vision of the yeoman farmer, and it especially did not conform to Hayter Reed’s vision of Aboriginal agriculture. Reed, as commissioner and later deputy superintendent general of Indian Affairs, instituted a new system of capitalist agriculture in 1889 to undercut “communist” forms of Aboriginal agriculture. Communal systems interfered with the department’s long-term goal of subdividing reserves into individual farming plots, thereby freeing-up “surplus” land for more western development. Moreover, the point of individual ownership was to create “law-abiding citizens” who would behave competitively and construct “civilised” homes and farms.\textsuperscript{122}

Into the early twentieth century, governmental policy towards Aboriginal agriculture continued to undermine their farming success. This has been little studied but what literature exists documents the government’s changes to the Indian Act, and how these changes made it easier for the government to buy reserve land. The treaties negotiated between Aboriginal peoples and the government reflects the government’s intentions to develop the west, but, as we shall see, the election of the Laurier government in 1896 signified a major transition in western policy and Indian Affairs.

**Failed Policies**

Attempts to re-educate Aboriginal peoples were neither effective nor absolute. While scholars have recently started to highlight the failures of re-socialisation and re-education strategies employed by the government, this area still needs more analysis. Within residential schools, for example, DIA policy undermined the school system. In particular, extremely poor standards of living and high rates of death and disease were common in many residential schools. As Mary Ellen Kelm argues, the belief that Aboriginal parents did not offer proper hygiene or nutrition and that their children needed to be removed from these environments, was a profound contradiction because the conditions in many residential schools caused high rates of abuse and death. Kelm demonstrated that many residential schools exceeded capacity and did not provide adequate or healthy food due to the department cost-cutting. John Milloy’s *A National Crime*, the first monograph dedicated to exposing the prevalence of abuse, death, and disease in residential schools, argues that the churches, the government, and the

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department all knew about high rates of death and disease. The hundreds—possibly thousands—of children that died (the exact number is impossible to delineate from documents) due to hazardous and poorly ventilated buildings was best described by lawyer, S. H. Blake, as an “unpleasant nearness to the charge of manslaughter.”

Not taking drastic measures to lower rates of disease and death not only undercut education instruction, but it was an act of murder, if not calculated genocide.

Quality of “education” in residential schools is also highly suspect. As J. R. Miller points out, many Aboriginal children were not progressing through the school system as the department and churches had intended. The foundation of the residential school system, which combined education with labour, undermined learning. However, as Miller argues, the vocational training in most schools was also poor. Schools did not properly train students to be self-sustaining individuals after graduation; rather, they extracted labour from Aboriginal children to maintain the school system. As government funding increasingly became inadequate for everyday school operation, residential schools had to fill funding gaps by relying more on child labour to produce items that they would normally purchase or that they could sell. Cutting firewood, making shoes, carpentry, sewing clothes, and food production (milking cows and growing produce) dominated the residential experience of many children. Poor funding issues were also compounded by low school attendance. High rates of student deaths, runaways, discharges, or parents refusing to send them to residential schools reduced the amount of grant money schools received as the government funded schools on a per capita basis.

126 John S. Milloy, 1999, 77. Blake report was in a review of Anglican missionary work sent to Minister of the Interior, Frank Oliver
128 See E. Brian Titley, 1986, 139. The government provided a $100 grant for each student. Duncan Campbell Scott particular schools paying for their operation through labour.
The narrative of residential schools is not only one of Aboriginal parents and children being acted upon. Residential schools were resisted by parents, and children both subtly and overtly. When the “school truck” came at the end of the summer to collect children, Celia Haig-Brown notes, many children ran and government officers had to catch them. Moreover, many parents refused to send their children. Parents resisted by not returning their children to residential schools after holiday breaks. More drastic incidents occurred. In 1895, a department employee was killed trying to collect children for residential schools on a Blackfoot reserve, and in British Columbia a Shuswap Chief made a school instructor leave the Kamloops residential school after it was discovered that the teacher had abused a child. Brian Titley argues that the closing of the Dunbow residential school was due to resistance by parents and students. Parents of children who attended Dunbow never supported the idea of taking their children away, and children effectively resisted the regiment of labour and chores in the school.

Within residential schools, Aboriginal children developed many strategies to resist curriculum and staff. Some children actively preserved their languages by secretly teaching each other. Inez Deiter, who attended Onion Lake residential school, described an underground system for teaching and learning Aboriginal languages. Deiter picked up Cree “on the sly”: she taught other students English and they taught her Cree. According to Agnes Grant, the speaking of Aboriginal languages was viewed by many school staff as a direct threat to their authority.

129 Celia Haig-Brown, Resistance and Renewal: Surviving the Indian Residential School, 1988, 43-44.
130 J. R. Miller, 2000, 268-269.
131 Ibid.
132 E. Brian Titley, 1992, 112.
133 Sandra Falconer Pace and Patricia Deiter Sunrise: Saskatchewan Elders Speak, 2000, 35.
134 Agnes Grant, No End of Grief: Indian Residential Schools in Canada, 1996, 189.
More blatant forms of resistance also occurred. At Onion Lake, Deiter recalled a story about revenge on one of her supervisors. None of the children liked their supervisor and some of the children killed her cat: “She wanted to know what happened to her cat. She never found out.” Resistance by parents and children show that power, although heavily balanced to one side, was not uni-directional.

The enduring effects of residential schools are undeniable. At the File Hills boarding school, Charlie Bigknife remembers that he got a “good bang” every time he spoke Cree. In 1929, he got a severe nose bleed from a beating. The staff put him into the infirmary with one other child, who also had a nose bleed from being hit after speaking Cree. Over night, the other boy died. Even at nearly 90 years of age, Bigknife can still tell this story with great detail. Inez Deiter also vividly remembers the abuse she endured. In school, she described herself as a mouthy young girl who had an inquiring mind. When she spoke out of turn, the staff slapped her on the side of the head. Today, Deiter is largely deaf from direct hits to her ears. Psychological abuse in residential school was just as traumatic and lasting. Theresa Bird recalled an incident in a school play that made her ashamed and ashamed of her culture and people. The play was put on for people in the village of Lebret, Saskatchewan. Bird played one of Chief Payepot’s six wives and other children played the part of dogs. She carried around a potato sack with bones and had to squat down every so often and pretend to eat the bones while grunting. “It was all made to look like we were primitive Indians,” Bird stated, but she knew that her home

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135 Sandra Falconer Pace and Patricia Deiter *Sunrise: Saskatchewan Elders Speak*, 2000, 36.
136 Charlie Bigknife, interviewed by C Drew Bednasek, 9 August 2007. At the Coqualeetza residential school in British Columbia, a list of rules outlined the punishment for each offense. “Communicating with girls,” “chewing tobacco” or “stubbornness” received a “half hour of kneeling,” “kneeling during supper” or “kneeling during breakfast.” Major offences such as running away, destroying plaster and truancy were punished with “confinement,” “humiliation” and “lashes.” (Keith Thor Carlson, “Early Nineteenth Century Stó:lō Social Structures and Government Assimilation Policy,” 1997, 102).
137 Sandra Falconer Pace and Patricia Deiter, 2000, 40-41.
life did not resemble the play.\textsuperscript{138} Punishments, Deiter recalled, were highly public to provoke shame: “They used to do things to punish us, in front of people. Nothing was ever private. It was so cruel. There was no regard for our feelings at all. They had a way of publicly ridiculing us in front of one another. I don’t know what the reason for that was. Maybe it was a way to teach us a lesson, but it was cruelty.” Schools, Deiter also stated, gave students low self-esteem. Students were called “dirty” and made to believe they had little intelligence.\textsuperscript{139} Many students developed an “inferiority complex” that they were not good enough.\textsuperscript{140} But perhaps the most enduring form of abuse was deprivation of love and affection. Deiter remembered that the school experience taught her some vocational skills, but it did not teach her about love. She felt unprepared to be a nurturing parent.\textsuperscript{141} Deiter believes her daughters were most affected by this because she could not give them needed love. Residential schools not only hurt many survivors, but future generations in Aboriginal communities have also experienced the consequences.

The re-socialisation of Aboriginal peoples through agricultural programs also was not effective. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this policy, so the government believed, was threatened by the “regression” of residential school ex-pupils back to traditional lifestyles. Graduates were not returning to reserves in droves and supporting themselves with an agrarian lifestyle. Going back to traditional livelihoods not only negated the “education” they received, but the government feared that Aboriginal peoples would continue to be a financial “burden.” Scholars such as Milloy note the issue of “regression,” but more attention needs to be paid to how the entire prairie strategy

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid, 41.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid, 36.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid, 49.
hinged on linking residential schools to a sedentary and agrarian lifestyle on reserves. Within the first decade of the post-Confederation residential school system, the DIA saw problems with their plan of having graduates return home and apply the skills they learned.\textsuperscript{142} The election of Wilfrid Laurier in 1896, and his appointment of Clifford Sifton as Minister of the Interior and Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, highlighted issues of self-sufficiency and finance. For many years, Liberals had criticised Conservatives’ management of Indian Affairs. The new Laurier government announced its intention to cut the “lavish” spending of the previous government, to reorganise the department, and to centralise decision-making in Ottawa.\textsuperscript{143} Laurier encouraged Sifton to conflate the jobs of the deputies of the Interior and of the Indian Affairs Departments and place both under a single deputy.\textsuperscript{144} Sifton’s rearrangement ended the tenures of A. M. Burgess and Hayter Reed, who were replaced by James A. Smart, a man who had little knowledge of Aboriginal peoples or of the government’s western development plan.\textsuperscript{145} Smart’s appointment was not an isolated example of men with little understanding. Under Sifton, the government focused on efficiency and the economy. Indian Affairs, more than ever, subordinated Aboriginal peoples to economic development and resource exploitation.\textsuperscript{146} Those appointed to the DIA supported this thinking, as without experience of Aboriginal peoples “most were relatively unsympathetic, if not ‘hard line,’” towards First Nations.\textsuperscript{147} Laurier’s appointment of J. D. McLean, Duncan Campbell Scott, and James McKenna stacked the DIA with officials who knew little

\textsuperscript{142} John Milloy, 1999, 158.
\textsuperscript{143} David J. Hall, “Clifford Sifton and Canadian Indian Administration, 1896-1905,” 1977, 129.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid, 129-130.
\textsuperscript{146} Arthur J Ray, 1996, 205.
\textsuperscript{147} David J. Hall, 1977, 130. Hall acknowledges that “hard line” approaches towards Aboriginal peoples were not new. Hayter Reed, and Reed’s predecessor, L. Vankoughnet, often pursued policies that were uncompromising and proved disinclined to consider the First Nations’ points-of-view.
about the on-the-ground workings of the department, and who had little sympathy for Aboriginal peoples. All were committed to cutting costs.  

While Sifton cut costs, regression worries did not dissipate. In the 1900 Annual Report, Indian Commissioner David Laird best expressed the view of the government:

The education of Indians is now costing the government a large sum. The results, though in many cases satisfactory, are not all that could be desired. Supporting schools for our aborigines, however, is a treaty obligation and must be persevered in. But apart from the obligation, there is no other way that they can become truly civilized and cease to be a burden upon the country for much of the ordinary means of support. Not a few of the graduates who have gone out from industrial schools have obtained employment among settlers and villagers and earned moderately good wages; some have married other ex-pupils and settled down on reserves with a fair prospect of making a comfortable living for themselves; while too many are idle and shiftless, and have fallen back into the old habits of their parents and other relatives on the reserves. How best to guard the ex-pupils of the schools from lapsing into the barbarous ways of the band to which they belong is one of the problems with which we are confronted.

Laird’s reports continued to express concern for much of the first decade of the twentieth century. It was clear that the government did not know how to address regression.

The previous strategy of *hoping* ex-pupils would return to reserves and be “productive” individuals was increasingly replaced with “experimental” schemes. In 1903, Laird saw “a gradual weeding out of the incompetent” and “a more satisfactory method of selecting recruits” as positive actions.

“When we consider also that for the most part the boys and girls of this class intermarry, it will be understood that these having the same aims, with nothing deterrent in their moral atmosphere, are more or less bound to succeed.”

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148 Ibid.
149 Dominion of Canada Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs, 1900, 288.
150 Ibid, 1903, 271.
Four years later, Laird was of the growing mind that a more paternalist system, which closely monitors the transition from residential school to reserve, would produce the best results. Laird remained positive in his reports about prospects, but he struggled to view Aboriginal peoples outside of Victorian and eugenic frameworks:

Given suitable education and intelligent, patient supervision, I see no reason why the Cree Indians, at least, should not become in two or three generations as good and thrifty citizens as most of the people in the country. The effects of heredity cannot be overcome in thirty years, which is about the longest time any of these Indians have been settled on reserves. If the curse of intemperance could only be stamped out amongst them, a century hence the Indian, as a rule, ought to be almost as highly civilized as his white brother.\textsuperscript{151}

Interest in controlling genes, moral environments, and a more directed approach to monitoring the transition from residential school to reserve is clear. Laird and other government officials were open to any strategy that would stop “regression.” Fears over failing re-education and re-socialisation policies led to what Stoler called an “administrative anxiety” over how to “solve” these issues.\textsuperscript{152} Documents that express colonial officials concerns over failing re-education and re-socialisation policies can be seen as “blueprints of distress.”\textsuperscript{153} This anxiety and distress led to one of the more oppressive colonial schemes ever attempted: The File Hills farm colony.

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid, 1907, 224.
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid.
“Yet too many ex-pupils have gone back to the ways of the old teepee life. Convinced that it is desirable to separate the most promising graduates of the schools from the down-pull of the daily contact with the depressing influence of those whose habits still largely pertain to savage life, the department has authorized an experiment to be made of the colony system. The method adopted does not involve the expense of setting apart separate reserves for ex-pupils; but of selecting a portion of some of the larger and more fertile reserves, some distance from the Indian villages or settlements, and under the immediate eye of a farming instructor and the almost daily visits of the agent himself. The colony of this kind at File Hills has been fairly successful. To encourage it still more the department last spring had a block of twelve square miles surveyed into eighty acre lots on Peepeekeesis reserve, where the land is all that could be desired for farming purposes.”

(David Laird, Indian Commissioner of North-West Territories, Annual Report 1902, 233)

“I beg to inform you that I have settled on the Reserves here four ex pupils who have prepared in all about 75 acres of crop. As these young men have worked hard ever since they settled here building houses stables, plowing land etc at no expense to the Department I trust you will see fit to supply them with seed grain for next Spring.”

(William Morris Graham informing the secretary of Indian Affairs about settling ex-pupils on reserves, National Archives of Canada, RG 10, vol. 1400, 1899)

William Morris Graham’s plan to build a colony that placed greater emphasis on paternalism, surveillance, self-sustainability, and improving public and private spaces, was eagerly supported and funded by the Canadian government. To construct and
administer the colony required collaboration with residential school principals, arranged marriages amongst residential school ex-pupils, transferring ex-pupils to the Peepeekesis Reserve, manipulation of First Nations’ sovereignty, bribery, and the disregard of ethical and legal responsibilities. The colony did not go unchallenged by Peepeekesis band members, and it was not simply imposed on the community.

This chapter is largely shaped by Canadian government archive documents about the colony from its construction in the late nineteenth century to its “closing” in the mid-twentieth century. First, I discuss Graham’s relationship and collaboration with two residential school principals, Father Joseph Hugonard and Kate Gillespie. This section also examines how both principals ran their residential schools according to late nineteenth and early twentieth century re-education policy that linked education, labour, and Christianisation. The rest of the chapter concentrates on specific questions about the colony in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: Why was the Peepeekesis Reserve selected as the site for the colony? When did the colony officially start? How did Graham go about constructing and administering the colony? Who was involved? When and how did it end? Was the colony successful? Documents provide some perspective on all these questions.

While Canadian government archives are main focus of analysis in this chapter, I am well aware of their political and subjective nature. Most of these documents represent the experiences and perspectives of Graham, the DIA, and the Canadian government, and they are littered with contradictions that raise important questions about the ethics and legality of the colony. “Problems” in the archive narrative do not render them useless;
rather, a critical interpretation of the contradictions and events challenge the history of the colony as held in archives.

**Graham, Hugonard, and Gillespie**

Graham’s appointment as Indian agent at the File Hills agency in 1897 came at an anxious time in the Department of Indian Affairs. The department had three chief worries about its failing strategies to re-educate and re-socialise First Nations: 1) the “regression” of Aboriginal ex-pupils back to traditional ways of life after leaving residential schools; 2) making First Nations into self-supporting individuals, free of government assistance; 3) reducing the financial costs of administrating and governing First Nations. While all three concerns are closely connected, the issue of regression was at the heart of these concerns. Consequently, when an ambitious Graham took the Indian agent job at the File Hills agency, and proposed his colony “experiment,” the government eagerly supported and financed the scheme. The colony, which created a paternalist system to promote self-sufficiency, cut costs, and maintain an environment in which

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1 Graham had a long and accomplished career in the Department of Indian Affairs. He was born in Ottawa but primarily grew up around Winnipeg. He had indirect knowledge of Aboriginal peoples because his father, James, was employed by the federal Indian Department. In 1885, Graham took his first job in Indian Affairs as a clerk at Moose Mountain agency (1886-1889) and later transferred to a clerk position at Birtle agency (1889-94). Ten years of outstanding service landed Graham a clerk position in the Indian Commissioner’s office in Regina in 1895 (Dempsey in Graham 1991). After two years of clerking, Graham was offered the Indian agent position at the File Hills for a yearly salary of $900 on a one-year probationary basis (RG10, volume 3878, file 91839). In December of 1899 Graham’s probationary status ended, when the DIA confirmed his position and increased his salary to $1,000 per year (RG 10, volume 3878, file 91839-7). Two years later, Graham became agent for the Qu’Appelle agency, which was a new amalgamation consisting of the File Hills and Muscowpetung agencies. In 1904, Graham was appointed Inspector for South Saskatchewan Inspectorate. Graham’s most prestigious appointment came in 1920, when he became Indian Commissioner for the three prairie provinces. In 1932, at the age of sixty-five, the DIA retired Graham. His forced retirement capped off a nearly four decade career in Indian Affairs. Although much his work has been viewed critically by Aboriginal peoples and scholars, there is little doubt that Graham’s work left its mark on the geography and history of the prairie west. He was not an insignificant person in his own time.
Aboriginal peoples could be watched and supervised, was the type of fresh thinking that the DIA sought to solve the “Indian problem.”\(^2\)

Graham may have conceived of the colony scheme, but its construction and administration was a collaborative effort. While Graham worked with various government officials and school principals, Father Joseph Hugonard, principal of the Qu’Appelle industrial school in Lebret, Saskatchewan, and Kate Gillespie, principal of the File Hills boarding school near the Peepeekisis Reserve, were his two closest confidants.\(^3\) Hugonard and Gillespie not only helped Graham select residential school ex-pupils for the colony, but the manner in which both principals ran their schools was highly important for preparing selected Aboriginal children for Graham’s colony.

Hugonard’s Qu’Appelle school was a direct product of Davin’s report, and its curriculum hinged on re-educating children through Euro-American curricular and vocation skills. Funded by the Canadian government and run by the Catholic Oblates, Qu’Appelle’s physical appearance resembled many American industrial schools. Built on 509 acres, the Qu’Appelle school maintained a farm and occupied three brick buildings housing student residences, classrooms, shops, hospital, staff quarters, and a chapel (see

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\(^2\) See D. J. Hall’s “Clifford Sifton and Canadian Indian Administration, 1896-1905” (1977) for more about the “fresh thinking” the DIA sought.

\(^3\) Graham and Hugonard knew each other very well for many years. Hugonard came to Canada around 1884 to take the principal job at Qu’Appelle industrial school. Four years later, Graham met Hugonard under what Graham described as “peculiar circumstances” at his home on the Moose Mountain agency (Graham 1991, 59). In the midst of a blizzard that had lasted for three days, Graham heard the sleigh bells of a team of horses outside of his home. Graham did not see any movement on the sleigh but walked over to the horses and discovered Hugonard laying under a pile of buffalo robes. He carried Hugonard into his place and revived him by giving him hot water and rubbing his feet. Hugonard stayed with Graham for a day or two. Once better, Hugonard went to recruiting children on the reserve for his Qu’Appelle school (the reason he went to Moose Mountain). From this first meeting, Graham frequently saw Hugonard recruiting students at the File Hills and they remained close friends (Ibid, 59). Kate Gillespie and Graham met after she accepted the principal position at File Hills boarding school in 1901. Gillespie moved out west in her teens. She first taught in a non-Aboriginal school then took a position on a reserve in Northern Saskatchewan (Ibid, 84; also see Miller 1996). She later transferred to the File Hills, replacing W. H. Farrer and became the first woman principal in the country. She also served as a missionary on the Star Blanket reserve.
image 4.1). Qu’Appelle’s curriculum, similar to that in many other Canadian residential schools, was to emphasise the three R’s, with some attention to geography and history. The curriculum and leisure time for boy and girl students was heavily gendered. Both sexes were taught the three R’s, but the boys’ curriculum stressed agriculture and machinery vocational training, while girls learned how to garden, sew, do laundry, cook, milk cows and feed chickens.4

Labour regularly overshadowed the school’s curriculum. The industrial school’s dedication to chores and labour frequently obliterated the rest of the curriculum. Graham himself reported to Duncan Campbell Scott that children were spending too little time in

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5 Oliver Brass, personal archive collection.
In 1916, Graham stated that children at Qu’Appelle had only spent nine days of a forty-two-day stint in the classroom. Graham argued that the objectives of Aboriginal education were being neglected, and the institution was approaching a “workhouse” (see images 4.2 and 4.3). His objections were ill-directed as the problem was one of funding. Like many other residential schools, Qu’Appelle had chosen to subsidise inadequate government funding with child labour.

Image 4.2
Qu’Appelle industrial school sewing room, 1894.

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7 Ibid, 171.
8 E. Brian Titley, “Indian Industrial Schools in Western Canada,” 1986, 139.
9 Saskatchewan Archives Board R-B9.
Rigid discipline was also central to re-educating students at Qu’Appelle. Students’ weekday activities were supervised almost every minute between waking and sleeping. After waking at 5:30 a.m., children’s days were regimented by chapel, inspections, eating, chores, school work, recreation and prayer. Students rarely escaped the gaze of school staff, even as they sat at long tables for meals three times a day.

Gillespie’s File Hills Presbyterian boarding school was not the ultra modern structure of Qu’Appelle, but it maintained a strong vision of re-educating Aboriginal children by reinforcing physical appearance, gender roles, and vocational training.

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10 Saskatchewan Archives Board R-B10
11 Jacqueline Gresko, 1986, 92-93.
13 Another major difference between the Qu’Appelle and File Hills school was the rate of death and disease. In 1907 and 1908 respectively, when the Bryce and Paget reports were published, the conditions at the File Hills school were starkly different from that reported by Wadsworth. Both reports linked the
Unlike the large land base and the many buildings that the Qu’Appelle school
maintained, Inspector of Indian Agencies, T. P. Wadsworth, reported in 1893 that the File
Hills school had a large dining room, an excellent recreation room, and two dormitories
(see image 4.4). By 1908, one of these dormitories would be condemned, and the girls
were sleeping in the boys’ residence, while the boys slept in tents. But the strategies
employed to re-educate at the File Hills boarding school paralleled those at the
Qu’Appelle school. Wadsworth’s report also noted that the children were “all washed and
dressed in clean and suitable clothes.”

condition of schools to the health of children. The Bryce report stated that of the thirty-one students
discharged from the File Hills school, fifteen of them left dead, and another seven children died within a
few months to three years after going home. Seventy-five percent of the children who appeared on the File
Hills’ discharge roll had died (Milloy, 1999, 91). According to the Paget report, the dormitories were too
cramped. Small poorly ventilated buildings, with insufficient fire escapes, made boarding schools breeding
grounds for tuberculosis and potential fire hazards (Ibid, 83). J. R. Miller (1996, 309-310) also noted the
cramped conditions at File Hills: the school was so cramped that some of the oldest boys were forced to
sleep outside in tents. In 1908, Indian agent William Gordon reported that the school had experienced high
rates of tuberculosis over the year (Saskatchewan Archives Board, R834-32c (3 of 3), “History of File Hills
Indian Reserve: From Annual Reports of Indian Department,” 1879-1940, 42).

14 Saskatchewan Archives Board, “History of File Hills Indian Reserve: From Annual Reports of Indian
Department, 1879-1940,” R834-32c (3 of 3), 1893, 19-20.
15 Ibid, 42.
16 Ibid, 19.
Hugonard and Gillespie also firmly believed in the role of Christianity in the re-education of Aboriginal children, and they emphasised Christian teachings in school curriculum. At a talk to the Regina Canadian Club in 1916, Hugonard stated: “I believe that without Christianity, permanent civilization and progress on the reserve is impossible and the only place most Indian children can get any instruction in this line is at school.”

Hugonard went on to say that the main difference between how Canada and the United States manage their Aboriginal peoples is that Canada does not believe in the American model of separating church and state (see image 4.5). Instead, Canada has realised its continuous need for help from churches. At Qu’Appelle, students received religious training on Sundays and every day during the winter, and the chapel was attended daily.

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17 Saskatchewan Archives Board, R-A5011.
18 Regina Leader, Indian of the West: An Interesting History Given by Father Hugonard before Regina Canadian Club.” 26 May 1916.
The assistant principal and teachers minded specifically to manners and moral training.\textsuperscript{19} Gillespie, likewise, felt Christianity was imperative for educating, socialising, and moralising First Nations. Moral and religious training received extraordinary attention at the File Hills school.\textsuperscript{20} “The Bible,” Gillespie stated, “is carefully studied and memorized and the child is trained to base his ideas of right or wrong on its teachings.”\textsuperscript{21} Students received religious training daily, and they attended Sunday school and a song service every day.\textsuperscript{22}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{filehills.png}
\caption{Father Hugonard with The Feather, 1908.\textsuperscript{23}}
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\textsuperscript{19} Dominion of Canada Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs, 1901, 417.  \\
\textsuperscript{20} Saskatchewan Archives Board, “History of File Hills Indian Reserve: From Annual Reports of Indian Department, 1879-1940,” R834-32c (3 of 3), 1903, 30.  \\
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, 1904, 32.  \\
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, 1902, 28.  \\
\textsuperscript{23} Oliver Brass, personal archive collection.
\end{flushright}
Most importantly, Graham, Hugonard, and Gillespie shared common concerns about the regression of ex-pupils and they all thought the colony was the best strategy to address regression and intervene in ex-pupils’ lives. For Hugonard ex-pupils, given the right resources, could go back to reserves and apply their residential school education for a better life. However, he realised that resources were not readily available and First Nations’ “progress is uncertain after leaving the routine and discipline of the school . . . [as they] depend very much on their environment whether they marry and settle down, or have to live with their parents, who, if pagan, too often exercise a detrimental influence over them.”24 In Hugonard’s view in providing the “special supervision” that ex-pupils received under Graham’s instruction the department had taken initiative to address regression and allow Aboriginal peoples to have “a useful and happy future” as “prosperous” farmers.25 Gillespie also believed that Graham had created “a system of government that better meets the problem of what is to be done with the young people.”26 Gillespie called the colony an “excellent plan,” as it gave boys the possibility that they might ultimately “work on their own farms.” 27 Similarly, girls learned a “definite” occupation: that of homemaker.28 But the construction of the colony provided Graham, Hugonard, and Gillespie with an additional opportunity to intervene in ex-pupils lives by arranging marriages amongst graduates. While this topic is discussed more in the next chapter, their interest in students’ well-being went beyond the walls of residential schools

25 Ibid, 418.
27 Saskatchewan Archives Board, “History of File Hills Indian Reserve: From Annual Reports of Indian Department, 1879-1940,” R834-32c (3 of 3), 1904, 32.
28 Ibid.
to include an active role in the most intimate and personal aspects of ex-pupils’ lives. All three felt a great paternalistic desire to manage and direct First Nations lives as they attended school and then settled on reserves.

Why the Peepeekisis Reserve?

Scholars have not fully hypothesised why Graham chose the Peepeekisis Reserve as the site of the File Hills farm colony, and the topic is not specifically addressed in Canadian government archives. In my view Graham’s selection of the Peepeekisis Reserve was due to four factors. First, the population of the Peepeekisis experienced a significant loss between 1874 and 1898 (the approximate start date of the colony). Between 1884 and 1894, the File Hills agency lost 46 per cent of its population due to migration and death by disease and starvation. The Peepeekisis band saw its population dip to its lowest level in 1895 (population: 76), and it would remain under 81 until Graham’s appointment at the agency. Graham and other government officials may have interpreted this low population to mean that the land was underutilized and thus open to government takeover. Second, the agriculture potential of the land on Peepeekisis, especially the south east corner of the reserve, exceeded the soil quality on the other reserves in the File Hills agency (Okanese, Starblanket, and Little Black Bear; see image

30 “Untitled document” Eleanor Brass papers, file 9, box 2, First Nations University, Regina. The Peepeekisis population varied between 1874 and 1898. Its highest was 146 in 1880, and its two lowest years were 1881 (pop. 52) and 1895 (76). 1881 was most likely not counted properly as the population was 146 in 1880 and 107 in 1882. Between the years of 1887 and 1898, the Peepeekisis population never went over 100. The long-term population decline is most likely due to an aging population on Peepeekisis. When Chief Inspector of Indian Agencies and Reserves, T. P. Wadsworth, visited the Peepeekisis Reserve in 1894, he stated that the band “is composed largely of old women. What men there are are not disposed to do much work. Few, if any, will sow grain” (RG10, volume 3906, file 105722). Very few women were on the reserve who could have children, and those with children faced extremely high child morality rates.
Surveyors and Indian agents regularly noted Peepeekisis’ high-quality soil and its agriculture potential. Third, the File Hills bands were perceived as a threat to stability in the area. After the 1885 North-West Rebellion, the DIA accused File Hills bands of participating in the event and attempted to punish them by placing an Indian agent at the agency to maintain order. Furthermore, when Chief Peepeekisis died in 1889, the department refused to replace him, thus leaving the band without a viable system of governance. The Peepeekisis Reserve, without a Chief or other forms of leadership, was an easy target for government expropriation. While government archives do not state specific reasons, a critical interpretation of these documents gives hints to why Graham selected Peepeekisis which is linked to the vulnerable state of the band at the critical time.

31 See land and soil descriptions in: Saskatchewan Archives Board, R-X26, “Descriptions and Plans of Certain Indian Reserves in the Provinces of Manitoba and the North-West Territories,” 86; Dominion of Canada Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs, 1908, 203; Dominion of Canada Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs, 1909, 196. An occasional prairie fire or drought were the reserve’s worst natural enemies (Saskatchewan Archives Board, James Newby Stilborn, Oral History Project: Adventures on the Westward Trail, R-A 1280).
33 Indian Affairs, RG10, volume 3818, file 57842.
Figure 4.6
Location of File Hills agency within Saskatchewan and the prairie provinces.\textsuperscript{34}

Foundations of the Colony: Transferring Ex-pupils and Government Support

Although Graham’s reports and scholars’ writings about the colony establish its start date in 1901, a more critical reading of documents demonstrates that it was established in 1898. The initial groundwork of the colony can be seen as early as 1897. On 2 July 1897, Graham reported to the DIA that he had been using residential school ex-pupils to make improvements to the agency. The ex-pupils, who were graduates of the Qu’Appelle industrial school and had returned to the File Hills upon graduation, helped build a new tool shed and paint several agency buildings.35 A more explicit example of the colony’s foundations is seen in 1898. Only six months into Graham’s probationary term as Indian agent, ex-pupils started transferring to Peepeekisis. Joseph McNabb (Jose Kah-kee-key-ass) was the first ex-pupil transferred. He was originally from the Petaquakey band but transferred to Peepeekisis after the completion of his studies at Qu’Appelle industrial school.36

The transfer of McNabb particularly challenges the narrative of the colony that Graham and certain officials in the department constantly tried to establish. In the 1911 Annual Report, Graham cited Fred Deiter as the first colonist,37 and in the 1910 Annual Report he indicated that Deiter joined the colony in 1901.38 However, Deiter’s status as the first colonist is not only countered by the transfer of McNabb to Peepeekisis, but

35 W. M. Graham, “Untitled correspondence with the Indian Commissioner of the Department of Indian Affairs,” 2 July 1897, RG10, volume 1400, National Archives of Canada.
36 H. Keith, “Untitled correspondence with Secretary of the Department of Indian Affairs,” 4 November 1897, RG10, volume 3983, file 163969, National Archives of Canada; W. M. Graham, “Untitled Correspondence with Secretary of the Department of Indian Affairs,” 17 January 1898, RG10, file 3983, volume 163969, National Archives of Canada.
38 Dominion of Canada Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs, 1910, 451
remarks made in 1902 by Indian Commissioner David Laird raise further doubt about
Graham’s narrative. Citing Graham’s report on the progress of the ex-pupils after leaving
residential schools, Laird clearly indicates in 1902 that the colony scheme was operating
well before Fred Deiter’s arrival in 1901:

[a] colony of this kind at File Hills has been fairly successful. To
encourage it still more the department last spring had a block of twelve
square miles surveyed into eighty acre lots on Peepeekeesis reserve, where
the land is all that could be desired for farming purposes. Some fifteen ex-
pupil lads have been located on an equal number of these lots and have
made a good beginning. They were assisted by being given horses,
ploughs, harrows and some lumber and hardware for houses, the greater
part of the value of which it is proposed they shall pay back to the
department when their crops warrant it, the money to be used to help
others to make a like start . . . Fred Deiter started to work a year ago and
has forty acres of good wheat and ten acres of oats; he has broken about
fifty acres this spring. F. Dumont started a year ago and has thirty-five
acres of good wheat; he has broken about twenty-five acres of new land.
Jose McNabb and George Little Pine started in three or four years ago;
they have about forty acres of wheat in, twenty-five acres of oats and a
good garden. They have broken about twenty-five acres of new land this
year.39 (emphasis added by author)

Laird’s comments put the start date of the colony in 1898 or 1899, and he indicates that
Joseph McNabb or George Little Pine were actually the first colonists. Graham’s
fluctuating narrative about the start date of the colony is just the beginning of
questionable reports and acts by the Indian agent.

While it is clear Laird knew about the colony, other officials in the department
appeared ignorant about its basic functions, which calls into question how much top DIA
officials knew about the scheme. In 1905, R. P. MacKay of the Presbyterian Church
contacted the DIA about admitting Frank Nataywayninis into the colony. Laird had
earlier rejected the request because he had secured Nataywayninis a grant to farm on his

home reserve of Swan Lake. MacKay pleaded with the DIA by stating that Nataywayninis “does not get on well with his people, and there is much drinking going on . . . His father is anxious that he should marry an uneducated half-breed, while he is attached to another girl in the school. I feel it would be folly to send this boy back there.”

The Superintendent General of Indian Affairs thought it a brilliant idea to bring “anxious and willing” ex-pupils to the colony even if from another reserve. Until then, the superintendent had understood that the colony was only intended for File Hills band members, but he was informed that Graham would receive “good boys” from other reserves if the commissioner agreed. In 1903 and 1904, only five of twelve ex-pupils admitted to the colony were from the File Hills. This document shows much confusion about who was already on the colony, and how it actually functioned. Was the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs unaware that the majority of ex-pupils admitted to the colony were not from the File Hills? This series of documents raises questions about whether all DIA officials were aware of goings on at the colony.

Joseph McNabb’s transfer to Peepeekisis also raises serious questions about the legality of transferring ex-pupils to the colony. On 22 November 1897, the Petaquakey band clearly gave their consent to transfer McNabb. Approximately one month later,

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41 Ibid.
42 Oliver Brass, personal archive collection, Peepeekisis Land Claim, 1 October 2004. Fred Deiter (#44 Okanese), Ben Stonechild (#46 Okanese), Alex Assinibinis (#6 Broken Head River), Marius Peekutch (#55 Black Bear), Philip Jackson (#54 Black Bear), Remi Crow Mocassin (#185 Piapot), George Little Pine (#187 Piapot), John R. Thomas (#90 St. Peter’s), Joseph McKay (#271 St. Peter’s), Stephen Wells (#59 Kakawistahaw), and Isaac Daniels (#30 Mistawasis), Roy Keewatin (#27 Okanese) were all admitted as colonists before 1905.
43 H. Keith, “Untitled correspondence with Secretary of the Department of Indian Affairs,” 22 November 1897, RG10, volume 3983, file 163969, National Archives of Canada.
Secretary J. D. McLean wrote to Graham that Peepeekisis had to consent to the transfer. Graham wrote back to the department on 17 January 1898 and with the claim that that Peepeekisis had given their consent (the signed consent form is not attached to the archive document located in the National Archives). Graham’s letter about transferring of ex-pupils is significant because it demonstrates manipulation and disregard for First Nations sovereignty and traditional forms of decision-making. It was not until four years later that J. A. J. McKenna and McLean exchanged correspondence that ended of the practice of having both bands agree to the transfer. Graham’s manipulation and disregard for First Nations sovereignty as early as 1898 calls many of the early transfers into question.

Conflicts in the colony narrative and questions of legality did not stop DIA officials from supporting the scheme, nor did they blur Graham’s belief that the colony was a proven strategy to address regression. On 4 February 1901, Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Clifford Sifton, cited Graham’s “ability in leading the Indian to become self supporting [sic]” as the reason for his appointment to Indian agent of the Qu’Appelle agency. In March of 1901, Graham’s colony received much needed financial support. Ottawa had ear-marked $2,000 to assist all ex-pupils to settle and start farming, but the majority of this money, $1,500, was given to Graham. Additionally, Ottawa granted

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44 J. D. McLean, “Untitled Correspondence with W. M. Graham,” 28 December 1897, RG10, volume 3983, file 163969, National Archives of Canada.
45 W. M. Graham, “Untitled Correspondence with Secretary of the Department of Indian Affairs,” 17 January 1898, RG10, file 3983, volume 163969, National Archives of Canada.
Graham permission to sub-divide the south east corner of Peepeekisis (see image 4.7). Graham planned to make 80-acre lots out of the sub-divided land for the “purpose of placing our ex-pupils on their own locations.” Graham’s own insistence that the colony was a faultless colonial strategy came in 1907, when he decided to declare the colony a proven system rather than a scheme or experiment:

The experiment started in a very meagre way, as there was a feeling in the Department and I might say held by most officers in the field, that it was only an experiment and might prove a failure. I am happy to say that not only has the colony proved a success, but it has demonstrated beyond doubt that if the same methods were adopted in other parts of the territories, in twenty-five years the Indian population could be converted into thrifty, industrious people.

Laird had referred to the colony as a “scheme” in 1902 and Sifton had called it a “very promising experiment” in 1904, but Graham argued that a new discourse needed to be applied to the colony (chapter 5 will examine the “discourse” of the colony more closely). His affirmation that the colony was no longer an “experiment,” but a proven strategy for addressing regression, subjected the colony to future expansion and many more legal and ethical issues.

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49 A. W. Ponton, “Untitled Correspondence with Secretary of the Department of Indian Affairs,” 30 January 1902, RG10, volume 3960, file 141,977-7, National Archives of Canada; J. A. McKenna, “Untitled Correspondence with J. J. McLean,” 13 February 1902, RG10, volume 3960, file 141,977-7, National Archives of Canada.
50 W. M. Graham, “Untitled Correspondence with David Laird, Indian Commissioner,” 11 April 1902, RG10, volume 3562, reel C-10,099, National Archives of Canada.
51 Saskatchewan Archives Board, “History of File Hills Indian Reserve: From Annual Reports of Indian Department, 1879-1940,” 1907, 37.
52 David Laird, “Untitled Correspondence with Secretary of the Department of Indian Affairs, 30 September 1902, RG10, volume 7768, file 27111-2, National Archives of Canada. He also made a very vague reference to the colony scheme in 1900. See Dominion of Canada Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs, 1900, 288.
53 Clifford Sifton, “Untitled address to House of Commons,” 18 July 1904, M8097 box 1, file 5 Glenbow Museum Archives.
Removing Difficulties: Resistance, Bribing, and Community Riffs

By 1906, the population expansion of the colony began to initiate major social issues on the Peepeekisis Reserve. In 1906, Graham wrote to the DIA that: “all the good farming plots in the File Hills Colony are about taken up and the time has arrived, I think,
when an extension of the survey [needs to be completed] . . .”\textsuperscript{55} The first sub-division in 1902 had already divided the south east corner of Peepeekisis into 96 80-acre lots, but Graham’s proposal for a second sub-division would consume a majority of the land on Peepeekisis. He asked for an additional 120 80-acre lots and 12 120-acre lots, which would leave approximately 7,600 acres for original Peepeekisis band members (see image 4.8)\textsuperscript{56} Graham’s letter to the DIA for a second sub-division also alludes to developing social issues between colonists and non-colonists. He warned the department that a second survey should be completed as quickly as possible as “trouble” was developing between colonists and non-colonists over land. Graham explained that colonists had started ploughing fields outside of the colony boundaries and this was causing friction.\textsuperscript{57} He said that colonists had the right to this land, as they were Peepeekisis band members, but delineating “colony” and “non-colony” spaces would address social issues. In less than a week, Laird gave his support for a second sub-division.\textsuperscript{58} Graham’s and Laird’s logic about the second sub-division is puzzling because an additional sub-division does not address social issues. Rather, it enlarged the colony and furthered Graham’s and Laird’s careers.

\textsuperscript{55} W. M. Graham, “Untitled Correspondence with Secretary of the Department of Indian Affairs,” 9 March 1906, RG10, volume 7768, file 27111-2, National Archives of Canada.
\textsuperscript{57} W. M. Graham, “Untitled Correspondence with David Laird, Indian Commissioner,” 31 March 1906, RG10, volume, 7768, file 27111-2, National Archives of Canada.
\textsuperscript{58} David Laird, “Untitled Correspondence with Secretary of the Department of Indian Affairs,” 4 April 1906, RG10, volume, 7768, file 27111-2, National Archives of Canada.
Image 4.8
Second survey of Peepeekisis, 1906. The box in the eastern part of the reserve outlines the 1902 subdivision, the box in the south west corner outlines the 1906 subdivision, and the box extending across the top of the reserve was the land left over for original members. The construction of the colony divided colonists and original members.\(^59\)

While the 1906 sub-division opened land to expand the colony, Graham used the 1911 agreement to further erode First Nations sovereignty and to counter resistance by colonists. The purpose of the 1911 agreement was to give Graham and the DIA more control of the admission of ex-pupils to the colony. On 18 October 1910, Graham wrote to the DIA about the current system for admitting ex-pupils. Up to then new colonists had been admitted by a vote amongst Peepeekisis band members. Initially, this system of

voting on colonists worked very well for Graham: many original member voters were not interested in the process, and many colonists admitted under Graham’s supervision feared him or were manipulated by him, and thus voted as he wanted them to. In 1910, Graham declared, “there has been quite a lot of opposition and as these Indians, particularly those of the Colony, are seeing the results of their farm work . . . [and] are naturally less inclined to admit others, in whom they have no personal interest.” He also found that there was a “tendency on the part of those young Indians who have been doing well, not to listen so readily to advice as they did when they were in poorer circumstances.” The 1911 agreement would remove these obstacles by offering Peepeekisis band members $20 each to allow the DIA to admit sixty male ex-pupils to the colony without a vote.60 Ex-pupils themselves would pay $50 dollars to settle on the colony. Later, Graham cut the number down to fifty new graduates, with an increased entrance fee of $60.61 On 23 June 1911, Chief Accountant, Duncan Campbell Scott, wrote to the Deputy Superintendent General about funding the agreement:

When I was at File Hills last year Inspector Graham and I discussed the possibility of removing the present difficulty of locating graduates on the Peepeekeesis Reserve as the elder Indians and even the colonists are manifesting a jealous spirit as to the adoption of new members. The payment proposed of $20 per head will be gradually repaid by persons who join the Colony under this Agreement.62

Graham received a cheque the same month to pay each band member $20 with the intention of “removing the difficulties.”63 Graham drafted an agreement and put it up to a

60 W. M. Graham, “Untitled Correspondence with Secretary of the Department of Indian Affairs,” 18 October 1910, RG10, volume 7768, file 27111-2, National Archives of Canada.
61 W. M. Graham, “Untitled Correspondence with Secretary of the Department of Indian Affairs,” 20 October 1910, RG10, volume 7768, file 27111-2, National Archives of Canada.
62 D. C. Scott, “Untitled Correspondence with Deputy Superintendent General of the Department of Indian Affairs,” 23 June 1911, RG10, volume 7768, file 27111-2, National Archives of Canada.
vote amongst all Peepeekisis band members in July. It failed: 20 to 14.\textsuperscript{64} The unsuccessful vote shook Graham: “The result was a surprise to me as I was under the impression until a few hours before the vote was taken that the majority would be in favor of the agreement.”\textsuperscript{65} Graham blamed the failed vote entirely on Joe Ironquil, saying that it was a “serious mistake” when he was admitted to the colony. Graham said that he heard Ironquil, who had started a dance movement that last winter, approached Elders and influenced them to vote against the agreement. Another vote was scheduled for 29 July. No petition for a second vote has been found, and the events that led to a second vote are not known, but Graham stated that two or three community members approached him about having another vote after the first one failed.\textsuperscript{66} The agreement was not changed from its original draft. It passed: 23 to 10. The “difficulties” were now officially removed to dramatically expand the colony with no voice of the Peepeekisis band.

Over the next twenty-five years, the 1911 agreement gave the DIA the power to add whomever they wanted to the colony, and its growth raised further questions about its legitimacy. Graham’s own Annual Reports are particularly telling: between 1910 and 1916, the population increased from 80 to 163.\textsuperscript{67} These numbers are not just trivial statistics about population growth, but allude to bigger issues about treaty and ethics. Throughout the construction of the colony, the department did not add additional land to the reserve as colonists settled there. Treaty 4 had stipulated one square mile was supposed to be reserved for every five persons. Reserve size, therefore, could be

\textsuperscript{64} W. M. Graham, “Untitled Correspondence with Secretary of the Department of Indian Affairs,” 24 July 1911, RG10, volume 7768, file 27111-2, National Archive of Canada.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{66} The Indian Claims Commission: Peepeekisis First Nation Inquiry: File Hills Colony Claim (2004) discusses the circumstances surrounding the second vote more.
\textsuperscript{67} Dominion of Canada Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs, 1910, 450; Ibid, 1916, 471.
increased or deceased with population fluxes. On Peepeekisis, as the government willingly supported the transferring of ex-pupils, the land base became short. Original members and colonists alike were deprived of an adequate land base (see figure 4.9).

Figure 4.9
Peepeekisis population figures between 1874 and 1936

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68 "Untitled document" Eleanor Brass papers, file 9, box 2, First Nations University, Regina.
The promises of land in Treaty 4 were disregarded to construct the colony. Furthermore, Graham, and officials of the DIA were aware that the colony created divisions between original members and colonists, and also amongst colonists. It was the government’s ethical and legal duty to do no harm but they created and exacerbated land and population problems by expanding the colony in every way they could.

A “Successful” Experiment?

While Graham’s and the Department of Indian Affairs’ actions can not be justified as right or ethical, the colony did allow some colonists to achieve a standard of living unlike that on any other reserve.69 In Graham’s 1914 Annual Report, he singled out Joe Ironquil, John Bellegarde, Fred Deiter, and Francis Dumont for their extraordinary crop. Ironquil harvested 9,578 bushels of grain under 312 acres; Bellegarde harvested 9,662 bushels of grain under 280 acres; Deiter harvested 6,388 bushels of grain under 200 acres; and Dumont grew 6,776 acres of grain under 246 acres.70 This amount of grain production is impressive. J. R. Thomas, Ben Stonechild, Clifford Pinay, Moise Bellegard, J. McKay and F. Fisher were also mentioned by Graham for their crops.71 In 1911, Graham also reported that colonists had hired two or three non-Aboriginal men as hired-hands.72 Furthermore Graham regularly wrote that colonists were as successful as non-Aboriginal farmers in the area. As Carter pointed out, many colonists had a higher standard of living than people on most other reserves and opportunities—access to farm

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70 Dominion of Canada Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs, 1914, 454-455
71 Ibid, 1914, 455.
72 Ibid, 1911, 550.
equipment, land, loans, etc.— unavailable to other Aboriginal peoples. The colony may have had a role in creating a strong sense of community, although a causal influence in the activities of the colonists is impossible to gauge. During World War I, although First Nations were exempt from service under the Military Service Act, many young men volunteered. Sadly, many died or were injured (see image 4.10). The File Hills reserves were also very active in raising funds for the Red Cross. Many colony descendants also went on to assume leadership positions in their own communities: Walter Deiter, the son of Fred Deiter, served as Chief of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians and was the founding president of the National Indian Brotherhood. Eleanor Brass, the daughter of Fred Deiter, was an accomplished writer who helped establish and run the Indian and Métis Friendship Centre in Regina and Peace River. Ernest Goforth was elected the second vice-president of the North American Indian Brotherhood. Kenneth Strath Moore was an accomplished hockey player who is thought to be the first Aboriginal person to receive an Olympic gold medal in Canada in 1932. Oliver Brass was the first status Indian in Saskatchewan to obtain a doctoral degree. As recently as 1988, the Peepeekisis Reserve had a higher than average rate of high school graduates entering university.

75 Patricia Anne Deiter, “Eleanor Brass,” 2004a, 34-35.
77 Jennifer Rattray, “Kenneth Strath Moore (1910-1982)”
79 Patricia Deiter, 1988).
The colony was also a very successful colonial showpiece for the Canadian government. It provided international dignitaries with positive impressions about how the country managed Aboriginal peoples. Visitors to the colony, such as Canadian Governor Earl Grey (see image 4.11), the Duke of Connaught, and the Secretary of the American Board of Indian Commissioners, Frederick Abbott, were toured through the showpiece to see how Canada re-educated and re-socialised Aboriginal peoples to Euro-American norms. Many visitors left praising the colony’s success. Abbott, for example, returned to the U.S. and argued that the Americans needed a similar approach to Graham’s colony. Grey was so keen on Graham and his experiment that he donated a

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80 Oliver Brass, personal archive collection.
shield to be hung in the home of the colonist who grew the most crops. Over the years, Grey and Graham became close friends and confidants. In 1911, when Graham wanted to resign because he felt the DIA did not appreciate him or his work, Grey contended that Graham had proven that First Nations can be “feeder to and not a sucker of the wealth of the Dominion.” Believers in colony did not waiver in their support for Graham or his scheme.

Image 4.11
Governor General, Earl Grey, visiting Peepeekisis and being greeted by colonists and Graham. Earl Grey (driving car), William Morris Graham (standing in front of the car), and Fred Deiter (reading address).

84 Earl Grey, “Untitled correspondence with W. M. Graham,” 6 November 1911, M8097 file 1, box 1, Glenbow Museum Archives. The collection of letters written between Graham and Grey provides a very interesting look into their relationship.
85 Saskatchewan Archives Board, R-A5019.
The media and some academics also praised Graham and his colony in numerous articles about them.\textsuperscript{86} In 1921, the \textit{Free Press Prairie Farmer} claimed that Graham was famous continent-wide and had taught visitors from Washington “how it is done.”\textsuperscript{87} Whenever Indians under his guidance participated in agriculture exhibits, developed a brass band, donated money, or took a visible step toward “civilisation,” the achievements were heralded to Ottawa and the press. Historian John Hawkes wrote in \textit{The Story of Saskatchewan and Its People} in 1924 that “Here is the solution of [sic] the Indian problem, which, as it is gradually applied to the whole of the reservation, will do more to raise the Indian perhaps than any one thing that has yet been attempted. No Indian Commissioner more thoroughly deserved his promotion than Mr. W. M. Graham.”\textsuperscript{88} Most of the government and media saw the colony as a remarkable strategy in Indian policy, but those who endured its effects did not agree.

While many visitors to the colony praised Graham’s experience, the controlled landscape of the colony did receive criticism. Graham’s long-time friend, Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance, a writer, actor, and entertainer who was later attacked as a fraudulent Indian, questioned the scheme. The Chief visited the colony in 1922, uncovered the exaggerated nature of Graham’s claims and argued that Graham had scandalously “pulled the wool over” the eyes of the superintendent general of Indian Affairs.\textsuperscript{89} The anthropologist, Mandelbaum, was also unimpressed: the colony looked good on paper, but it was a money sink: there were only three or four good farmers amongst all the

\textsuperscript{86} In particular, see the newspaper clippings in the William Morris and Helena Violette Graham collection, M8097 box 3, file 10-11, Glenbow Museum Archives.
\textsuperscript{87} Free Press Prairie Farmer, “A Man and His Work,” 5 January 1921, M8097 Box 3, File 10, William Morris and Helena Violette Graham, Glenbow Museum Archives.
\textsuperscript{88} John Hawkes, \textit{The Story of Saskatchewan and Its People}, 1924, 104.
\textsuperscript{89} Donald Smith, \textit{Chief Buffalo Child Long Lance: The Glorious Impostor}, 1999, 139.
graduates of the schools. Edward Ahenakew, a widely-known Cree Anglican clergyman and writer, said that while he had boasted of the colonists’ success, their achievement was not a “natural development.” Their success was the result of intense control, which might be used as fruitfully with any Indian, whether an ex-pupil of residential school or not.

**Challenging the Colony**

Texts and oral history show that some colonists challenged the colony’s agenda and Graham’s power. Many did not entirely abandon their cultural practices, nor did they simply accept oppression. Eleanor Brass wrote about going to “secret fiddle dances held in private homes” as a child. Although alcohol-free, the dances were a source of pleasure in part because they were forbidden. Joseph Ironquill, a highly successful colony farmer, regularly lauded in reports to Ottawa, was nevertheless a constant “nuisance” to Graham as he started a movement to bring dance to the colony. While Graham was away, residents tried to hold a dance that was stopped by the clerk and farm instructor.

Power on the colony was not unilateral and there are signs that colonists were aware of their own power. Some scholars have noted how colonised peoples adopt and turn colonial strategies to fight those who have oppressed them. Fanon persuasively argued that colonial violence reinforces aggressiveness, and when colonised peoples are

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90 David Mandelbaum, 1934, 2.
92 Eleanor Brass 1987, 13.
organised, violence can become an expression of power.95 Resistance by the Aboriginal peoples of Canada is well-documented and, as Michael Ripmeester argues, accounts of such resistance in official documents “point to a remarkable account of survival.”96 Brian Osborne noted how the Kingston/Bay of Quinte Mississauga resisted assimilation and conversion to Christianity between 1783 and 1837 by moving into areas of their homeland where they could not be counted or monitored.97 On the colony, Eleanor Brass described an encounter between her father, Fred Deiter and Graham. Graham had criticised Deiter, who retaliated by threatening to abandon the farm. Graham immediately placated Deiter and promised to leave him alone.98 Similarly, Ironquil probably knew that his successful farm would allow him a measure of independence. In this bilateral power game, Graham’s reputation was at the mercy of the colonists, who recognised that their resistance could be used strategically to undermine the machinery of the colony.

In Ottawa, the mixed messages from the colony created ambivalence. In 1917, the Deputy Superintendent General wrote that Graham was “labouring under the delusion that he is indispensable.” His resignation would not have a “disastrous effect on the Indians,” and it might in fact benefit the DIA.99 Others, such as Sifton, would have disagreed. In 1918, Sifton stated “Graham has been given the widest authority of any man in the Government Service, either inside or out, and in my opinion, he is the only man in any of the services that I would consent to give the powers to, and if anybody can make

95 Frantz Fanon, 1963, 70-71.
99 Duncan Campbell Scott “Correspondence to Dr. Roche,” 4 September 1917, RG10, volume 4070, file 427,063-A, National Archives of Canada; also see E Brian Titley, “W. M. Graham: Indian Agent Extraordinaire,” 1983.
the plan a success, Graham is the man.” An unparalleled reputation for his work with Aboriginal peoples being one of his primary objectives, the contradictory messages from Ottawa worried Graham, who contemplated resigning his post on numerous occasions. 

Graham’s reputation amongst Aboriginal people was less mixed. John Tootooosis considered Graham “hard” on Indians in eastern Saskatchewan, claiming that many were “afraid” of him. Colonists were at best ambivalent. According to Graham’s memoirs, an obviously slanted source, many soldiers wrote to him about their experiences and feelings, demonstrating a “very friendly, albeit respectful, relationship.” Brass described Graham as “quite strict at times” but also as a man who let colonists conduct their own affairs. In a later interview, she added that many people thought he was a “dictator” and “cruel” to younger people. Peepeekisis community member, Mildred Pugh, credits Graham with saving lives by building a hospital and showing colonists how to work hard and keep house. Some residents of the reserve were much more negative. According to Stewart Koochicum “Graham was the judge. He was everything. He could send them to jail without even going to court.” “To oppose Graham,” said Alex Nokusis “meant a jail sentence for thirty days, starvation or whatever he had in mind for you . . . Graham was a dictator of the worst kind.” Regardless of whether Graham was respected or not by colonists and reserve residents, not a single Aboriginal person attended his funeral, no one defended him when his job was terminated.

100 Samuel McDougall 1918 “Correspondence to William Morris Graham,” 4 May 1918, M8097, file 1, box 1, Glenbow Museum Archives.
101 William Morris Graham, “Correspondence to Earl Grey,” 27 September 1911, M8097, file 1, box 1, Glenbow Museum Archives.
103 Ibid.
105 Saskatchewan Archives Board, R 834-32c-(1 of 3).
106 Indian Claims Commission, 2004, 16.
by the DIA, and a memorial erected for him on the reserve was later demolished by First
Nations (see image 4.12). Peepeekisis community member, Greg Brass, put it most
directly when he said: “Some Indians are going to hell just to see Graham again.”

Image 4.12
“Unveiling of Memorial to Commissioner and Mrs. Graham, File Hills Agency,
Saskatchewan.” The plague reads: “In memory of Commissioner W.M. Graham & Mrs.
Graham who gave a life long service to the Indians of the Plains. Erected by the Indians
of File Hills Agency.” Joe Iron Quill standing left foreground, W. M. Graham standing
right foreground.

107 There is now little memory of the memorial amongst residents of the area. There is no record of when it
was demolished, or by whom, but Eleanor Brass recounted its demolition by First Nations in an interview
with Patricia Deiter, 1988). Also see Evelyn Poitras, To Colonize a People: The File Hills Farm Colony,
109 Glenbow Archives, NA-3454-49.
While the construction and administration of the colony is clearly visible in Canadian government archives and some scholars’ work, the challenge of the colony by Peepeekisis band members and its ultimate demise need more explanation. Legal petitions by Peepeekisis community members in the 1950s ultimately ended the colony but by the 1930s, Annual Reports had stopped giving exclusive attention to it. After Graham’s forced retirement in 1942, there was no one tirelessly promoting the colony. References in government documents did not disappear until the late 1940s.110 Most importantly, the colony’s legitimacy was challenged in 1952 when ten original Peepeekisis members, led by Ernest Goforth, filed a petition against the membership of twenty-five band members.111 In all, the petition implicated approximately 300 colonists as “illegal” members of the reserve.112 As noted earlier, Peepeekisis band members initially voted colonists onto the reserve. According to Goforth’s petition, over time band members took less interest in meetings and the later colonists took over the colony’s affairs. Many of the colonists who came after 1911, the petition charged, were part of the problematic agreement between Ottawa and the Peepeekisis community that witnessed money exchanged for votes.113 In 1954, the Trelenberg Commission held a four-day hearing to consider the appeal initiated by Goforth against colonists brought in both before and after 1911. Evidence presented at the Commission was deferred until 1956, when Judge J.H. McFadden held an eight-day hearing. McFadden ruled that colonists were legal members of the Peepeekisis band.

111 Patricia Deiter, personal archive collection. The names of Selina Denomie, Moise Bellegarde, David Bird, Joseph Ironquhil, Roy Keewatin, Francis Dumont, Henry McLeod, Mary Brass, Clifford Pinay, Magloire Bellegarde, William Ward, Noel Pinay, Prisque LaCree, Alex Denomie, Albert Daniels, William Bellegarde, James Stonechild, Pat LaCree, Campbell Swanson, Norman Keewatin, Fred Deiter, the widow of Joe McKay, John Thomas and Mark Ward were all challenged as well as their families.
112 “Untitled correspondence” Eleanor Brass’ papers, file 30, First Nations University, Regina.
113 Patricia Deiter, personal archive collection.
The colony, from its beginning to its end, created great divisions including amongst colonists. Canada government archives are not adequate sources to understand how the colony troubled identity, community membership, and Indian status in ways that shape relationships within the Peepeekisis community today. The McFadden hearing may have determined the legal position of colonists in the community, but the judgement did not resolve tensions. The colony’s effects cannot be isolated to the past as its repercussions are still lived out daily at Peepeekisis. Before considering present-day legacies in Chapters 6 and 7, I consider in more detail the spatial and environmental strategies employed in the colony’s attempt to “better” Aboriginal people.

114 See *Indian Claims Commission: Peepeekisis First Nation Inquiry: File Hills Colony Claim*, 2004. This inquiry is particularly important for engaging with oral histories and government documents to show how the colony created frictions within the community that yet have to be resolved through specific land claims.
“Blood”\(^1\) and Controlled Environments

Chapter 5

“Graham called the colony an ‘experiment’ . . . so he experimented with people.”

(Ben Stonechild, interviewed by C Drew Bednasek, 2007)

“A very promising experiment is being made by Mr. Graham, the inspector of the Qu’Appelle agencies, who has been most successful in bringing about a better state of affairs amongst the Indians under his charge. He has made good practical farmers out of them; they raised 65,000 bushels of wheat last year; we are buying cattle from them for supplying other reserves; they are most successful, and we have ceased the distribution of supplies amongst them. Mr. Graham has adopted this plan: He has set aside locations on certain portions of the reserve, and he encourages the young men and the young women who come from the schools to marry and settle down upon these locations. He endeavours to see that they are not interfered with by the rest of the Indians . . . Mr. Graham has been most successful in this experiment.”

(House of Commons papers, 18 July 1904, 6956 in M8097 box 1, file 5, William Morris and Helena Violette Graham, Glenbow Archives)

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, debates in Canada concerning colonialism, science, race, and morality engaged the biological sciences, environmental sciences, and social purity movements in a manner that generated much public interest within Canadian society. A “betterment” discourse ensued, promulgating

\(^1\) I do not wish to reproduce racialised language of the past by using the term “blood.” Rather, the term is strictly referring to the influence of eugenics in shaping Canadian Indian policy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
scientific and moral intervention in people’s lives to save the country’s moral character by protecting the Euro-American “race” from degeneration. The conflation of these concerns regarding social purity, biological/heredity sciences, and environment sciences gave rise to eugenics- or euthenics-like thinking under the umbrella term “betterment.”

Betterment discourses significantly shaped Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) policy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although scholars have examined the eugenics movement in Canada, scholarship dedicated to its impact on Aboriginal peoples is sparse. Similarly, modern scholars have almost ignored euthenics, whilst discussing social purity movements primarily in the context of Europeans and Euro-Americans. Cole Harris and Matthew Hannah considered how the introduction of reserves and reservations sought to instil ideologies of private property, and promote discipline while exerting control, but geographers have yet to examine how discourse on heredity and environment influenced DIA policies. In other disciplines, some scholars have examined the implications, largely ignored by geographers, of domestic space dedicated to the re-education and re-socialisation of Aboriginal peoples in North America. This chapter seeks to expand this discourse, focusing on the File Hills colony to explore the links between the biological, environmental and social realms.

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The prevalence of assimilationist thought and policy in nineteenth century Canada that sought to eliminate Aboriginal identities and stewardship of the land permitted a further discourse of “vanishing.” The terms “social genocide” and “apartheid” have entered recent scholarship to highlight the brutality of these colonial strategies. When the DIA realised in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that total assimilation or extermination of Aboriginal peoples was neither realistic nor achievable, subtle changes in policy language and colonial strategies refocused on improving genetics, environments, and morals through re-education and re-socialisation. Betterment, an extension of assimilationist thinking dating back to the 1830s, adopted, consciously or not, the scientific discourse of eugenics and euthenics.

The construction of the File Hills farm colony provides a clear illustration of the influence of betterment discourses on Indian Affairs policy. The colony’s founder, Indian agent William Morris Graham, attempted to substantiate DIA policy by monitoring closely the lives of Aboriginal peoples as they moved from residential schools to reserve agriculture. Graham's experiment selected students for their intelligence from surrounding residential schools, favouring those of mixed white and Aboriginal blood, to settle in Euro-American-style houses, cultivate crops, attend church, and live a “civilised” life, well removed from reserve influences. Graham kept the colony under constant surveillance: Indian agents frequently visited homes, and residents had a list of rules forbidding many Aboriginal cultural expressions. Intervention was key to colony


6 See Olive Patricia Dickason, Canada’s First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times, 2002, 203. The genealogy of re-education and re-socialisation, at least in the Canadian context, dates back to the 1830s
betterment. The intimate lives of colonists were manipulated to control and shape gender, sexuality, health, family structure, and colonists’ interaction with public and private spaces.

**Betterment Discourses and Spatial Colonial Strategies**

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed significant changes in Canada’s social and cultural fabric. During this transitional age, dramatic growth in population, finance, industry, and urban centres challenged the ideas behind civilisation, colonialism, race, and morality. A new aggressive phase of imperialism during the Victorian era left many Europeans struggling with their own “civilised” identity and ill-equipped to appreciate other peoples’ cultural values. Concerns over anti-social behaviour and the dangers of cross-cultural contact ignited fears of racial ‘suicide’ and “degeneration.” Many educated Canadians, including teachers, doctors, and clergy, instigated projects designed to raise standards of morality throughout Canadian society, whilst scientists, social commentators, and government officials sought new methods to improve human biology and environmental conditions to benefit all.

From the late nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century, the pseudo-science of eugenics was influential in Europe and North America. Francis Galton’s work in eugenics called for more direct intervention in human breeding. Galton hoped science would give “the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of

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8 Mark Francis, 1998, 55.
10 John P. Radford and Deborah Park, 1995, 74-77
prevailing speedily over the less suitable.”¹¹ Breeding was about ‘quality’ and should not be left to individuals or chance. “The question,” to quote Angus McLaren, “was not if some survived, but who survived; the process of selection, not elimination, had to be controlled.”¹² Social observers argued that racial characteristics could and should be improved.¹³

Euthenics in the early twentieth century represented a modern and material development of environmental science. Neo-Lamarckian theory held that environmental factors altered behavioural and cultural patterns, which would then shape characteristics passed to offspring.¹⁴ For Ellen Richards, who first used the term in 1910, euthenics was the “betterment of living conditions, through conscious endeavour, for the purpose of securing efficient human beings.”¹⁵ Whilst eugenics promoted race improvement through breeding, euthenics attempted to improve racial character through environment. Euthenics, Richards argued, unlike eugenics, required no further scientific investigation: it could provide environmental change and hygiene immediately.¹⁶ The disciplinary foundations of euthenics were sanitary science, home economics, and education, directed to increasing human efficiency through relating education and science to life, ultimately achieving long-term genetic improvement.¹⁷

¹¹ Francis Galton in Daniel J. Kevles, In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity, 1985, ix.
¹³ Ibid, 7.
¹⁶ Ellen H. Richards, 1977, viii.
¹⁷ Ibid, ix.
Within Canada, Aboriginal peoples became the target of betterment discourses. The myth of the dying Indian (both physically and culturally) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries ignited interest in the betterment discourses that were shaping colonial interventionist strategies to improve Aboriginal peoples’ blood (through marriage), educational status, homes, health, and use of spaces.

Betterment discourses demonstrate how colonialism worked on as well as in colonised people.\(^{18}\) Normalising the body through systems concentrated on the family, sexuality, domestic and public spaces, health, religion, training, disciplining, and surveillance, involved making the colonised body, its surface and interior, an object of science.\(^{19}\) Betterment discourses underpinned the development and colonisation of Canada’s prairie west. Betterment thinking had significant impact on non-Aboriginals, but the discourses most profoundly affected government policies aimed at Aboriginal peoples through the Department of Indian Affairs.

**Spatial and Environmental Strategies of Colonialism on Canada’s Prairie West**

After an initially open-door approach to populating western Canada with European immigrants, immigration policy became more selective, labelling certain races and ethnicities as “preferred” and “non-preferred.” Concern over immigrants had arisen as early as the 1880s in Alberta.\(^{20}\) James S. Woodsworth’s *Strangers Within Our Gates* created an elaborate ranked classification of national and ethnic groups based on a

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\(^{19}\) Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1977, 296.

combination of geographical, physiological, and moral criteria. Under the Laurier government, the immigration of three million people between 1896 and 1914, gave rise to nativism and a desire for greater control over who should be admitted to Canada. As Minister of the Interior, Clifford Sifton was extremely successful in securing large numbers of immigrants, but his successor, Frank Oliver, chose to select for “quality” in immigrants. Immigrants were constructed as ‘strangers’ creating their own Canada—not necessarily the Canada that less recent arrivals wanted. Some ethnic groups (especially in the Qu’Appelle Valley of Saskatchewan) created utopian communities that advocated alcohol temperance and social harmony, but importantly did not adhere to Euro-American notions of individualistic homesteading.

Betterment sciences had already begun to inform the policies by which the government proposed to populate and develop the terra incognita of western Canada. Canadian government legislation, such as the Gradual Civilizing Act of 1857 and the Indian Act of 1876, provided frameworks for betterment, but also sought to exterminate Aboriginal status through legislation. The Gradual Civilization Act, although largely unsuccessful in destroying Indian identity through property ownership and enfranchisement, nevertheless laid the foundation for the Indian Act’s definition of who is and who is not Indian, which would cause great friction later. For Aboriginal peoples of the prairie west, colonial strategies were particularly oppressive. As we saw in Chapter 3, the signing of numbered treaties (1871-1877), which were intended to be a working

relationship in which First Nations would share their land in exchange for reserves, education, annual payments, and hunting and fishing rights, soon resulted in exploitation. Starvation occurred in the prairie west as early as the mid-1870s because the government did not fulfill its treaty obligations, deliberately targeting the Aboriginal body through control of food rations. Peoples of Treaty 4, who signed partly because of their disappearing food source, the bison, had not received the promised farm equipment six years after signing; they were starving, sick, and ill-dressed for a tough winter.25 Blackfoot Chief Old Sun and Sarcee Chief Bull Head reported that their people sold their rifles and horses and resorted to eating dogs, gophers, and mice.26 Some rations that were delivered may have been spoiled: Piapot claimed that the food was causing dysentery and killing his people.27 When rations were not spoiled, the government distributed an inadequate calorific quantity.28 Peoples who did not sign treaties, received no rations.29 Some bands, like Little Pine’s, eventually had to agree to sign because their people were dying. Maureen Lux has argued that the government allowed starvation to occur at Fort Walsh as a “cynical and deliberate plan” to pressure the Cree to leave the area so it could be developed.30 Indian Commissioner Edgar Dewdney targeted the Cree leadership: “I know they are not getting enough flour but I like to punish them a little. I will have to increase their rations, but not much.”31 Dewdney combined biological and moral strategies. He was appointed Indian Commissioner in 1879 with responsibility to initiate

26 Maureen Lux, 2001, 35.
27 Ibid, 39.
28 Ibid, 38.
31 Ibid, 40. Also see Arthur J. Ray, The Canadian Fur Trade in the Industrial Age (1990, 41-42) for more on starvation of First Nations in the prairie west following the decline of the fur trade.
the Indian farm program. His assistant, Hayter Reed, had farm instructors and agents implement a “work for rations” policy. Reed believed this program was fundamental to shaping moral and productive citizens. Starvation, sickness, and inadequate distribution of food rations continued into the 1890s. In 1894, T. P. Wadsworth investigated a rash of cattle killing in the Treaty 4 region. Indians repeatedly told him that they were not getting enough food. Chief Peepeekisis’s widow admitted: “Yes I killed three of the cattle with an axe. Every time that I went over to the Agent to ask for grub he didn’t give me any, then I killed the cattle.” Moostoosahpe claimed the “Government does not do the right thing with us. The Agent don’t get enough food to give. He only gets a little. We kill our cattle when we are starving.” Yellow Bird killed a cow when his wife was vomiting blood and the Indian agent had refused his request for food. Vic Satzewich argues that cattle killing by First Nations in Alberta was a common reaction to severe starvation, demonstrating resistance to the government’s coercive Indian policy.

After the North-West Rebellion of 1885, Aboriginal peoples again experienced intense colonial strategies of surveillance, discipline, and cultural destruction. The government punished Aboriginal peoples of the prairie west for their role in the uprising. The Cree suffered most, as their horses, guns, rations, and carts were impounded and annuity payments suspended. Prairie west First Nations were subjected to a pass system proposed by Hayter Reed in 1885 to curb Indian movement after the Rebellion. Passes

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32 Maureen Lux, 2001, 35 and 42.
33 T. P. Wadsworth, “Correspondence to Indian Commissioner,” 5 May 1894, RG 10, volume 3906, file 105722, National Archives of Canada.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
38 Olive Patricia Dickason, 2002, 293.
were intended to prevent further uprisings, keep Aboriginal peoples out of towns and villages, and prevent them from attending Sun Dances. In 1886, books of passes were sent out to Indian agencies and distributed to farm instructors. Initially, Aboriginal individuals obtained a pass by presenting a recommendation letter from a prospective white employer to an Indian agent. As the system progressed, First Nations were required to carry passes for all off-reserve activities such as fishing, hunting, shopping, and visiting another reserve or a child in school. Pass violations usually resulted in withheld food rations or privileges. Because it interfered with some treaty rights, and therefore rested on weak legal ground, North-West Mounted Police eventually refused to enforce the pass system, as they feared it would destroy their credibility in Aboriginal communities. The system evolved into a scheme to give the appearance of control by monitoring movement rather than curbing mobility. Arthur Ray argued that the Canadian government intensified its assimilation strategies immediately after the Rebellion by targeting Aboriginal cultural institutions and reinforcing attempts to “re-educate” Aboriginal children.

The government’s most important betterment strategy was the education of the prairie west’s Aboriginal peoples. Before Confederation, the Bagot Commission (1842) established a policy aimed at teaching agricultural skills and individual land ownership by placing young Aboriginal children in boarding schools. After Confederation, Sir John A. Macdonald’s government commissioned Nicholas Flood Davin to tour American

Indian schools. The U.S. experience profoundly influenced Davin’s thinking: his 1879 official government report initiated a larger scale systematic strategy for “bettering” Aboriginals through industrial schools.44

Davin’s report paid keen attention to the application of betterment sciences in the schools, introducing an early infusion of biological racism.45 Davin, influenced by the ideas of popular eugenics, held that “hybrid” races (especially mixtures of American Indians with Anglo-Saxons and Celts) would produce more intelligent people. He warned, however, that hybrid people in the early stages of development, not necessarily civilisable for several generations, might prove incapable of grasping nationalism.46 In 1906, P.H. Bryce, then chief medical officer, who also considered hybrid races beneficial, wrote that the introduction of white blood would suppress nomadic habits and increase intelligence in Aboriginal peoples.47

Davin’s report also emphasised the importance of environmental or spatial aspects in the construction of residential schools. In the United States, the Carlisle Industrial School in Pennsylvania was housed in a former military fort. Its external appearance symbolised military might while its internal spatial design coerced students into

44 Ibid, 23.
45 Mark Francis, 1998, 76-77.
46 Ibid; also see Nicholas Flood Davin, “Report on Industrial Schools for Indians and Half-Breeds,” 1879. Davin’s industrial school report was not the only instance where his popular eugenics thinking appeared. As Ramsay Cook argued, government official, social commentators, and scientist were informed by language of pseudo-sciences and social purity. Davin ideas and policy recommendations best express this influence. In a speech titled “Culture and Practical Power,” given at Landsdowne College in 1889, Davin’s pseudo-sciences views are most clearly seen. Davin sees humans as different from animal in that they can be “an object of cultivation and improvement” (1889, 6). Education gives us practical knowledge, but it is sciences that “raises man high” (Ibid, 10 and 11) However, Davin’s most telling words come at the end of the speech when he states: “I find I have used the word ‘evolution.’ We hear nothing but evolution to-day. Think you Darwin’s work is the work of a Dry-as-dust scientist? No indeed! It is a true work of the imagination, a magnificent dream—an epic of development . . . [that] fits in with a noble conception of a divine order” (Ibid). Davin’s own words show that his thinking was shaped by pseudo-sciences.
47 Dominion of Canada Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs, 1906, 311.
regimentation and discipline.\textsuperscript{48} Carlisle was not the only school to use former military facilities, nor was it the only school to use spatial design to achieve cultural transformation. The Phoenix Industrial School was built ‘geometrically . . . incorporating such features as parade grounds . . . unabashedly designed to convey a sense closer to regimentation than to mere “orderliness.”’\textsuperscript{49} Although Canadian schools used military-style organisation less frequently, some designed dormitories as barracks bays, the main building was generally impressive looking, and the property was usually fenced.\textsuperscript{50} Typically, schools confined children in small, cramped rooms where they could be observed by a single staff member. The schools’ spatial layouts forced alien Euro-American constructions of discipline, morality, time, space regimentation, gender divisions, language, and work ethics upon the children.

Having captured and displaced the body from the familiar places of family, home, and culture, betterment strategy in residential schools targeted Aboriginal children’s embodied expressions of culture. In the name of “cleanliness, sameness, regularity, and order,” physical appearance and personal identity were denied as staff bathed children, cut their hair, dressed them in Euro-American uniforms, and gave them English names.\textsuperscript{51} Dressing and grooming, judged as visible indicators of integration, were used by colonial agents to demonstrate success to their superiors. Canada’s extensive collection of before and after photographs of Aboriginal children illustrates the transformation and break with

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid, 24.
the past, showing images of traditionally dressed Indian parents standing by or behind their newly groomed, “well attired, healthy-looking” children.\textsuperscript{52}

Many Canadian residential schools in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries segregated boys and girls, further isolating the children from their familial environments and undermining their social identities. Boys, “innately attuned to vigorous, strenuous, and perhaps even dangerous activities” were taught labourers’ skills, while girls, with their “inherently delicate nature,” learned vocational skills, deemed subordinate to those of the boys, that placed their duties in the home.\textsuperscript{53}

Directly related to Aboriginal education, the government’s nineteenth and twentieth century betterment strategy instigated policies designed to encourage Aboriginal peoples to adopt agriculture, especially in the prairie west.\textsuperscript{54} In the late nineteenth century, the Canadian government’s plan to populate the prairies with white settlers centred socially, culturally, and economically on the family farm as the ideal social unit.\textsuperscript{55} Aboriginal peoples were subjected to this family ordering. Many schools tried to arrange marriages between students before they left school.\textsuperscript{56} Sarah Carter argued that the institutions of monogamous marriage and patriarchal nuclear family were used to reshape concepts of gender. The government wanted wives to be obedient and submissive and to place them under the power and leadership of men. Indian agents interfered in Aboriginal peoples’ personal lives by arranging marriages, denying permission for marriages, dispensing advice on marriage, preventing couples from separating, returning

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid, 222.
\textsuperscript{54} J. R. Miller, \textit{Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens}, 2000, 269.
runaway wives, and attempting to break up marriages regarded as illegitimate. In 1890, Father Hugonard, head of the Qu’Appelle industrial school, was reprimanded by Indian commissioner Hayter Reed for allowing the marriage of a female student to a “not-so-educated” male without permission from the DIA. Alongside policies regarding marriage, ongoing betterment aimed at fully integrating Aboriginal peoples as sedentary farmers through settlement on reserve land restructured according to Western thinking.

On reserve, the condition of Aboriginal peoples’ homes became a means of measuring betterment. Geographers such as Cole Harris and Matthew Hannah have noted how reservations and reserves, by destroying nomadic culture and spatially restricting First Nations, contributed to Indian Affairs policy. As these authors point out, the reserves were integral to a larger socio-spatial imposition, including mapping, naming, and numbering, that profoundly undermined Aboriginal society. On the File Hills agency, this socio-spatial policy invaded the most intimate place, the home. The 1890 Annual Report for the File Hills emphasised separate sleeping rooms, the development of a second storey, and flooring. A year later, the Annual Report was considerably augmented to include grain yields, number of cattle, births, deaths, how many children attended school, and a census (which was broken down into numbers of men, women, boys, and girls, as well as how many men were “strong enough to do farm work”). This Annual Report’s account of the material dimensions of the residents’ intimate lives shows how, for the Peepeekisis band, material elements were clearly linked to activities in the home:

57 Sarah Carter, 2005, 156.
58 Sarah Carter, 2005, 166.
60 Saskatchewan Archives Board, “History of File Hills Indian Reserve: From Annual Reports of Indian Department, 1879-1940,” R834-32c (3 of 3), 1890, 14.
Nah-tah-toose—In his house he has a table, bedstead & chairs, owns 1 set bobsleighs.

Kee-wish—cookstove, bedstead, table, lamp.

Os-ky sis—set of bobsleighs of his own make, new stable, corral, mower.

Ah-toose—comfortable house, stove, table, bedstead, dishes, addition to stable, new corral, bobsleighs.

The Soney—new stable.

Red Bird—Has repaired his house.

Mrs. Buffalo Bow—makes butter and knits.

Widow Peepeeksis—cookstove, bedstead, table. House small but good.61

The Annual Report also detailed homes and activities for the other File Hills reserves—Okanese, Star Blanket, and Little Black Bear.62

As discussed in an earlier chapter, the government’s agricultural plan was largely unsuccessful. Most of the failures were the result of contradictions and incompetence in Indian Affairs’ planning. Farm instructors were ignorant of the prairie west climate, and much of the promised farming equipment and seed never arrived.63 Hayter Reed contended that social evolution had to pass through many stages before First Nations could become “civilised” and that the adoption of machinery might facilitate this “unnatural” progression.64 When Aboriginal peoples excelled in farming, the DIA undermined these operations by banning the tribal and communist systems that some

62 Ibid, 16-17.
63 J. R. Miller, 2000, 270.
bands used, such as pooling their earnings with other farmers or with their band to buy machinery.\textsuperscript{65} Such activities did not conform to Hayter Reed’s vision of ideal indigenous agriculture. Behind his antipathy lay the DIA’s long-term goal of subdividing reserves into individual farming plots to create “surplus” land for more western development. Moreover, the point of individual ownership was to produce law-abiding citizens in civilised homes who would run their farms competitively.\textsuperscript{66} Late nineteenth century thinking on race and social evolution influenced Reed’s preference for the competitive individual family. Agricultural fairs and exhibits were held to encourage competition and convince sceptics that Aboriginal farming could produce non-dependent individuals.\textsuperscript{67} Settlers’ concerns about competition from Aboriginal farmers imposed rigidly controlled conditions under which Aboriginal farmers were allowed to compete.

Anchored in betterment discourses, government strategies promoting betterment through education in residential schools and agricultural programs constituted part of an intended integrated system of intervention at every stage of Aboriginal peoples’ lives. Schools disciplined and trained Aboriginal bodies by using space, punishment, surveillance, and Euro-American ideologies of morality, whilst the curriculum and spatial environment reflected the application of environmental discourses. Before leaving school, many pupils were subjected to the application of hereditary sciences as Indian agents and school principals tried to arrange marriages between intelligent and “civilised” pupils. On reserve, betterment discourses focused largely on the home and human efficiency. The influence of eugenics sought to shape gender, health, and family

\textsuperscript{65} Sarah Carter, 1989, 30; E. Brian Titley, “Hayter Reed and Indian Administration in the West,” 1993, 123-124.
\textsuperscript{66} Sarah Carter, 1989, 30.
\textsuperscript{67} See: Dominion of Canada Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs, 1888, 14, and Dominion of Canada Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs, 1901, 22.
structures. As First Nations were simply not going to vanish, bettering their genes, environments and morals became the department’s goal.

**Controlling Bodies on The File Hills Farm Colony**

The idea of a colony scheme, as Olive Patricia Dickason pointed out, was not unique to the File Hills colony. Throughout the nineteenth century, religious organizations had used model, utopian, or Christian communities to establish Euro-American values in First Nations people. In Ontario, Methodist missionaries started a First Nations mission village on Grape Island. The village (1826 to 1836) attempted first to convert individuals and then to settle them on the island for agricultural training. Village founders established strict forms of discipline that attempted to change the Mississaugas’ understanding of landscape, gender roles and domestic spaces. In Alaska, Christian organizations funded the model communities at Sitka and Metlakatla. Similar to Grape Island, the Sitka and Metlakatla employed Christianity and domestic spatial arrangement to “civilise” First Nations.

**Managing Blood on the Colony**

Nearby residential schools provided the colony with Aboriginal students educated according to the dictates of betterment thinking. As discussed in the previous chapter, principals Father Joseph Hugonard at the Qu’Appelle industrial school and Kate Gillespie

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at the File Hills Presbyterian boarding school were important participants in Graham’s scheme. The curriculum taught in their schools sought to teach Aboriginal children forms of discipline, labour, Christianisation, gender divisions, and particular uses of spaces. In addition, Hugonard’s and Gillespie’s participation in the colony went beyond the role of principals, and included the selection of “certain” students for the colony.

“Superior” ex-pupils from neighbouring residential schools and arranged marriages formed the core population of Graham’s colony. Although other schools, such as Regina Industrial School and Brandon, Manitoba, contributed ex-pupils to the scheme, Hugonard and Gillespie worked most closely with Graham to settle their graduates on the colony, moving beyond education to take an active role in structuring their personal lives through marriage. Gillespie was so keen on the marriages that she frequently helped select the dress, veil, and cake.71 Although it was common for schools to attempt arranged marriages amongst ex-pupils, Graham, Gillespie and Hugonard sometimes forced marriages. According to Don Koochicum of the Peepeekisis First Nation, some people were forcefully settled on the colony, and in a number of cases, he added, “marriages were arranged for them.” Daniel Nokusis wanted to go home (Sakimay Reserve) after residential school, but Graham prevented him, declaring “I got a woman for you to go and start farming in Peepeekisis.”72

Selection of students was aimed at the destruction of Aboriginal culture. Ex-pupils were picked from diverse First Nations to undermine use of Aboriginal languages,

72 Indian Claims Commission: Peepeekisis First Nation Inquiry: File Hills Colony Claim, March 2004, 166. There are many more examples of arranged or forced marriages. An anonymous Peepeekisis community member told me that Fred Deiter and his wife, Mary, had an arranged marriage that “was not on the count of love, but put together” (Interview by C Drew Bednasek, 2007). In Eleanor Brass’ television interview in 1988, she also discusses the prevalence of arranged and forced marriages (Deiter personal archive collection).
forcing them to resort to the lingua franca of English. American anthropologist David Mandelbaum, who completed an extensive ethnographic study of the Plains Cree and bison hunting between 1934 and 1935, found that lighter skinned students received preferential treatment on the colony. 73 Although Mandelbaum’s main research focus was not on reserve life, he was clearly intrigued with Graham’s selection of boys of mixed blood from residential schools to form the colony. Colony clerk, ironically named, Mr. White, told Mandelbaum that skin colour and genetic makeup played a significant role in the marriage of Aboriginal peoples on the Peepeekisis Reserve:

> Among the most interesting to me was the statement that there is a definite color preference in marriage among the Indians of this reserve. Those who are lighter in color are prized as good catches in direct proportion to the percentage of white blood in their veins, those of pure Indian stock are shelved or married at a later age, with a consequence of fewer progeny. This statement, of course, needs statistical verification, but it seems very plausible. 74

White declared that the birth rate among pure blood Indians on the agency was very low, whilst people with more white blood had higher fertility rates. 75

**Managing Colony Spaces and Bodies**

Public and private spaces were carefully planned on the colony. The Peepeekisis Reserve was subdivided to subordinate Cree understandings of the inviolability of reserve land and communal land use to Euro-American ideals of private property. The construction of the colony also created a geographic distinction in drawing a line between “civilised” and “non-civilised.” Colonists were physically separated from original

74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
Peepeekisis band members and other Indians in the File Hills agency, a strategy that reduced cultural exchange between the groups and, by effectively confining colonists, allowed Graham and other Indian agents to monitor their daily activities.

Graham attributed the colony’s success to constant supervision and surveillance. His betterment strategies differed little from the paternalism of residential schools. Indian agents made frequent visits to band members’ homes, passes were required to leave the colony, permits were needed to slaughter cattle or sell goods, and Graham strictly enforced the Indian Act’s banning of traditional cultural expressions, such as dancing, pow-wows, and tribal ceremonies.76

The DIA was able to gauge betterment through Graham’s reporting of intimate activities and material items in the private spaces of colonists’ homes. Under Kate Gillespie’s leadership at the File Hills school, girls learn how to be “clean, neat, economical housekeepers and homemakers” who know how to make bread, butter, sew, bake, laundry, iron, and decorate rooms. Boys learned to be farmers and gardeners.77 Graham explained that most young men married graduates, most of whom made good housewives, though a few required constant supervision. “In nearly every house,” Graham wrote, “you will find in the sitting-room, clocks, sewing-machines, chairs, tables with covers on mats on the floor, and often lace curtains on the windows and pictures on the walls. The kitchens are all as well furnished as the average white farmer’s kitchen.”78 Agents reported in general on the population, characteristics and progression, education, temperance, morality, health and sanitation, occupations, buildings, farm stock, and

76 Indian Claims Commission, 2004, 14. As the imperial logic of the Indian agent would have been obscure to the Saskatchewan Cree, they may have seen the stern opposition of Graham, whom they referred to as Kes-Ke-Kat (“the man with the cut-off leg”), to dancing as due to his own gracelessness (Titley 1986, 185).
77 Ibid, 32.
implements for the entire reserve, but the colony Annual Reports singled out specific individuals. Colonists Fred Deiter, Frank Dumont, John Bellegarde, Ben Stonechild, and Joe Ironquil were repeatedly cited for their agricultural success and exemplary intimate lives. Deiter, who was half white and erroneously reported by Graham to be the colony’s first settler (see chapter 4), was agriculturally productive with a full line of farm equipment, a nice house and barn, and “a good wife [who] keeps a very clean house, and looks after a fine vegetable and flower garden.” Dumont had a nice whitewashed house, did not owe money in loans or take financial assistance from the DIA. Bellegarde had a full line of farm equipment, never took financial assistance from the DIA, and his farm was “a model of neatness.” Graham claimed he could cite another half dozen cases.

Public spaces were also important in promoting betterment. Graham’s 1910 colony Annual Report demonstrates how public space conformed to Euro-American spatial logic. The colony was a “thrifty settlement, with . . . straight roads, whitewashed houses and painted roofs.” The buildings were “placed with care” facing surveyed roads that ran north and south every half mile and east and west every mile. Colony homes were frequently uniform in style, built with hewn logs, approximately 18 x 24 feet with one and a half storeys, kitchen, shingled roof, and whitewashed walls. As time passed, successful farmers moved from log to wood frame homes. The colony had many barns (some painted) and over forty wood-frame granaries which held 1,500 to 3,000 bushels. Colonists dug nineteen water wells and planted three miles of trees.

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81 Ibid, 450.
Spaces, both public and private, were used to influence colonists’ behaviour. Leisure time, structured to forestall participation in traditional cultural activities, involved sewing circles, church attendance, and lecture groups. Presbyterian and Catholic Churches delivered sermons reinforcing the Euro-American values and morals taught in the schools. Colonists themselves participated in the process. According to former resident of the colony, Eleanor Brass, colonists passed a bylaw prohibiting cohabitation without marriage under the laws of Canada and its churches. Around 1910, colonists also created a brass band, of which every member, Graham told the Regina Leader, was a farmer. He insisted the colonists had organised the band for their own pleasure.

Graham’s memoirs provide insight into his views on race and betterment. He did not believe in a vanishing Indian. Graham noted the rapid decrease in bison numbers but attributed this to a substantial increase of population on western reserves around 1900. He was sure that this increase was due to the improved cleanliness, proper food preparation, and home ventilation that Indian women had learned in residential schools. Aspects of Aboriginal character, such as “lack of initiative” and poor “organizing ability,” were inherently negative. Any vanishing of Indian status and identity would take place only with planning and encouragement. Like Davin, Graham embraced the intent of the Indian Act: advocating mixed marriage to create a hybrid people to replace status Indians. Aboriginal women marrying white men would cease to be wards of state, but would “exercise their franchise and take on the battle of life the same as do the white people.”

Men’s education in agriculture would teach them not to rely on bison; growing crops and

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83 Sarah Carter 1990, 239).
85 Regina Leader, 1911.
87 Ibid, 31.
raising livestock would show them a path to efficiency and success, and a lifestyle compatible with customs and habits of surrounding settler communities. “The time will come when there will be little distinction between the races.” Graham was convinced that the colony was already producing a different kind of Indian (see image 5.1).

![Image 5.1](image)

**Image 5.1**
Picture titled: “Three generations of File Hills natives, 1926.” Like propaganda pictures taken at residential schools to show “progress” of students juxtaposed to their “traditional-looking” parents, this photo is equally powerful. Generations in this family show the different “kind” of Indians Graham and others in the DIA felt they were producing. 

Adopting Euro-American life practices would bring better health and, at least in the next generation, higher intellect. He wrote in 1914:

> It is claimed by those who should know that the children of ex-pupils show more intelligence than do the children of parents who have never

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88 Ibid, 123.
89 Saskatchewan Archives Board, 14854.
received any educational training. Another interesting fact is that the Indian graduates, not only here but throughout the district, are raising larger and healthier families than do the parents who have not been at school. 90

There is little doubt that Graham felt he was bettering the lives, blood, and environments of colony members.

**Conclusion**

To date there has been inadequate exploration of the link between betterment discourses and Indian Affairs policy. Yet there is little doubt that late nineteenth and early twentieth century Indian Affairs policy in Canada was shaped by a complex web of betterment discourses. Scholars have identified how betterment ideas influenced the populating of western Canada by Old World immigrants, but Aboriginal peoples were subjected to an even more rigorous application of the betterment-influenced agenda.

The government’s policies for improving the genetics, environments and morals of Aboriginal peoples in the prairie west were applied through residential schools and the imposition of agricultural lifestyles. Residential schools sought to re-socialise Aboriginal children by instilling Euro-American concepts of gender, sexuality, appropriate behaviour in particular places, discipline, and morality through curriculum and spatial arrangement. After schooling, the managed marriages of educated Aboriginals and settlement in a sedentary agricultural lifestyle, allowed Indian agents to monitor the progress of betterment strategies. The government had decided that as Aboriginals were not going to “vanish” conveniently, they had to be made more like the white settlers of

90 Dominion of Canada Annual Report of the Department of Indian Affairs, 1914, 454.
the prairie west through manipulation of their genetics, their material goods, their health, their homes, and their use of space. The key concepts of the pseudo-sciences of eugenics and euthenics, and the social purity movement, although not always directly employed, underpinned Indian Affairs policy. Residential schools and agricultural programs demonstrate the weight of influence of the betterment discourses on the DIA.

The File Hills colony, more than any other colonial strategy, demonstrates how significantly betterment discourses influenced the thinking of key individuals and Indian Affairs policy. Graham, Hugonard and Gillespie created a networked system that re-educated Aboriginal peoples and moved them to a sedentary agricultural lifestyle. Betterment shaped spaces of domesticity, leisure, and social interaction on the colony. Homes were for nuclear families, leisure time was confined to civilised activities, and churches were moral regulators. Graham’s colony was intended as an exemplar demonstrating the possibility of assimilating Aboriginal peoples into Euro-American society in Canada. However, the controlled settlement of the colony as the key to Aboriginal social transformation never spread beyond its bounds. As an experiment in betterment, it had proved too divisive and too expensive. While this chapter engaged to some degree with oral histories of Peepeekisis community members and Mandelbaum’s fieldwork to critically investigate conceptions of race and intellect on the colony, the next chapter puts Aboriginal oral histories about the colony front and center.
“Graham was a two-faced guy. He would be shaking your hand while thinking something else.”

(Charlie Bigknife, 9 August 2007)

. . . every Sunday, people would pack lunches and would all go to the big pasture at . . . the big lake . . . we used to go there and the kids would swim, you know, and they’d have ball games there and men would be playing cards in the bushes, you know, and they used to have it every Sunday . . . that sure died away at the wartime . . . that’s when it all ended.

(Florence Desnomie interviewed by Oliver Brass 1993 pg. 22)

“Storied Landscapes” argues that Aboriginal oral histories about the File Hills farm colony significantly enrich the historical record beyond the scope of the archive narrative.¹ So far, I have engaged with oral histories in the contexts of residential school experiences (chapter 3) and the selection process of students for the colony (chapters 4 and 5) to raise questions about narratives found in archives, in both cases demonstrating that oral histories reveal the hidden histories of people’s personal experiences.

¹ In this chapter, I use the terms “stories,” “narratives,” and “oral histories” interchangeably. For some, the word “stories” provokes a sense of folklore. Stories, whatever their media of storage, are what life is made of.
Oral histories provide the foundation and primary means of organising both sections of this chapter. The first section looks at narratives concerning the colonial mechanisms used to enforce control over the Peepeekisis Reserve, significant because stories of colonial brutality are only hinted at in archives. Most of these narratives mention Indian agents William Morris Graham or his successor Dodds. The second section, concentrating on specific people, places, and events in the community, is about intimate and everyday lives, offering insight into geographies, histories, lives, spirits, and feelings that are almost completely missing from Canadian government archive documents. These everyday stories demonstrate that colonialism did not entirely consume or direct people’s lives: they persisted in controlling their own geographies and ways of living.

Many of these oral narratives do not fit into a neat chronology, and the mix of time periods ranges from first-hand experience to hearsay. The stories are significant because they are part of a shared social history, and they contain many important points and lessons. It is impossible to produce a complete chronology through the either oral histories or archival documents, but open-minded and thoughtful combining of the two can create richer and deeper understanding.

Foot-to-Ground

At the beginning of this research project, the benefits of engaging with oral histories about the colony were not apparent to me. In October 2006, I took a preliminary research trip to Saskatchewan to assess the feasibility of doing my PhD research on the colony. Eagerly expecting to find remnants of the colony, I drove around the Peepeekisis
Reserve only to discover a landscape not distinctly different from surrounding reserves. An experiment of this magnitude, I could not help thinking, had to be etched deeply into the land: as a geographer interested in colonial mechanisms, I was convinced I would see material structures of the colony built to maintain discipline and surveillance. My assumptions were far from the on-the-ground reality of the Peepeekisis Reserve. Most material structures of Peepeekisis had been burnt or torn down.

The next day I rang the Peepeekisis band office to inquire whether I could talk to anyone about the colony or consult any archive collection managed by the band. The person at the other end of the line assured me they did not have any archives, nor did she know if there was anybody to talk to, but if I came back out to the band office, we could chat. An hour later I was in a room with Martine Desnomie, the Peepeekisis First Nations Director of Operations. Somewhat discouraged by not finding what I had anticipated, and not knowing what shape my research would take, I asked Martine the question, “So, nothing exists from the colony?” She looked at me and said, “The people.” Trying to outwit her, I responded with “Of course, I meant materially.” Over the next twenty minutes, as Martine introduced me and my project to people who kept popping into her office, I came to realise every person knew something about the colony. Many people were familiar with its basic history, and knew Elders who had experienced the colony, family histories and jokes.² This contrasted with my experience of surrounding communities, such as Fort Qu’Appelle and Regina, where most people had not heard of the colony. The story of the colony would not be revealed in a narrow definition of

² I wish I could remember who told me this joke and its exact wording. Anyway, I will try to paraphrase it. “You know the government always told us that they would send a man out here to stand on the ground with two feet and honour the Queen’s treaties. So, they sent Graham.” He, as I mentioned earlier, has one wooden leg.
material landscape, but would emerge clearly from an approach to landscape and place that included the people, their embodied, often oral stories, and tangible effects and feelings residual from the historical events on the Peepeekisis Reserve.

The Genealogy of Stories

A small number of stories about the colony recorded by band members are in the public domain. Eleanor Brass’ book, *I Walk in Two Worlds*, is perhaps the best-known and cited work about the colony. Brass, the daughter of Fred Deiter and one of the first babies born on the colony, was the first to write about the everyday life of colonists. While Brass’s book was not critical of the DIA, in a later interview with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation she spoke with greater frankness about the heavy-handed rule of the colony. More recently, the video *To Colonize a People: The File Hills Farm Colony* has expressed community members’ perspectives and experiences on the impact of colonisation, while the Peepeekisis First Nation land claim has critically assessed government records for its role in the construction and administration of the colony.

Oral histories provide the foundation of these recorded stories and have been the most important factor in preserving memories of the colony. When I returned to Saskatchewan to begin fieldwork, I had re-directed my research project to consider archival and oral histories as equal narratives. I made a list of interview questions such as: “What do you know about Graham?” “What is your family history?” “What do you remember about everyday life?” I heard many stories about the brutality of Graham’s

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4 Patricia Anne Deiter, personal archive collection.
rule, and people were pleased to relate memories of their everyday lives. I was keen to understand who knew stories, why they were told, and what places and people were given importance in them. I learned that many stories have been told about the colony in various ways and for various purposes, and that these oral narratives have interesting ways of converging with or diverging from archival documents.

Colonial archival documents and Aboriginal oral histories about the colony’s construction and administration are typically contentious and vary considerably. As discussed in previous chapters, government documents tend to highlight the benefits accorded residential school graduates, while oral histories of Peepeekisis community members often focused on the oppression and brutality of the colony’s schemes. In presenting contrasting perspectives, these narratives can augment one another; the historical record needs to be re-evaluated to include a greater variety of voices.

Not all community members’ oral narratives about the colony address contentious issues: accounts of everyday life are of central importance. Colonial documents only refer to this subject matter when describing coerced conformity to dictated norms: playing in bands, sewing circles, attending church. Lewis Holloway and Phil Hubbard have argued that research should be grounded in the way movement and behaviours associated with local, ‘everyday’ places.6 Trevor Barnes has argued that people’s lives are necessarily about “social and biographical processes (lives told) rather than a set of final accomplishments (lives lived).”7 The “lives told” approach, Barnes argued, permits the reconstruction of history by linking individual biographies to their practices and wider

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6 Lewis Holloway and Phil Hubbard, People and Place: The Extraordinary Geographies of Everyday Life, 2001, 16.
social context. Catherine Nash and Stephan Daniels have argued for an intersection between the geographical and biographical, an overlapping of the spheres of spatiality, subjectivity, positionality, and identity. They refer to the interconnection of geography and biography as “life geographies.” Stories told within the Peepeekisis community illustrate the intersection of everyday lives and geographies.

The contexts in which stories are told and their connections with places on Peepeekisis are dynamic and fascinating. There is a social life to these stories that gives them great complexity. Stories about Graham and his abuse of power are usually ambiguous: although they always conveyed a central point (note the fire story below), details about participants and timing of events were ambiguous. Many of these stories have been fragmented over the years, but memories about everyday life were vivid, presenting a complex weave of the historical and the contemporary, situated in the geography of the reserve. People’s perspectives on their own identities, histories, and lived-lives create a social geography of the reserve. As Elaine Stratford pointed out, bodies are neither ahistorical or acontextual and I suggest that neither are people’s geographies or memories. Unlike archival documents, stories preserved in individuals and communities are dynamic, fragile and subject to loss of a variety of sorts. In the following sections of this chapter, I engage with oral narratives from Dr. Oliver Brass’s fieldwork in the early 1990s. Oliver recorded interviews, but died in 1997 before he had time to write a book about Peepeekisis band history. Had he not conducted interviewed when he did, many stories would have been lost to death and the failing memories of old

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8 Ibid, 417.
age. It is deeply affecting to hear Oliver tell interviewees “You’ll live forever now” after completing their sessions.

**The Legacy of the Colony**

This three-part section focuses on band members’ stories about colonial brutality. The first part discusses the financial situation of Peepeekisis and the stories that circulate about stealing of money from the band. The second focuses on the colonial mechanisms used to maintain discipline, control, and surveillance. Lastly, I highlight the social significance of a few narratives that I heard or read frequently during my fieldwork. I selected these three themes because they were the most discussed topics during my fieldwork. After completing my interviews, oral narratives were coded thematically to help facilitate organisation during the writing process.12

**Questions of Money**

Graham’s financial management of the reserve dominates many oral narratives about the colony. Most Peepeekisis community members saw the permit system as a calculated strategy of theft. They believe that Graham became wealthy from their labour and grain production. During the late nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century, the permit system dominated the economic lives of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, requiring them to obtain permits if they wished to sell grain, wood, produce, milk, and so on off-reserve from the local Indian agent (who could issue permits at discretion). According to Peepeekisis community member, Dwight Pinay, “everything

that affected your life you needed a permit for.” An Aboriginal farmer would have to obtain a permit to take grain to a grain elevator, where he would be issued with a receipt for the quantity brought in. The money from the sale would then be given to the Indian agent for distribution. Deprived of direct access to the market, Aboriginal farmers never knew how much money their grain generated. Florence Desnomie told Oliver Brass that this started speculation about money being stolen. Desnomie said that no one liked the permit system and many people felt Graham was “feathering his nest . . . from the Indian people.”

The permit system and the Indian agent’s control over all funds limited economic possibilities and presented opportunities for corruption. Peepeekisis community member, Greg Brass, was told by his father, Campbell, that Graham and his wife Violette came to the File Hills agency with little more than a two-wheeled wagon and were rich within three years by using band farm equipment on his own farm and siphoning money out of band coffers. It is now impossible to determine how much revenue Graham accumulated fraudulently (if indeed he did), but land property maps, located in the Saskatchewan Archives Board, reveal that Graham owned large tracts of land west of the File Hills agency and became one of the most productive farmers on the prairies. One of the most widely known stories on Peepeekisis supports accusations of the fraudulent use of the permit system. According to oral histories, the office and garage of the Indian agent’s home caught fire, destroying most, if not all, of the financial records of the agency. A couple of community members rushed to the house to help put out the fire.

13 Dwight Pinay, interviewed by C Drew Bednasek, 6 August 2007.
14 See Maureen Lux, Medicine That Walks: Disease, Medicine, and Canadian Plains Native People, 1880-1940, 2001, 149, 151, and 164-5 for more about the permit system.
15 Florence Desnomie, interviewed by Oliver Brass, 1992, 17.
16 E. Brian Titley, “W. M. Graham: Indian Agent Extraordinaire,” Prairie Forum, 1983; Also see the Cummins land maps (1920 and 1922) in the Saskatchewan Archives Board for how much land Graham owned.
fire, but were stopped by the Indian agent. I will discuss the social significance of this story in more depth below.

**Ruling with an Iron Fist**

Graham’s abuse of power and use of brutality to manage the colony are the most common themes in Peepeekisis oral stories and his lasting reputation is largely that of a dictator. Many community members described Graham as police, judge, and jury, with threats of jail, punishment and intimidation. Campbell Swanson’s experience exemplifies the brutality of Graham’s rule. In an affidavit, Campbell stated that he wanted to leave the colony because he felt that Indian agent Dodds was not giving him enough money for his grain production. Graham (then Inspector) instructed Dodds to send Campbell to jail for thirty days if he left the colony. Campbell left and went to Pasque Reserve, where the Royal Canadian Mounted Police arrested him. According to Campbell, Graham said: “Keep the Indians broke, without money and step on them. You can do whatever you feel like with them.” He used both the permit and the pass systems as methods of control to keep people on the colony, even against their will. The story about jailing a man feigning drunkenness is perhaps the most widely known and told. The man was actually a non-drinker entertaining younger people with his antics, but when Graham noticed him staggering, he threw him in jail for thirty days without discussion. Maintaining divisions between colonists and non-colonists by means of clearly marked boundaries between the colony and other non-colony spaces was essential to Graham’s strategies of control and

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17 First Nations University of Canada, Eleanor Brass’ personal papers, box 2 file 9. Dodds took over as Indian agent of the File Hills in 1904 when Graham was appointed Inspector for South Saskatchewan Inspectorate, and then Indian Commissioner in 1918. Although he was not the Indian agent, he was still involved with it workings, and Dodds continued the colony “scheme.”
surveillance. Sarah Brass remembers that when she came to Peepeekisis, people were prohibited from crossing reserve boundaries: “there was such restrictions that . . . we couldn’t even go across the line. Peepeekisis couldn’t go into Okanese. Yeah, they weren’t . . . free you know to visit each other that way . . . it was strict . . . and that’s what I think kept the people . . . separate.”\(^{18}\) Sarah and others saw the artificial reserve boundary not as a physical barrier to keep them in place, but a constant reminder of where they were or were not allowed to go. Social divisions were also exacerbated by and indirect system of control: during her interview with Oliver Brass, Florence Desnomie revealed that her father had told her of four or five families who spied for Indian agents. Florence asked Oliver to turn off the tape recorder so they could compare names. Graham also used favouritism and gossip, common causes for fighting between many community members, as a control mechanism. Sarah Brass remembered that someone on the reserve had divulged reserve-gossip to a missionary or Indian agent, causing strife.\(^{19}\) Suspicion about some people ran so deep that many today believe that Graham planted some of his own relatives on the reserve to maintain order. Anonymous interviewees told me on three occasions that a particular family on Peepeekisis was related to Graham. It was unclear to me whether the interviewee believed he had impregnated a woman on the reserve (Graham and his wife had no children), or had moved a relation onto the reserve. The former allegation, if true, would have damaged his reputation in the Department of Indian Affairs as well as on the reserve. Apparently, some of the children of this family called him “Grandpa,” but whether this was a sign of respect or something more is not clear.

\(^{18}\) Sarah Brass, interviewed by Oliver Brass 1992, 11.
\(^{19}\) Ibid, 13.
The subtle strategies of indirect colonialism had a profound and enduring impact on people on Peepeekisis.

Strong parallels exist between oral narratives about Graham’s brutality told by Peepeekisis community members and stories told by other First Nations. In an affidavit, Walter Richard Gordon, of the Pasque Reserve, stated that the DIA used coercive strategies in forcing First Nations to surrender land. If a band did not surrender the land the government wanted, Indian agents used, “allegations of drunkenness . . . to confine persons for 30 days or more in jail.” Indian agents also “firmly applied” the permit system regulating the sale of goods off reserves and used the pass system to stop visits amongst First Nations between reserves.20 Solomon Asham, of the Pasque Reserve, said that many people were not only threatened with jail and loss of food rations if they did not vote in Graham’s favour for land surrenders, but that Graham used bribery to entice a “yes” vote.21 Importantly, Pasque community members claimed that Graham would not let them use their own interpreter during land surrender talks.

Social Significance of Oral Narratives

Amongst oral histories about brutality on the colony, two in particular carry weight for their social significance. I was told the story about a sober man being thrown into jail for simulating drunkenness many times during my research. Although there is more consistency to the story told amongst the people who talked to Oliver Brass and who testified in legal affidavits than in my interviews, in my interviews the details of the

20 “Affidavit of Walter Richard Gordon,” Eleanor Brass’ papers, file 9, box 2, First Nations University, Regina.
21 “Soloman Asham,” Eleanor Brass’ papers, file 9, box 2, First Nations University, Regina.

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man’s identity or where it happened are not always the same. This is not very important. It is significant that so many Peepeekisis community members remember the arbitrariness and injustice of the abuse. I also have heard or read the story about the fire at the Indian agent’s house with little consistency of detail. The particulars of who was serving as Indian agent, who wanted to put out the fire, or when the event occurred, varied. That a fire destroyed valuable documents regarding the finances of band members and that community members were prevented from extinguishing it, is a constant. George Leslie Brass stated in an affidavit that he and Joe Lowe rushed to the scene to put out the fire, and that Indian agent, Dodds, stopped them from extinguishing the flames, while others claimed that different individuals helped put out the fire, and that Graham was agent at the time. While Elders who have died or are now very old have told these narratives with consistency of detail, younger generations, whose lives and circumstances shape their modern versions, have not forgotten the central theme or lesson of these stories. The point of the fire story is of greater importance to the community than the details of what occurred that night. As Julie Cruikshank explained, oral histories not only delineate the power relations and intricacies of everyday life, they also anchor memory. On Peepeekisis, oral histories about the colony illustrate the power relations of the past by concentrating on colonial wrongs; they also provide context for understanding current and future power relations (which will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter).

**Everyday Geographies and Lives**

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Listening to oral histories about everyday geographies and lives on Peepeekisis provides a window onto connected stories, spirits, feelings, histories, and identities. These oral histories, more than stories about colonial brutality, blend the historical and contemporary embedded in the geography of the reserve. During interviews, after hearing stories about Graham or other aspects of the colony, I always asked people what they remembered about their own or their parents’ lives on Peepeekisis. This question typically brought a smile, followed by a struggle to remember a time in their lives that was long ago. They often seemed surprised and happy, as they were used to people asking them only about the colony for legal cases or for histories entirely focused on the colony.

In the two parts of this section, I consider significant places, people, and events regularly discussed in oral accounts, and the question of Peepeekisis’ size together with the oral narratives that query its current boundaries.

*The Peepeekisis Community and Community Members*

Certain places and events in the community prevail in many oral histories. During interviews, I presented interviewees with a simple present-day map of the reserve showing roads and the locations of people’s homes and asked them to show me what they knew about the colony. The perception of an east (colonists) west (original members) divide was a recurring theme that pointed to the complex weave of older and younger generations, and how each remembers particular places, people, and events.

As oral histories about the Peepeekisis community are grounded in geography, I heard many stories about Treaty Day and places such as, “The Hill,” “Bacon Highway,”
“Under the Pines,” and “The Agency.” Until 1953, Treaty Day was a significant community event when all four bands of the File Hills gathered together at the old agency near the northwest border of Okanese and Peepeekisis. The agency had a ball diamond, and a sports day was held on the day of treaty payment. Sarah Brass remembered it as a “great day” when everyone was “happy.” many people used the treaty money ($5) to buy new clothes and hats. Aubrey Goforth remembered Treaty Day as a grand celebration with crowds of people, and his father, Ernest Goforth, “seemed to have lots of money that day” and would treat Aubrey to ice cream. Florence Desnomie vividly recalled horse races, a parade, pow-wow dancing, and fiddle dances. She had fond memories of the Treaty Day campground where people set up tents and teepees. Shavetail, a Peepeekisis Elder, would ride his horse around early in the morning and wake people up in Cree. In the evening, the Treaty Day celebrants moved to the Starblanket Reserve for a pow-wow and fiddle dance that continued well into the early morning. Treaty Day was not about “being a part of the whole Indian celebration,” but was a “day symbolic of [the] future” and “prosperity.”

Many community members’ memories from after 1953 recall “The Hill” as the site for Treaty Day, socialising, and community events: a small hill, roughly at the centre of the Peepeekisis Reserve, where a new agency house was built. Gloria Deiter remembered sports days and social gatherings on The Hill, recalling with enthusiasm Henry McLeod’s booth, where he sold ice cream and pop on sports days.

24 Sarah Brass, 1992, 7
Desnomie remembers sports days on The Hill, but also has fond memories of going there for lunch after church. The Peepeekisis school is now located on The Hill.28

“Bacon Highway,” another site remembered by many people, ran diagonally north-west to south-east across Peepeekisis, so named because the band members who helped in its construction were paid mainly with food rations, which always included bacon. Gloria Deiter remembered her father working on Bacon Highway on ration day: he would leave the storehouse near the northwest corner of the reserve to distribute tea, bacon, flour, and so on to people in need. The highway was also significant as the route to the boarding school located “Under the Pines,” near the northwest corner. For many who were young children of File Hills, the boarding school harbours memories of its own.29

Off-reserve places are at the heart of some oral narratives. The town of Lorlie near the southeast corner of the reserve, now a ghost town, is dear to the memories of many community members. Florence Desnomie recalled community members playing football, hockey, skating, and curling in Lorlie. Most teams, she said, had more First Nations than non-First Nations players. The town had a lumber yard, blacksmith, café, and a hotel that train travellers frequented for lunch or used as a place to sleep. Two trains came through each day: one from either direction.30 Gloria Deiter had fond memories of Lorlie’s curling rink. As a child, she went there with her father and skated outside while he curled. To warm up, she went inside and sat by an old stove where men

29 Constance Deiter, From Our Mothers’ Arms: The Intergenerational Impact of Residential Schools in Saskatchewan, 1999.
During the 1950s, Lorlie, where the Trelenburg and McFadden hearings were held, became the centre of opposition to the construction of the colony.

Certain community members figure prominently in these stories. Fred Deiter, one of the earliest colonists, regularly congratulated by Graham for his achievements, is remembered by many. An anonymous community member remembers the early days when Fred had to haul grain to Indian Head, Saskatchewan, passing through the Qu’Appelle Valley. Fred took two teams of horses because the climb out of the steep valley was so challenging. The same person remembers that Fred never rode a horse, unless he sneaked away to the sweat ceremony on Starblanket Reserve. Gloria Deiter remembers the beautiful pine trees that Fred planted between his house and Lorlie. After church, she and her family would often sit under them to eat lunch. Gerry Desnomie remembers stories about his grandfather Henry McLeod, who kept transferring from residential school to residential school until he ended up at Qu’Appelle industrial school. Gerry joked that every school he attended seemed to burn down. The Qu’Appelle school did not burn while Henry was there, and he later went into an arranged marriage. Henry wanted to join the colony, Gerry said, but Graham considered him unfit to farm because he was missing an arm. Several years after he had worked for non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal farmers, on and off Peepeekisis, Graham admitted him to the colony. Dwight Pinay, whose grandfather was “kidnapped” from his home and later brought to the colony by Hugonard, remembers how his father and Vince Bellegarde became two of the first Indian Indian agents in 1959. Dwight remembers playing as a youngster in the

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34 Gerry Desnomie, 2007.
ration houses at Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, which, like ration houses on other reserves, housed old RCMP coats, blankets, shotgun shells, tents, tea, sugar, canned meat, potatoes, and occasionally flour.35

Stories from the other side of the reserve tell how different life was for original members. Don Koochicum remembers living in a sod house until 1951: “We were poor.” The north-west part of the reserve was a beautiful forest where he hunted game.36 Don’s father died at 29 of tuberculosis, indicative of poor living conditions. Don told Oliver Brass that Elders like his grandfather could see the future; Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginals would live together some day. Change came quickly, and he remembers the first time his grandmother saw an airplane in the sky and ran into the house to grab her pipe and started praying. This was during the war and his grandmother thought the Germans were bombing them.37 While original members’ stories of the past are mainly located along the northern section of the reserve, many have moved to the southwest corner of Peepeekisis, an area generally known as “Koochicum Corner”. Ironically, original members are some of the few farmers left on the reserve today.

A Story for All?

It struck me during fieldwork that a story can invoke the geographic imagination of a community. One narrative widely circulated amongst original members and colonists, centres on the size of Peepeekisis as drawn under Treaty 4. This story has major implications for all band members, and the everyday geographies they might experience. Many believe that a large area of land was taken from the southern border of

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37 Don Koochicum, interviewed by Oliver Brass, 1992.
the reserve. Gloria Deiter told me she saw a map in the Ottawa archives that showed the southern border at Pheasant Forest, 15 kilometres away between Highway 10 and Lemburg, Saskatchewan. She was travelling with a group of band members who saw the map displayed under glass in the archives who loudly expressed their enthusiasm. She returned next day to obtain a copy but it was gone.38 Gerry Desnomie believes the southern boundary extended to near the Motherwell homestead, Abernathy, Saskatchewan, again approximately 15 kilometres south of the existing boundary. He saw several pictures of Peepeekisis community members working in fields that convinced him of this.39 Other anonymous band members told me they knew some non-Aboriginal farmers south of the reserve who pulled “IR81” (Indian Reserve 81: Peepeekisis) markers out of their farm land and hid them. Others claimed to know the location of some IR81 markers concealed in the ground that would prove the current size of Peepeekisis is too small. Charlie Bigknife said he knew of a non-Aboriginal farmer who found an IR81 marker on his land that would prove the southern boundary of Peepeekisis is near Highway 10. The issue of Peepeekisis’ size came up not only during my interviews, but also in Oliver Brass’s 1992 interview with Peepeekisis band member, Norman Keewatin. Norman, too, indicated that the reserve extended far south of its current boundary. Oliver replied that he did not think the allegation was true. A note Oliver wrote on a survey document stating that the reserve size would not be included in an up-coming land claim, suggests that he continued to believe the southern boundary was correct, though he did consider it odd that the reserve was only eight and half miles rather than nine wide. This

story, whatever its foundation in truth, captivates the imagination of many Peepeekesis members and has significant implications for their everyday lives and spaces.

The ubiquity of the story raises a vital issue. The Peepeekesis band was the last to settle on the File Hills agency; the Chief selected land in another location but later changed his mind and chose the area where Peepeekesis is today.\(^{40}\) The reserve may not have been properly surveyed before the band settled. Some community members are trying to investigate the reserve size in archives. Ben Stonechild said the topic had been proposed to a law firm that advised the need for extensive map research in England, but lawyer fees prohibited pursuit of the claim.

Why are these Stories Important?

The oral histories discussed above are important for engaging with community members’ experiences and perspectives to develop the story of the colony. While their non-legal nature may or may not supplement a land claims case, they are undeniably a source of human history lacking from many current Canadian history narratives. They reposition the significance of narratives, places, and people in the history and geographies of those affected by the colony. The narration of geographies, lives, feelings, and spirits carry great weight in decolonising history and the researcher’s epistemology. Can oral histories be problematic? Yes, to a certain extent. Many of the stories combine earlier and later memories from the 1900s. This blending not only puts holes into reconstructing a neat history of the colony based on oral histories, but, as Stephen Bann argued, it also demonstrates a process of memory fragmentation that actively values certain parts of

\(^{40}\) “A Brief History of the ‘Ready Bow Reserve,’” in Oliver Brass’ personal archive collection.
history. The valuing of certain stories (or parts of stories), and omission of important
details that might bring clarity to a topic, is again a consequence of the collaborative
methodology. During my project, I found that oral narratives focused so much on
Graham, and the colonial strategies he used to force ex-pupils onto the colony, that issues
of human agency, and whether some First Nations asked for a spot on the colony because
they thought it would be a better life, were not valued in story-telling. Other issues arise
because stories on Peepeekisis do not always agree about the construction of the colony.
There is ambivalence about its success and Graham’s intentions. There is agreement
that the colony was an experiment conducted on people that harmed them. These stories
are no more problematic, subjective, revised, and reworked than the written documents
discussed in Chapter 3. We are a storied people, and the means by which a story is
conveyed—whether written or spoken—is much less important than the story itself.

**Conclusion**

In many ways, I am still contemplating the oral histories I heard. To enhance
organisation and comprehension, I have omitted some. The anger, pain, and confusion
caused by what the colony did to this community runs deep, and much of this feeling is
directed at Indian Affairs’ policies and the federal government’s disregard for the
obligations and working relationship established by Treaty 4 that so many Aboriginal
peoples consider essential to their identity as a people.

There is a pervasive spirit of generosity amongst the people I interviewed that
emerges little in an account such as this. The sound of a kettle boiling and someone

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42 “Good intentions” does not mean he was a “good person.”
making tea, a common background noise in Oliver Brass’ recorded interviews and a
typical sound in my interviews, reminds me of the thoughtfulness of so many people who
spent hours telling me their oral histories and describing personal feelings. Stories about
people’s everyday lives and geographies will always fascinate me and be dear to my
research.

In this chapter I wanted to demonstrate how the postcolonial viewpoint can
address everyday geographies and lives by engaging with oral histories of colonised
peoples. I think that historical geographers need to put foot-to-ground and move beyond
archive collections. Collaborating with Aboriginal peoples is a more ethical approach to
research, and it helps decolonise narratives.43 The limitations of oral histories are well
known, but written documents are also frequently unreliable.44 The colony did not
extinguish human agency, and many Peepeekisis community members’ identities and
histories are embedded in this place called Peepeekisis.

43 In particular, see Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*,
44 Ronald J. Grele, “Movement without Aim: Methodological and Theoretical Problems in Oral History,”
1998; Mark Riley and David Harvey, “Talking Geography: On Oral History and the Practice of
Collectively Remembering the Past and Negotiating the Future

Chapter 7

Here on the reserve if a group of four or five were standing together, you approach them and started to talk about Graham they would all start walking away one by one till you were standing all alone. It’s [sic] only lately they talk about him openly.

(Joseph Desnomie, First Nations University of Canada, Eleanor Brass’ personal papers, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada box 2, file 9)

There’s no other agenda [in the Peepeekisis curriculum] except to teach our history and to help kids understand who they are.


The ways in which Aboriginal and other communities choose to educate their children about their past and present are as important as the stories their members tell. Memory is of growing interest to scholars: how people and societies remember, choose to remember, and choose not to remember. Many factors shape individual and collective memory. Geographers emphasise the patterns of memory related to connections to places, while other social scientists examine group dynamics, collective memory, and the diffusion of memories within societies. Scholars have also explored the connections between memory and memorialisation. Commemorating the past is not just about establishing memorials, maintaining historical structures, or preserving significant sites;
embodied acts of commemoration (e.g., songs, rituals, performances, and storytelling) and participatory methods of disseminating collective histories are more fundamental to communal remembrance.

To understand itself in the social and political contexts of twenty-first century Canada, the Peepeekisis community has to confront its colonial past, its postcolonial future, and come to terms with a turbulent history that has divided many band members along political and ethnic lines. This fragmentation has created significant gaps in the collective memory that must be addressed so that band members may negotiate current and future relationships on the reserve. In this chapter, I argue that the enduring effects of the colony, in dividing Peepeekisis community members and disrupting collective memory, has created the need for a collective history and structures for its dissemination. In educating the whole community, giving special attention to the youngest generations may promote a united future through their understanding of the past.

I have divided this chapter into two parts. The first considers literature on memory and memorialisation. In the second section, I consider what has happened to individual and collective memories on Peepeekisis and examine various communal efforts to write histories. These projects have not been supported by all community members. Using a documentary video, land claims documents, and a school curriculum written by several community members as examples, I explain why some memorialisation endeavours have been viewed as problematic for the histories they choose to emphasise.

**Memory and Memorialisation**
Memory studies have attracted the attention of an interdisciplinary field of scholars (e.g., anthropologists, historians, philosophers, psychologists, and sociologists) and employ a variety of methodologies and theoretical perspectives. Geographers, in particular, are well positioned to explore the links between memory and place. Karen Till engages with memory studies to stay “sensitive to the ways individuals and groups understand their pasts and possible futures through the relationships they and others have with places.” Stephen Legg, interrogating Pierre Nora’s work on memory, argues that individual bodies are potent retainers of counter-memories that challenge the teaching of hegemonic nationalist histories. Elaine Stratford has explored memory in the context of socialisation of individuals and ways in which the body serves as a site of remembrance. Stratford, drawing on the social feminist, Frigga Haug, argues that bodies are historically and contextually produced: “body politics,” she writes, “become a preoccupation about social and symbolic as well as ‘natural’ and material concerns.” Caitlin DeSilvey has devoted much attention to memory and material objects. In her work on a Montana homestead, she considers the connection between material culture and experiences, sensations, and memories in individuals’ lives.

Outside the discipline of geography, scholars have paid more attention to the maintenance and transfer of memories within social groups and societies. Works by sociologists Maurice Halbwachs and Paul Connerton concern the elevation of group memory over the individual. Halbwachs has argued that individuals remember, but

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5 Ibid.
individual reflection must be located in a group context: individuals participate in social
groups to acquire, localise, and recall memories. Connerton has directed his attention to
how societies and individuals convey and sustain memories. For him, Halbwachs’ work
fails to explore the “acts of transfer that make remembering in common possible” and
individual memories are “an abstraction almost devoid of meaning” not necessarily
linked to social memory. While Halbwachs insists that “mental and material spaces of
groups” are where societies locate memories, Connerton argues that repetition of
ceremonies, bodily practices, rituals, and commemoration shape social memory.

Many scholars have researched the links between collective memory and commemoration. Material items, such as monuments, streets, neighbourhoods, buildings, churches, and so on, give spatial coordinates to identity, and there is much speculation on the connections between memory, identity, and material objects of commemoration. As Adrian Forty argued, “[i]t has been generally taken for granted that memories, formed in the mind, can be transferred to solid material objects, which . . .
stand for memories.” Work by T.M. Scruggs and Brian Osborne also questions the link between memories and material structures of commemoration. As Connerton argues for the significance of memory diffusion through bodily practices of preservation and contact, similarly Scruggs and Osborne emphasise transient commemoration and

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10 Ibid, 37.
activities, such as songs, rituals and performances. Scruggs’ work considers how popular songs in Nicaragua have shaped, negotiated, and preserved collective memory while providing a counter-narrative to the policies and aesthetics of the conservative elite. Osborne also argues that the modern era of commemoration may be over. He suggests that, since commemorative sites are constantly contested and subject to varying political agendas, we should be making commemorative sites out of such perishable materials as ice-cream and papier-mâché to reflect their fragile and changing nature. To add to Osborne and Scruggs’ observations, I would argue that the defacing or destruction of commemorative structures also challenges our interpretations of the past and future. In much the same way as stories (whether written or oral) are subject to re-evaluation and re-interpretation, so are our commemorations of the past and anticipations of the future.

Memory and Memorialisation among First Nations

The history of colonisation in North America greatly complicates collective memory and identity amongst many First Nations. Colonial strategies of assimilation, such as residential schools and enfranchisement programs, were designed to absorb Aboriginal peoples into the body-politic and homogenise differences by demolishing

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16 Connerton cites modern devices for storing and retrieving information, print, encyclopaedias, indexes, photographs, sound tapes, and computers as examples of bodily practices of preservation. He points to smiles, handshakes, or spoken word as examples of contact. Nicolas Argenti’s The Art of Forgetting (1999) is great for more about ephemeral monuments.


19 See Brian Osborne, “Corporeal Politics and the Body Politic: The Re-Presentation of Louis Riel in Canadian Identity,” 2002. He points out that the constantly evolving opinion within Canadian society about Louis Riel challenges national identity. Osborne, citing Will Kymlicka’s work on multiculturalism, argues that changing attitudes about Riel’s contribution to Canadian society centred on the “plural concept of Canadian identity” in the decades following the 1960s (309).
social structures and identities, and preventing Elders from influencing younger people.\(^{20}\) Colonialism clearly contributed to the fragmentation and loss of histories and memories in many Aboriginal communities. In the postcolonial context, Aboriginal communities and individuals are taking a variety of approaches to confronting and commemorating their colonial past.

Celia Haig-Brown and Basil Johnston have made the stories of residential school survivors the focus of their studies, while the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has a government mandate to collect such stories.\(^{21}\) The commission aims to create awareness about residential schools in Canada, discuss their lasting impacts through survivors’ stories, produce an extensive record of the school system and commemorate former students and their families.\(^{22}\)

To heal and move on from the suffering caused by residential schools, some communities, government bodies and Aboriginal organisations have engaged with survivors’ stories and altered school sites. In some cases First Nations communities have transformed these symbolic places of oppression into places of culture, healing, higher education, and recreation. As Michael Kenny has argued, they become healing circles where First Nations can visit and recall memories.\(^{23}\) Former residential school sites, such as St. Eugene’s in Cranbrook, British Columbia and the Portage la Prairie Methodist


\(^{22}\) Ibid.

Indian Residential School in Long Plains, Manitoba have been appropriated and commemorated in anticipation of moving forward.  

Some First Nations have reacted by destroying, burning down, or abandoning former school buildings. Feminist geographers have discussed the impacts of fear and violence on people’s perceptions and uses of space. In her work on geographies of fear, Gill Valentine argued that victims of crime associate threats of being attacked with certain places. Rachel Pain notes that this type of place-associated fear can affect behaviour and quality of life. “General feelings of unease,” she writes, “become focused on specific fears about crime and are manifested in spatial perceptions and behaviour.” This literature applies to First Nation communities’ feelings about the sites of residential schools or other places reminiscent of colonial brutality. Valentine and Pain argue that proximity to these sites of victimisation might inhibit the quality of everyday life. Recent exposure of the physical, sexual, and psychological abuse that Aboriginal children endured in residential schools draws a clear link between feelings of fear and anger and material places. The Spanish Residential School in Ontario; the St. Jude’s Cathedral in Nunavut; and the Port Alberni residential school in British Columbia are examples of schools demolished by First Nations, burned by arsonists or left vacant.

26 Gill Valentine (1989): 385
Although colonialism created an association between brutality and oppression and certain places, some First Nation communities embrace and commemorate their colonial past, however horrific, while others try to forget by emptying the landscape of material structures and deliberately avoiding commemoration. Paul Connerton does not regard forgetting as human failure;\(^\text{29}\) rather, it may be vital to the renewal of identity to “discard memories that serve no practicable purpose in the management of ones’ current identity and ongoing purposes.”\(^\text{30}\)

Memory needs a place, a context. Its place, if it finds one that lives beyond a single generation, is to be found in the stories that we tell. We wish to know about the nature of the relation between memory, historical narrative, and self-formation.\(^\text{31}\)

For some First Nations, storytelling serves as the conduit of memory and sole basis of commemoration and identity; for others, the appropriation and preservation of significant places of colonialism augment the passing on of oral stories that lie at the heart of commemorating the past and healing the postcolonial present.

**Peepeekisis Collective Memory and Memorialisation**

Why hasn’t the Peepeekisis community memorialised its past or its post-colony present? Apart from a veterans’ memorial in front of the Peepeekisis school and a cairn near the site of the Presbyterian boarding school, the landscape of the Peepeekisis Reserve is almost empty of commemoration of its past (see image 7.1).

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\(^{30}\) Ibid, 63.  
\(^{31}\) Michael Kenny, 1999, 421.
Surrounding towns such as Fort Qu’Appelle and Lebret, are full of material structures that celebrate Canada’s “development” and “modernisation” of the prairie west. A monument recognising the site where Treaty 4 was signed is located in the middle of Fort Qu’Appelle, an outpost of the Hudson’s Bay Company survives on the main street, and the town’s museum has gone to great lengths to preserve one of the fort’s original structures. The Catholic Church dominates the town of Lebret, where many Aboriginal children attended the Oblate-run residential school; a plaque indicates that a statue of Father Joseph Hugonard in the cemetery was donated to the church by Aboriginal

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32 Saskatchewan Archives Board, R-A4011.
peoples. Near the town of Lebret, there is a road name after Hugonard. Has the
Peepeekisis community deliberately not commemorated the past; is the band trying to
forget?

As discussed in previous chapters, the File Hills farm colony divided people
through intimidation and brutality. Not only did Graham attempt to keep “uncivilised”
Aboriginal peoples away from “civilised” colonists, he used fear to keep colonists apart.
Strict rules forbade women from visiting each other’s houses and kept men working
alone in fields. Graham’s reign of fear had a drastic impact on individual and collective
memories of Peepeekisis. Individuals embodied their stories but, denied the freedom to
share stories and experiences with one another, their accounts became fragmented.
Traumatic events also affected the cohesion and transfer of stories within the
community. In an affidavit, Joseph Desnomie described how Graham’s presence
frightened people and prevented them from talking about him:

Graham and his agents did not allow Indians to have meetings. They were
the only ones who could call an Indian meeting . . . My father used to take
me along when he went to the different camps of Indians around here.
Once he was at one of the camps and the Indians were gathered to have a
quick meeting by themselves. One of the lookouts saw Graham coming in
his horse and buggy. He told the gathering. You should have seen the
Indians scattering as fast as they could. I have seen that with my own eyes.
That is how afraid they were of Graham and his police.

Desnomie’s description of disrupted story-telling substantiates Michael Kenny’s work on
individual and social/collective memory. While Kenny acknowledges that the links

34 See Michael G. Kenny “Trauma, Time, Illness, and Culture: An Anthropological Approach to Traumatic
Memory,” 1996, 151–71 and “A Place for Memory: The Interface between Individual and Collective
History,” 1999, for the connection between traumatic events and it affects and effects on memory.
35 First Nations University of Canada. Eleanor Brass’ personal papers. Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada box
2, file 9.
between trauma, pathology and memory are controversial, scholars have shown the effects of trauma on individual and collective lives. Although individuals have told personal stories about the abuses they endured on Peepeekisis, a larger project on the collective memory of its colonial past and present is much needed.

Various recent attempts to shape a collective awareness of the colony have had mixed results. In 2001, Evelyn Poitras directed the documentary “To Colonize a People: The File Hills Indian Farm Colony”, in which she attempted to interview both original community members and colonists, engaging extensively with their oral histories, perspectives and experiences. Apart from various specific land claims issued by community members, the video was the first real source of public knowledge about the farm colony and its lasting effects on the community. During my interviews in the field, some people mentioned the documentary but it does not appear to have made a lasting impression on most. It may not have been well circulated, but it was a positive step toward demonstrating the historical and contemporary impact of the colony.

There are at least four or five completed or on-going specific land claim suits on the Peepeekisis Reserve. There is no doubt amongst Peepeekisis community members that the colony was an injustice to be redressed. While land claims are political documents, so are the oral histories that they engage with. Most interviewees on Peepeekisis had strong opinions about the specific land claim documents submitted to the Indian and Northern Affairs of Canada in 2004, and were clearly politically engaged people who had studied the claim and its supporting documentation. The value of land

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36 Michael G. Kenny, 1999, 421.
37 This video was fairly difficult for me to obtain. In 2006, I could retrieve it through interlibrary loan, but it was only available in VHS format—a technology that is increasingly hard to find. In 2008, I tried to obtain the video again through interlibrary loan but was denied.
claims as a source of community history depends entirely on who writes them. In the context of Peepeekisis, specific land claim retribution would benefit only original members or colonists, thus politicising the claim and the history written within.

The collective memory of community members emphasises the legal aspects of the colony in the research, writing, and dissemination of specific land claim documents: Was the colony a justified government scheme? Who does or does not belong on Peepeekisis? What compensation should be awarded to original members and colonists? Should the Peepeekisis band be broken into different bands as band members see fit? Thus collective memory is grounded in the divisive influences of the colony rather than band history, treaty-signing, or the strengths of community. The colony’s legal history permeates the collective memory of Elders and adults and may constitute the fabric of what is passed to future generations.

**Peepeekisis School Curriculum**

The most interesting case of collectively remembering histories of the farm colony, the community, and Aboriginal spirituality and values is the community’s attempt to establish a curriculum for the Peepeekisis school (grades nursery through 10).\(^{38}\) In March of 2004, Peepeekisis community member Sandra Bellegarde, and a core committee consisting of Freida Koochicum, Doris Bellegarde, and Stuart Koochicum, initiated the curriculum project by informing the band government of their intentions and inviting Elders to gather and share their stories. Later that month, approximately 35 to 40

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\(^{38}\) Freida Koochicum, interviewed by C Drew Bednasek, 2008
original members and colonists, 15 to 20 of whom were Elders, met to share stories and design the curriculum.

The curriculum team soon recognised that most community members had very limited knowledge of the basics of their own history. Bellegarde had to explain the Indian Act and treaty rights to the group. She feels that the people of Peepeekisis do not understand how Canadian government policies have affected their lives both historically and contemporarily, and it was only through talking to community members and showing them archive documents that they began to understand how events such as the passing of the Indian Act affected what they did and who they are. They also acknowledged that collective memory about the reserve and the colony was not as coherent as they imagined. People remembered events and stories very differently, or had been told different stories. The curriculum team had to work out how (if at all) these varied narratives and fragmented histories would serve the community if included in the curriculum.

The curriculum team stressed that their goal was to write not a history book, but a curriculum with emphasis on what they want children to know. They indentified three important themes for inclusion: self, respect, and knowledge of their own history. The aim for Bellegarde is to help children “walk fluidly between two worlds.”39 The Self component centres on identity, which includes the personal, social, and spiritual. Elders and the curriculum team were particularly worried that the Peepeekisis Reserve had lost its sense of community identity and that this would be most felt in the younger generation. The Self section also contains a language module designed to teach children

39 Sandra Bellegarde interviewed by C Drew Bednasek, 2008

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at least one Cree phrase each week. The **Respect** component is particularly concerned with role modelling; Elders wanted the younger generation to connect with them for spiritual and social guidance. The **History** element exposes children to the histories of First Nations, the Peepeekisis Reserve, and the farm colony through community members’ experiences and stories. The syllabus challenges children’s preconceptions of government by asking them to deconstruct ideas of the hereditary system, democracy, and their impact on Aboriginal societies. The curriculum is intended to inform students of their spiritual, cultural, and historical identities, and provide them with keys to future success.

In June of 2007, the Peepeekisis curriculum gained national recognition when the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s “Absolutely Canadian: First Peoples’ Edition” featured its plan and objectives. In the broadcast Bellegarde observed that the curriculum incorporated both archive documents and oral histories. Freida Koochicum explained its significance for peace and understanding, stressing the importance for community members of knowing their history and being comfortable with it. The tradition-based curriculum aims to replace the culture lost on the reserve.

**Issues with the Curriculum**

Although the establishment of the curriculum appears to promote collective memory-building, predictably in such a divided community, its development and implementation have been contentious. At the heart of the disagreement are the farm colony, and its lasting effects. One of the most frequently voiced criticisms of the
curriculum is that it will exacerbate divisions between original members and colonists on Peepeekisis, as well as amongst some colonists.

Bellegarde stated that some families offered their own family histories, which raised issues of belonging. It was never the objective of the curriculum team to examine band members’ family trees for the right to be on Peepeekisis, but many people’s social politics are still influenced by the divisions Graham established on the colony, and some families teach their children within that framework. Questions of who belongs on the reserve, due to band membership legitimacy (as discussed in chapters 3 and 4), run deep through the historical and contemporary contexts of Peepeekisis. Bellegarde readily admits that her family came to Peepeekisis as colonists and feels that she can nevertheless make progress and work with everyone, but that is not the case with all community members. Bellegarde knows that the farm colony has caused great damage in the community, and that dismissing the fact is not realistic.

Band politics and criticisms, were the main reasons the curriculum was not piloted at the Peepeekisis school in the fall of 2007 as planned. As yet, the Peepeekisis curriculum has not been tested in school, but Bellegarde and her team continue to work on the document, optimistic that it will be implemented.

Conclusion

Official interventions to shape or restore collective memory amongst Peepeekisis band members may not be possible. The dictatorial management of the colony by Graham and other Indian agents severed customary communication so that people’s lives

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and varied experiences could not easily be shared and passed from one generation to the next. This fragmenting of individuals’ stories and lack of collective memory has resulted in history polarising rather than staking out common ground.

If a suitable collective history is to be agreed by all community members, it will reside in educating band members about the past, present, and future through a broader spectrum of individual’s stories. Although the Peepeekisis community did not actively preserve material structures of the colony or commemorate the period with memorials, its existence is embodied in the memories of community members and needs to be shared. As Connerton, Scruggs, and Osborne have persuasively argued, the actual transference of collective history and personified practices of dissemination are key to preserving histories. The geography of Peepeekisis is important because dynamic geographies assist in locating what communities and community members choose to remember and choose to forget. As Till has argued, there is a deep connection between places and memories. Peepeekisis is a place of memories, stories, identities, and histories. As Keith Basso discovered in *Wisdom Sits in Places*, stories can be anchored in “things” other than colonial structures.41

The positive action of creating a school curriculum, though controversial amongst some community members, is a way to move forward by educating young people about their past. Memories are about the present and future as well as the past and have significant bearing on who we are and the history we choose to emphasise and memorialise. Communal Peepeekisis identity is not commemorated by material structures of its colonial past, but resides in bodies as the sites of memory and transient

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commemoration. This does not indicate a denial or forgetting of history, but, rather, a community’s struggle to deal with its history while negotiating its present and future.
Still in Our Minds, History, and Stories

Conclusion

Canada’s colonisation and settlement of the prairie west was a highly geographical process that witnessed national growth through trade, treaties, and the subjugation of First Nations. While initial contact between Euro-Americans and prairie Aboriginal groups was mostly positive, the events to follow, which included the spread of diseases, the collapse of trading partnerships, the exploitation of the numbered treaties, and the introduction of residential schools and Aboriginal reserves, had devastating impacts on First Nations. The desire of individuals, such as Sir John A. Macdonald and Clifford Sifton, to tame western land and “populate” it with settler farmers resulted in a disregard for the provisions outlined in the numbered treaties of the 1870s. Aboriginal land was needed for the development and expansion of Canada, and absorbing younger First Nations into Canadian society through residential schools or settling them permanently them onto small tracts of land, cleared the way for “modernity.” The government’s plans to entirely re-educate and re-socialise Aboriginal peoples was a failure. Aboriginal children often received less than adequate educations in residential schools, and First Nations were not adopting reserve agriculture and adhering to Euro-American notions of self-sustainability. The colonisation of the prairie west cannot be read as a series of triumphs, in spite of First Nations. Aboriginal peoples stood up to the
Canadian government’s Indian policies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth
centuries and gradually forced them into reversal

William Morris Graham’s construction of the File Hills farm colony can best be
conceived as a strategy to address the government’s failed policies of re-education and
re-socialisation. From Graham’s founding of the colony in 1898, the scheme attempted to
create a paternalistic system to end “regression” by closely supervising and controlling
ex-pupils’ lives as they left residential schools and were settled on the Peepeekasis
Reserve. Graham’s colony was the type of innovative thinking valued by the Canadian
government to end the “Indian problem.” I have tried to demonstrate that a critical
viewing of Canadian government archives exhibits reveals that Graham endured many
difficulties while constructing and maintaining his colony. Although he regularly tried to
establish an easily digestible story about the colony’s founding and all its successes in the
Annual Reports of the Department of Indian Affairs, other government documents
demonstrate a different narrative riddled with contradictions, revisions, problems of
ethics and legality, and hints of resistance by original Peepeekisis band members and
colonists. “The archive,” Michel Foucault argued, “cannot be described in its totality,”¹
and the narrative of the colony presented in government archives included many
imaginations and was neither neat nor entirely straightforward.

A critical interpretation of written and oral narratives about the colony is also
important for considering how the construction and administration of the colony engaged
debates in Canada about colonialism, science, race, and social purity movements in the
late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The advent of betterment sciences, such as

¹ Michel Foucault in Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire*,
1993, 11.
eugenics and eugenics, and social purity movements clearly affected non-Aboriginal Canadian society, but they were equally crucial in shaping Indian Affairs policy. While Canadian government archives hint at the use of betterment sciences in the construction of the File Hills colony, I have engaged with various written and oral narratives that show how betterment sciences influenced Indian policy and the basis of the colony. The combination of David Mandelbaum’s fieldnotes, Peepeekisis oral histories, and research by some contemporary scholars is significant for enriching the history of the colony to demonstrate how Graham, Hugonard, Gillespie, and other government officials were schooled in betterment thinking. Furthermore, the combining of oral and written narrative provides a richer understanding of the historical context in which Graham, Hugonard, Gillespie, and other government officials were schooled and worked.

Throughout the entire research process, Peepeekisis oral histories have been the most vital component for enriching the historical and geographical record. Oral histories not only provided first-hand accounts of how colonialism affected the effected Aboriginal peoples, but they are key for envisioning First Nation everyday geographies and lives. Throughout the course of my research, I found that some oral stories about the brutality of the colony paralleled Canadian government archives, while other completely diverged from the government narrative. It is not correct to say that in all cases oral histories countered the government’s story but many stories tend to focus on different aspects of colonial brutality. This emphasis not only demonstrates First Nations’ experiences and perspectives of the colony and how they felt about acts of colonialism, but it exhibits the social importance of certain stories, and how many narratives are anchored in past and present geographies to teach people current lessons. Oral narratives told by Peepeekisis
community members also show that the construction and administration of the colony did not consume their lives with power and fear. Community members’ stories about their everyday lives show that they had their own sense of geographies and histories that were not entirely anchored in the construct of the colony. Going to Peepeekisis and listening to people’s stories dramatically altered my research and gave me a very different perspective.

My fieldwork also brought out how the colony continues to influence band members. The effect of the colony on the Peepeekisis community and the emotions it generates cannot be isolated in the past: for over one hundred years, the colony has shaped and disrupted community relations on the reserve. Graham and the government unfortunately did not consider, or perhaps care, what long-lasting impact the injection of the colony scheme into the Peepeekisis community might have had on all First Nations involved. As a historical and colonial geographer, I am particularly keen to understand how the past resonates in the present and might shape the future. On the Peepeekisis Reserve, the interplay between the colonial imagination and the “on-the-ground” working of colonialism, and the past and present of the colony, has been a particularly fascinating and a rather conscious-awakening process for me. Both forms of colonialism were equally significant and they etched deep and extremely complex divisions into the reserve.

While the people I interviewed had many amazing and interesting stories to tell about their lives and about the colony, they were also extremely helpful in help me conceptualise past and present relationships in the community relations that could not be extracted from a government document. Community divisions between colonists and
original members, and between various colonists, run deep and will take many years to
sort. I am in no position to make recommendations to the Peepeekisis community about
what the community “should” or “should not” do to address divisions, as a
“recommendation list” would only perpetuate colonialism for a people who have lived
through many acts of colonialism over the past century. I am, however, comfortable
sharing some of the words told to me that are instrumental in helping me conceptualise
the past, current, and future circumstances on the Peepeekisis Reserve.

“The colony has never ended in people’s minds”

My first sit-down interview was with Florence Desnomie and her son, Gerry.
Three days before the interview, I had called Florence to see if she would be willing to
talk to me about her experiences on the colony. Scared shitless, as I remember, I drove to
Florence’s house on Peepeekisis on a blazing hot July day. Florence welcomed me and
told me the only story she could remember about the colony: when she was young, a
tornado hit her house and her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Henry McLeod, were hurt badly.
Community members, Fred Deiter and Ben Stonechild, ran from their farms to help the
McLeod family. The two men found that Florence’s sister had been swept away in the
tornado and had landed in the barn on a pile of hay.

After unsuccessfully trying for a while to think of more stories, Florence called
Gerry, a Peepeekisis band councillor, to talk to me about the colony. Gerry showed up a
few minutes later and I explained to him what I was doing on Peepeekisis. Gerry, like
almost all of my interviewees, seemed initially sceptical of me and furthermore wondered
why a student going to Queen’s University, who grew up in Kansas and Wyoming and
later ended up in Canada, wanted to know more about the colony and Peepeekisis. Gerry and I talked for nearly three hours. Florence wandered in and out of the kitchen, where Gerry and I moved our conversation, and eventually made us some bologna sandwiches, Campbell’s alphabet soup, and a cup of tea. Gerry later drove me around Peepeekisis and showed me some of the places that he remembered best as a kid, and he told me all about his adult life. Gerry is a retired school teacher. After teaching, both on and off Peepeekisis, he drove a charter bus all over North America. His greatest hobby now is playing pool, and he had just returned from a pool tournament in Las Vegas. Through our three hour discussion, Gerry told me one of the most important things I heard: “the colony has never really ended in people’s minds.” ²

I had assumed that what the government archives told me about the termination of the colony in the 1950s was true. It had not occurred to me that the colony was not just a remnant of Peepeekisis and colonial history, but a formation internalised by community members that still shaped the way people see themselves and see others. Gerry’s frank statement about the colony not only demonstrates how significant internal colonisation is, but it shows that Peepeekisis community members are well aware of this embodiment. I never again looked at the colony, or the Peepeekisis Reserve, in the same way.

“Many people are angry about what happened here”

Along with researching and writing a thesis, a PhD candidate is asked numerous times about hers or his project by colleagues, friends, and family members. Over the past two years, I have shared my work as much as I can with interested people and reactions

² Gerry Desnomie, interviewed by C Drew Bednasek 2007.
have ranged from shock and disappointed, to those who were not surprised by the actions of the Canadian government. Very rarely had anyone, with the exception of people from Peepeekisis or prairie west historians, heard about the colony.

In the summer of 2008, I was in Saskatchewan for the second time to interview people on Peepeekisis. During the summer of 2007, I interviewed Freida and Don Koochicum about the colony. Freida knew a lot about the colony from oral and archive sources, and her husband, Don, is an original member. Freida worked on the 2004 land claims and one room in her house was filled with research material. During my last discussion with Freida she passed frequently in and out of that room to look for documents, always shutting the door behind her. She later joked that the room had become a “dumping ground,” and it is one of those rooms where you always close the door behind you. Although Freida is not originally from Peepeekisis, her father, Charlie Bigknife, personally knew Graham and many of the colonists brought onto Peepeekisis. I really enjoyed my talks with Freida, and I have found her to be a great person with whom to share my ideas and writing.

During my talk with Freida in 2008, she told me that, “Many people are angry about what happened here.”³ While I had conceived of people thinking that they were wronged, I had not thought about the issue of anger very deeply. I came to think of this anger as a completely justifiable response. But what I do wonder is if this anger has always been directed appropriately? While people are aware of what Graham and the DIA did to construct and maintain the colony, I find that Graham’s strategy of indirect colonialism has created anger against other community members more than against the more distant Canadian government. I heard more about who did and did not belong on

Peepeekisis than the treaty and Indian Act provisions to which the government did or did not adhere.

“**We are all victims**”

When doing this project, my initial thinking was to often frame people in colonial terms: colonists and original members. With so many discussions about people’s own experiences and perspectives of the colony, and constant talk about land claims suits that will either benefit original members or colonists, it is not always apparent that the Peepeekisis Reserve is actually one community.

One of my last interviews in 2008 was with Sandra Bellegarde. While Sandra does not live on Peepeekisis, she has a great knowledge of how riven the community is. The challenges faced while piloting the curriculum are still fresh in her mind, but its development gave her an extremely insightful perspective into community division. Sandra explained to me that when she gathered people to tell their stories about the colony and the community, it was clear that it was a painful subject and that many thought the curriculum would be a challenge to their family history and their right to be on reserve. In the end, she said that bringing people together to share their stories was very therapeutic. People needed time to grieve and time to listen to each other about their lived experiences on the colony.

The colony, as Sandra stated, affected everyone, and “we are all victims” of it.4 Viewing all Peepeekisis community members as victims of the colony helped me conceptualise the colony outside of the divisive colonial framework. All Peepeekisis  

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4 Sandra Bellegard, interviewed by C Drew Bednasek 2008.
community members were injured by the colony, and labelling one person’s or one side’s suffering as more or less fails to understand the collective suffering of the community. Moving beyond the colony will take some time, and grieving and listening will benefit all.
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Oral histories:

Gathered by C Drew Bednasek

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Brass, Greg. Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, 2008

Deiter, Gloria. Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, 2007

Dieter, Keith. Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, 2007

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Pinay, Dwight. Peepeekisis Reserve, Saskatchewan, Canada, 2007 and 2008
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*Gathered by Oliver Brass*

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Keewatin, Norman. Peepeekisis Reserve, Saskatchewan, Canada, 1992
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Be sure to consult the “Instructions to Applicants” when completing this form. Submit 1 original + 2 copies including all supporting documentation to your unit REB. If your department does not have a unit REB, then submit directly the General Research Ethics Board (GREB) through the Office of Research Services, 301 Fleming-Jemmett. See http://www.queensu.ca/vpr/greb/UnitREB.htm for a list of the Unit REBs.

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  - Master’s
  - Ph.D.

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**Start Date: Early June**

**Anticipated Completion: Mid- to Late July**

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### 2.0 TITLE OF PROJECT

*The Colonial and Counter-Colonial Geographies of the File Hills Farm Colony*
3.0 PROJECT DETAILS

3.1 Abstract: (300 words)
In 1896, Indian Commissioner William Morris Graham founded the File Hills farm colony on the Peepeekisis Reserve in southeastern Saskatchewan. The colony, which consisted of hand-selected residential school graduates who demonstrated “superior qualities,” was a colonial experiment that placed graduates into Euro-American style houses where they would cultivate crops, go to church and live a “civilised” life, well away from reserve influences. Graham kept the colony under constant surveillance by having Indian Agents frequently visit homes, and he enforced discipline with a list of rules forbidding many aboriginal cultural expressions. The government and church documents of the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries unmistakably show the colonial imaginary in this experiment. The Canadian government’s assimilation of aboriginal peoples centred on linking spatial control and acculturation. What the documents do not reveal is how effectively assimilation worked. Nor do they acknowledge aboriginal peoples’ resistance to the colonial imaginary. Scholars have made limited use of official documents to describe the government’s assimilation intentions, but aboriginal voices are largely unrepresented. My research will compare official documents and aboriginal oral history to create a nuanced historical geography of the File Hills farm colony. Asking vital questions will separate my research from the existing literature: Who has told stories? How do these stories still exist? What is the history of their stories? What places and people have been given importance in these stories and why? Does oral history provide a counter history? Moreover, conducting fieldwork and collecting stories, whether recorded, passed down or first-hand accounts, will create a richer historical understanding of what took place at the File Hills farm colony and its importance to Canadian society.
3.2 Method

Provide up to a 2 page description of the research. Attach a copy of your questionnaire(s), sample questions, test instrument(s), thematic overview or interview guide, as appendices.

One of the principle aims of this research is to help those associated with the File Hills farm colony and their decedents create and record an oral counter history of the colony. As such, interviewees are full participants in the creation of this history. Thus the content of this history will be discussed and negotiated throughout this project. Aside from analysing archive documents, interviewing aboriginal peoples who know stories about the File Hills farm colony will form the core of my research project. I imagine that most, if not all, participants will be from the Peepeekisis band, who live on the reserve or in the surrounding communities of Regina, Fort Qu’Appelle, Balcarres and Lebret. In some cases, I might interview aboriginal peoples on the Okanese, Star Blanket or Little Black Bear Reserves. Interviews will most likely be held in private homes of band members. If interviewees are not comfortable with meeting in their home, arrangements will be made to do the interview in a public setting. On the reserve, the band office or a church might be a more public setting. Off of the reserve, libraries, cafés or shopping centres could be possible public interviewing sites. Interviewees will be given a letter of consent to sign and all interviews will be recorded with a hand-held digital recording device and eventually transcribed in the Queen’s University Geography Department sound studio. If interviewees do not want their testimony digitally recorded, I will take notes during the interview. In certain cases, I will also ask interviewees to take me to places of importance to discuss their geographic imagination of the farm colony. Pictures will be taken and maps may be drawn to illustrate this imagination. Anonymity will be given through the use of pseudonyms if the interviewees do not want to be identified. Moreover, any on- or off-the-record information that interviewees provide and later decide that they do not want included in my research will be erased. However, when consent is given, I plan to use interviewees’ full names and their full testimonies. Digital and transcribed copies of the interviews will be part of my thesis appendix unless it is clear that the interviewees do not wish to participate in that way. At the current time, I am not aware of any land claims suits pending on the Peepeekisis Reserve. I am aware, however, that oral history accounts about the farm colony and residential schools may bring up emotional and difficult times in a respondent’s life. Both used brutal assimilation strategies that have had a continued effect on many aboriginal peoples. If an interviewee becomes upset, I will stop the interview and let them decide if they would like to continue at a later time. I will not push more questions upon the interviewee. Lastly, the Peepeekisis band office and any other person I interviewed for my research that wants a copy of the digital and/or the transcribed interviews will be provided a free copy.

As an outsider to the community, as well as a non-aboriginal researcher, I must understand the power relationship between interviewee and interviewer and the power relationships within the community. Being a researcher also presents me with a power to form questions, thus shaping the direction of the research and the findings. But as an informed researcher I am also open to questions formed by others, particularly by interviewees and the Band Council. Within the Peepeekisis community, I anticipate finding many views on the colony, as some people might have been farmers while others were displaced from their land by colonists. The history of their stories might also have an explicit agenda. I will have to approach the interviews not knowing what I will find. This will keep my research project open.

I may find many story fragments that do not match written documents, and stories might not be chronologically dated. Fragments in stories might cause many disagreements about specifics, but stories are clearly part of cultural history. History needs to be viewed as dynamic, an alive process that different people use to make sense of their lives and collective identity. By looking at the archives and understanding the people, places and events they identified as significant, and by interviewing Peepeekisis people to learn what people, places and events are important to them, I want to create a nuanced historical geography that is more incorporative of aboriginal oral history accounts on the farm colony. Are there large discrepancies in the stories told by non-aboriginals and aboriginal peoples? How do stories in the archives compare to aboriginal oral stories? What stories are different? What stories are similar?
3.3 Will the data be collected off-campus? □ No  x Yes If yes, please consult the Off-Campus Activity Safety Policy at http://www.safety.queensu.ca/policy/activity/

My research will take place on the Peepeekisis Reserve, which is approximately 100 km north east of Regina, SK. I have attached a letter of support from the Peepeekisis Band. I will also conduct archival work in Regina, Calgary and Ottawa.

3.4 Are other approvals or permissions required? e.g. Field Safety Approval, School Board Approval; Community or Institutional Approval  □ No  x Yes

Specify: I have sought and obtained permission from the Chief and Band Council of the Peepeekisis First Nation. Please see attached sheet. Martine Desnomie, director of operations at the Peepeekisis Band Office, is willing to answer any questions about the letter of support.

X Attached  □ Follow

3.5 If you will be using archival data, please describe data source:
The Saskatchewan Archive Board, Regina, SK; The Glenbow Museum, Calgary, AB; National Archives, Ottawa, ON.

4.0 RECRUITMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

4.1 Describe the participants (eg. occupation, relevant membership, or student status) that will be involved in the research. Describe any special characteristics (such as age, race, gender, mental or physical disabilities)

Participants in my research will be any aboriginal peoples who know stories about the farm colony. I imagine that most, if not all, participants will be from the Peepeekisis Band and live on the reserve or in the surrounding communities of Regina, Fort Qu’Appelle, Balcarres and Lebret. However, some interviewees might not be part of the Peepeekisis band and live on the Okanese, Star Blanket or Little Black Bear Reserves. Any adult of any gender will be considered a potential interviewee.

4.2 Will vulnerable populations such as children; physically, cognitively or mentally challenged individuals, economically marginalized or incarcerated people be recruited?  □ No  x Yes
If yes, please describe the population and any special measures that will be needed to address their vulnerable status.

4.3 Will aboriginal peoples be recruited or aboriginal communities studied? □ No  x Yes
If yes:

• Has band approval been obtained? □ No  x Yes See attached letter from Peepeekisis First Nation. The letter is not signed, as it was sent via e-mail. Martine Desnomie, the Director of Operations for the Peepeekisis Band Office, can be contacted at desnomim@hotmail.com or (306) 334-2573 to discuss band consent and her discussion with the Chief and Band Council about my research project.

• Will the findings be reviewed by an aboriginal community before dissemination? □ No  x Yes Not applicable  I will send the Band Council a draft copy of the thesis before its defence and I will send them a copy of any proposed articles inviting comments and suggestions before formal submission to a journal.

4.4 How many participants will be involved? As many as possible. This depends, however, on how many people know stories, as well as time and money to do the research.
4.5 Source of Participants - Check all that apply

- Queen’s undergrad or graduate classes
- Queen’s departmental subject pools
- Other Queen’s sources - Specify:
- School Boards
- Correctional Services
- Agencies
- Mailing Lists
- Businesses, Industries, Professions
- Health Care settings, Long Term Care Facilities
- Other - Specify: Aboriginal peoples from the Peepeekisis, Okanese, Star Blanket and Little Black Bear Reserves.

4.6 Describe how and by whom potential participants will be recruited.

In October 2006, I travelled to the Peepeekisis Reserve to assess the feasibility of thesis research. While visiting the band office and explaining what type of research interested me, the Director of Operations for the Peepeekisis Band Council, Martine Desnomie, stated that she would be willing to assist me in setting up interviews with band members. From these initial interviews, I am planning to ask interviewees if they know of someone else I could interview—a methodological approach known as snowballing. This will help provide me with a larger sample of interviewees.

Please attach any recruitment notices, advertisements, or information sheets.

4.7 If remuneration or compensation will be offered, please provide the details.

No monetary compensation will be offered. Before the research is completed, I will give a copy of the thesis, which will include transcripts of the interviews, to the band office for feedback. I will also send the Band Council any article I want to publish before it is submitted to a journal.

4.8 Will people be informed of their right to withdraw from the study? Please describe procedures should someone wish to withdraw.

Yes. If someone is in an interview and wishes to terminate the interview I will comply willingly. If an interview has been completed and the interviewee later wishes to change his or her account or simply have it destroyed, that wish will be respected. Accordingly, notes or tape recording will be destroyed or erased.

4.9 If your study requires a formal debriefing, please provide details about the procedures you will use.

N/A

5.0 ASSESSMENT OF RISKS

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<th>Will this study involve any of the following:</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>YES</th>
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<td>5.1 Questions about sensitive or personal issues? See response on next question.</td>
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<td>5.2 Psychological or emotional risk?</td>
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<td>5.3 Physical, economic or social risk?</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>5.4 Dangerous location such as war-torn countries (see section 3.3)</td>
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<td>5.5 Risks to participants due to power imbalance?</td>
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<td>5.6 Language and cultural sensitivities?</td>
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<td>5.7 Other risk, please describe:</td>
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5.8 DECEPTION
If deception is involved, will it be minor, major or by omission?

☐ minor  ☐ major  ☐ by omission

Describe deception: No deception will be used.

6.0 BENEFITS
Please describe the benefits of the research to the participants, the research community and to society, at large.

For aboriginal peoples, my research will give them recorded sources (both in audio and textual form) of their oral history accounts. These recorded sources of oral history will provide participants, as well as other aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples, with an accessible history for many years. At least one copy of my thesis, the transcribed oral history accounts and a copy of the digital recordings of my interviews will be provided to the Peepeekisis Band office and any other person who would like a copy. My research will also put aboriginal voices at the forefront of history on the File Hills farm colony.

Within the academic community, my research will enrich the historical geography of Western Canada and the File Hills farm colony. At the present time, the secondary literature has tended to treat the farm colony as a key moment rather than a process with continuing effects in Canada’s colonial history. Historians have engaged to some extent with aboriginal accounts in print about the colony, but they have not gone beyond that to interview First Nations for their views of history. Within the field of historical geography, I want to present a methodological approach that goes beyond analysing written documents to include aboriginal oral history. Incorporating aboriginal voices into research will not only create a nuanced historical geography of Western Canada and the farm colony, but it is a more responsible and incorporative approach to research.

For Canadian society, as well as other colonial societies, I want my research to show aboriginal peoples’ role in Canadian history and society. Furthermore, I want my research to be accessible to the general public. Research should not just be for the academic community. Finally, and most importantly, I want Canadians to be aware of the consequences of colonialism. The File Hills farm colony was one of the most, if not the most, oppressive of colonial landscapes in North America. The public needs to be conscious of the unjust assimilation strategies taken by colonial governments and societies. Racism, cultural misunderstandings, feelings of superiority and colonial subjugation is not the problem of aboriginal peoples but a reflection of problems within non-aboriginal society, education and perceptions.

7.0 PRIVACY: Confidentiality and Anonymity

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<th>NO</th>
<th>YES</th>
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<td>7.1</td>
<td>Will the participants identify themselves in a way that will allow you or anyone else to match their identity to the information you gain from them? If yes, explain. They will be identified by giving their full name. If they do not want their name used, pseudonyms will be made.</td>
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<td>7.2</td>
<td>Will the confidentiality of the participant’s identity be protected? If no, explain. Identity will only be protected if they want it protected.</td>
<td>x</td>
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7.3 Will information about the participants be obtained from sources other than the participants themselves?  
   Yes, possibly in the sense that there will be multiple interviewees. But they are not the subject of the inquiry.  
   [X]

7.4 Will the information on individual participants be disclosed to others?  
   Yes, possibly in the sense in which I answered questions 7.3.  
   [X]

7.5 Could publication of the research allow participants to be identified?  
   Yes. If they so consent.  
   [X]

7.6 If it becomes possible that the participant’s identity can be deduced by anyone other than the researcher, will the participant be told?  
   Will he or she be able to withdraw?  
   [X]

7.7 Will anyone other than the applicants listed here have access to the data?  
   The data will be provided to the Band.  
   If using a translator will he or she sign a confidentiality agreement? N/A  
   [X]

7.8 Please provide specific details about the security procedures for the data as well as plans for the ultimate disposal of records/data.  
   Oral testimonies will be stored on my personal computer, which is protected by a password and a document safe. Records will only be disposed of if an interviewee decides that they do not want their testimony used. I will erase the digital recording and shred my notes.  

8.0 INFORMED CONSENT - indicate all applicable  

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<th>8.1 Letter of Information</th>
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<td>Participants will be given a Letter of Information (LOI).</td>
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<td>If no, please explain.</td>
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<td>This is the normal procedure.</td>
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<td>Instructions at <a href="http://www.queensu.ca/vpr/greb/instruct.htm">http://www.queensu.ca/vpr/greb/instruct.htm</a></td>
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<th>8.2 Consent Form</th>
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<td>a) Participants will be asked to sign a written consent form (may be combined with LOI) If no, please explain.</td>
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<td>This is the normal procedure except with some survey questionnaires.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructions at <a href="http://www.queensu.ca/vpr/greb/instruct.htm">http://www.queensu.ca/vpr/greb/instruct.htm</a></td>
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| b) Participants will be given a Letter of Information and will give Verbal Consent as a Category I exemption, see [http://www.queensu.ca/vpr/greb/instruct.htm#exceptions](http://www.queensu.ca/vpr/greb/instruct.htm#exceptions) |

| c) Participants will be given a Letter of Information and will give Verbal Consent as a Category II exemption, see [http://www.queensu.ca/vpr/greb/instruct.htm#exceptions](http://www.queensu.ca/vpr/greb/instruct.htm#exceptions) |

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d) Participants are not in a position to give Consent to participate, so written permission will be acquired from person with legal authority. Permission of the Band Council has been sought and obtained.

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e) Participants are children or other population unable to legally provide consent. Voluntary assent will be obtained.

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9.0 SIGNATURES

Applicant(s): I/we, the undersigned, certify that (a) the information contained in this application is accurate; (b) that conduct of the proposed research will not commence until ethical certification has been granted; (c) that the Board will be advised of any revisions to the protocol arising before or after ethical certification is granted. Conduct of research using human subjects that has not received ethics certification is a breach of University policy on integrity in scholarly activity.

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<th>Applicant’s Signature:</th>
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<tr>
<th>Supervisor’s Signature: I have reviewed this application and agree with the information it contains.</th>
<th>Date:</th>
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SUBMISSION CHECKLIST – required

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<th>Attached</th>
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- Copy of the verbal or written Letter of Information that will be provided to participants before they are asked for consent to participate
- Copy of the informed consent(s) that will be distributed to each participant
- Copies of questionnaire, sample questions, thematic overview, interview guide
- Recruitment: your recruitment notice, advertisement, and/or information sheet as well as that used by a sponsor or supportive organization, as may be applicable. Refer to Recruitment Guidelines document on our webpage
- Completed and signed application for review - original with 2 copies