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CANADA'S CAMPAIGN FOR IMMIGRANTS AND THE IMAGES IN CANADA WEST MAGAZINE

LAURA A. DETRE

One of the major challenges that Canadian government officials felt they faced at the end of the nineteenth century was the development of the prairie West. By this time there were large urban centers in eastern Canada, but many Canadians worried that they had not truly ensured the future existence of their country. They hoped that filling the middle, the province of Manitoba and the region that would become the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta, with prosperous, white, family farmers would support the industrialized cities of the East. To do this the government engaged in a systematic program to encourage immigration of farmers and agricultural laborers from the United States and Britain. This involved many forms of promotion, including a magazine entitled Canada West. From this publication we can see that the ideal society envisioned by Canadian officials was a modern, highly developed society, based on family farms. This work shall demonstrate through a detailed analysis of the magazine's covers over several years the ways in which Canada depicted the ideal life farmers could hope to have on the prairies.

KEY WORDS: advertising, Canada, ethnicity, farming, immigration

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magazine-sized text featuring sections on the general history of Canada, the development of the West, and each of the prairie provinces and territories. It was a catchall document, as opposed to some of the other brochures available to the agents, which promoted only one region. It was also much more sophisticated in appearance than the earlier works. Designed by Rand McNally under the direction of the Immigration Branch, Canada West was filled with black and white pictures of prairie life and colorful maps of Canada and its regions. The magazine evolved over time, reflecting the changing reality of prairie farm life but also incorporating new advertising techniques.

This paper focuses on the covers of Canada West rather than the text contained within. Many of the themes addressed in the covers are more explicitly identified in the written promotion, and where appropriate the text will be used to illustrate and elaborate on the topics discussed. The covers will be the focus, though, because they succinctly demonstrate that the Canadian government had an agenda of populating the prairies with prosperous white families.

**Images as Sources**

Traditionally historians have undervalued images, preferring texts as their primary sources, and this work hopes to address some of those omissions of the past. It is possible to analyze an image and find historical significance in it, without making the image secondary to a related text. As Jean Colson has said, it is a matter of looking at the images systematically, identifying individual themes in the same way that historians have traditionally looked at texts. These covers are of interest because they were the viewers' first contact with the government's message; thus, the creators took special care with them. This is true in the sense that each year's edition of the magazine text changed relatively little, sometimes not at all. Despite the continuity in the written message, each edition had a different cover. Obviously the Immigration Branch officials who oversaw the production of Canada West put more priority on updating the visual message of the cover than they did the written one contained inside.

**History of Advertisement and Promotion**

For the purpose of this work, the word advertising will be used interchangeably with the term promotion. This is appropriate because the Canadian government was engaged in a systematic campaign to promote the West, and this campaign used many of the same techniques that product manufacturers of the time would have used to sell their products. Part of the Canadian plan was to place advertisements in many of the newspapers of the United States and Britain, up to 7,000 publications in 1906. The government used an advertising agency, Lord and Thomas of Chicago, to create and place the newspaper advertisements, which were just part of a sophisticated, modern campaign. As John Oldland noted, "[W. J.] White [Press and Advertising Agent for the Immigration Branch] was giving Canada a positive identity at the same time as Kodak ('you press the button; we do the rest') was branding cameras and National Biscuits was first packaging cookies with the Uneeda brand ('lest you forget, we say it yet, Uneeda Biscuit')."

The Canadian immigration campaign was a good example of modern advertising, fitting into many of the categories established by previous advertising historians. One such author was Richard Tedlow, who broke the history of American advertising down into three stages. The Canadian ads fit into his second period, that is, those appearing after 1880. He said that toward the end of the nineteenth century, the completion of the railroad and telegraph network set the stage for the second phase of American marketing. This was the era of the national mass market, in which a small number of firms realized scale economies to an unprecedented degree by ex-
panding their distribution from coast to coast and border to border.6

The Canadian advertisements not only occurred in this period, but they fit Tedlow's description in other ways. There is no evidence that they were regional; they do not mention the places where the advertisements were placed. They also fit the description of the second phase in that Canada was marketed as the perfect place for all farmers, not just one particular group, such as farm owners. Although certain advertisements singled out one group as their target, none of them suggested that the group was the only appropriate one for the prairies.7

Tedlow was only one of the advertising historians whose methodology is appropriate for analyzing the Canadian advertisements. Roland Marchand in his book Advertising the American Dream points out the importance of advertising as a historical source. He quoted a 1926 publication from the advertising firm N. W. Ayer and Son that said, “[D]ay by day a picture of our time is recorded completely and vividly in the advertising in American newspapers and magazines.”8 Marchand contended that advertisements do not just influence a society, but they also reflect certain aspects of that society. As Marchand argued, “advertising leaders recognized the necessity of associating their selling messages with the values and attitudes already held by their audience.”9 In the case of the advertisements used to recruit farmers to the Canadian West, the society they reflected was the ideal one envisioned by the Canadian government and the hope was that this would appeal to potential immigrants in the United States. The message that the Canadian prairies were the perfect place for American farmers was one that the government would repeat time and time again.

A final source for this methodology is Jackson Lears’s book Fables of Abundance. Especially in the later advertisements, the Canadian government tried to use scientific claims, backed by the testimony of experts. Lears referred to this new form of advertising as technocratic and argued “this mode of expression was rooted in the assumption that human technical prowess could transform the course of life into a predictable pursuit of personal well-being.”10 The Canadian advertisements portray settlement as the natural extension of human achievements, accomplished not just through the hard work of pioneers but also through technological advancements in agriculture. In this respect the Canadian advertisements represent an important shift in advertising methods. The earliest ads use the older techniques of hyperbole and exaggerated claims, but the later ones show signs of the shift to technocratic advertising.

Finally, Lears said “the late-nineteenth-century ideal of gemeinschaft—the self-sufficient, organic community—achieved its embodiment in commercial imagery long before it was codified in sociological texts.”11 There may be no better representation of community in advertising than the Canadian advertisements. In part this was a response to the sparse settlement of the prairies; in order to attract settlers they had to downplay the isolation of prairie life. That was not the only purpose of community in these advertisements. It was a reflection of the type of settlers the Canadian government desired. According to historian Cecilia Danysk, “the agricultural community of the prairie West had been designed and was defined, both economically and socially as family-oriented, based on small-scale units of production—family farms.”12 The Canadian government had more than an economic agenda in mind with the settlement of the prairies. A major goal was to populate the region with hard-working, white, Protestant farm families who would uplift the moral character of the prairies and ensure that the West would remain “Canadian.” This desire was expressed through their advertisements.

**CANADA’S GOALS FOR THE PRAIRIES**

From the beginning Canadian politicians had an eye toward developing the prairies, in part because of the agricultural potential of
the region. Sir John A. Macdonald, the first prime minister, believed that the best way to encourage industrial development in the East was to settle the prairies with farmers who could provide a stable source of food for Canada’s growing population as well as an additional source of exports in the form of grains, which were in great demand in Europe. Agricultural settlement, along with high tariffs and several other aspects of domestic and foreign policy, formed what was known as the National Policy. Although there were farms in the older provinces, these were smaller operations that could not produce grains in the desired quantities, and farmers in some regions concentrated more on producing specialty items, such as dairy products and fruits, which would bring them greater returns but did little to further the National Policy.

This may have been the most often stated reason for Canada’s emphasis on westward expansion in the period, but it was not the only one. Cecilia Danysk states:

[W]estward expansion provided tangible political benefits as well. Capitalist support for a government providing such a lucrative market was the most obvious political reward. Industrial workers, promised more jobs and security through expanded markets, were enthusiastic in their support. Ontario farmers regarded the West as a patrimony for their sons unable to take up farms in an overcrowded province. Beyond a simple collection of votes, the acquisition of the prairies would ensure Canadian sovereignty in the northern part of the continent, protecting it from America’s grasp.¹³

The year 1896 brought political change to Canada. It was in this year that the Liberal Party, under the leadership of Wilfrid Laurier, brought the Conservative Party’s tenure to an end. The Liberals agreed to the essence of the National Policy, but they changed many aspects of how the government was run. As western development was concerned, one of the most important changes was that the Liberals reorganized the way the government approached immigration. The previous administrations had taken a fairly haphazard approach to immigration. They put immigration under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture, which produced only a limited amount of promotional material and did little else to advance immigration. In the second half of the nineteenth century the immigrants coming to Canada were not of the class or ethnicity that the political establishment desired. Most politicians believed that there were enough people in the East to serve as the industrial workforce. They wanted to encourage the immigration of farmers who would establish a white presence in the prairies. Not only did they want the grains that these farmers could produce, but they also wanted to form provinces from the regions.¹⁴

As in the United States, the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth was a period of tremendous immigration, but the Canadian government was not impressed with the way that immigration had transformed American society. As Irving Abella and Harold Troper noted in their work *None Is Too Many*,

By the early 1920s Canada, once terminus of the Underground Railway, had effectively barricaded itself against “foreigners.” If Canada, unlike the United States, never legislated quotas against particular groups, Canada’s government still enforced a restrictive immigration policy with unabashed ethnic and racial priorities. With public support, it knew what ethnic and racial groups it wanted and how to keep out those it did not.¹⁵

Although Abella and Troper in this instance were referring to the early 1930s, their observations hold true for the earlier period as well. Many Canadians felt that unchecked immigration was ruining American society; in particular they felt that immigrants were prone
to many vices and that they would contribute little to the betterment of Anglo-North American society.

ETHNICITY AND CANADA’S IMMIGRATION CAMPAIGN

Most Canadians had an ethnic hierarchy of immigrations. As Abella and Troper said, "British and American immigrants, especially agricultural immigrants, were always welcome, encouraged to come, recruited, made great promises, their journey often subsidised." The highest rung on this ladder was up for debate. Some believed that the best ethnic group for Canada was the British. People who supported this position felt that the most important aspect of Canadian society was its imperial character and that the only way to maintain this was to import people who were already familiar with British institutions. The other school of thought was that Americans were preferable. The people who espoused this view assumed that Americans would have better farming skills, especially when it came to dry farming. Also, native-born residents of the prairies held negative stereotypes of British immigrants. As Cecilia Danysk noted of immigrant Wilfred Rowell, "as an Englishman looking for farm work, he encountered skepticism from prairie farmers who believed that Englishmen were 'frightfully lazy and don't even earn their keep.'" People who preferred American immigrants also assumed that these newcomers would be Anglo-Americans, or at least northern Europeans, such as Germans and Scandinavians.

Northern Europeans were a distinctly less desirable ethnic group, but still acceptable. In their book Abella and Troper state that "when, out of economic necessity, Canada required immigrants from countries other than Britain and the United States, it gave preference to northern and central Europeans." In fact, many of the Scandinavians and Germans who came to Canada in this period had either transmigrated through the United States or were the American-born children of immigrants. Canada was aware of this and had agents to specifically recruit these groups in the United States, such as the special agent in St. Paul, Minnesota. Most Canadians felt that, while these immigrants were unfamiliar with British institutions, they were, for the most part, racially compatible with Anglo-Canadians. The exceptions to this rule were religious minorities. Groups such as Hutterites and Mennonites often came under the suspicion of native-born Canadians, mostly because of their desire to live in autonomous, insular communities. They were most certainly a second choice, but they were vastly preferred over the next group on the ladder, eastern Europeans.

Abella and Troper demonstrated that "only in periods of great economic prosperity did it [Canada] reach well down its ladder of ethnic preference to admit southern and eastern Europeans." This group caused great controversy in Canada, even among Liberal Party leaders. Clifford Sifton, Laurier's first minister of the interior and the official in charge of the Immigration Branch, believed that British and American immigrants were preferable, but that there were advantages to Slavic immigrants as well. Sifton is famous today for his comment in defense of the many Ruthenian immigrants coming to Canada at the time: "I think a stalwart peasant in a sheepskin coat, born on the soil, whose forefathers have been farmers for ten generations, with a stout wife and a half-dozen children, is good quality." He felt that they had vast experience as farmers and also that their poverty would prevent them from expecting too much from the prairies. Many British and even American immigrants were shocked by the conditions that they encountered on the prairies and gave up their homesteads after just a few seasons farming them. Sifton hoped that their extreme poverty would make Slavic immigrants more amenable to the harsh conditions in the prairies.

Not all politicians shared this view. Frank Oliver, Clifford Sifton’s immediate successor as minister of the interior, espoused the view
that Slavic immigration would be detrimental to Canada. He believed that Slavs were morally inferior to Anglo-Saxons and that their presence in Canada would corrupt the native-born population. His biggest concern was that he saw Slavs as unable to assimilate to British culture. Overall, the Canadian government was moderately tolerant of immigrants from central and eastern Europe, but there were limits. As the 1911 edition of Canada West put it, “[N]ationality is no bar to progress . . . but a natural preference is shown to those who speak English and appreciate well-modeled institutions” (1). Though Sifton and Oliver represented opposite perspectives when it came to Slavic immigration, they agreed about the undesirability of other ethnic groups, particularly southern Europeans.

One of the groups most eager to come to Canada was southern Europeans, but native-born Canadians universally disregarded them. Along with Greeks, Italians formed one of the largest groups of immigrants coming to Canada at the turn of the century, but politicians did not appreciate their presence. Most of the political establishment viewed Italians and Greeks as a drain on Canada’s resources, a moral detriment to society, and most significantly, not likely to become farmers. Since most of these immigrants were drawn to metropolitan areas, such as Montreal, they did not further the government’s goal of populating the prairies. Despite the lack of enthusiasm for southern Europeans, there were ethnic groups who fared even worse in Canada.

Perhaps the most despised groups to come to Canada at the turn of the century were Jews, Asians, and African Americans. Of these groups, Abella and Troper noted, “as Canada proceeded through the first half of the twentieth century, those groups that did not fit the national vision—especially Jews, Asians and blacks—were ever more often relegated by Canadian officials to the bottom of the list of those preferred.” The opposition to Jews took the form of typical anti-Semitism. Native-born Canadians held racial stereotypes about Jews that prevented them from seeing Jews as good immigrants. Particularly, Anglo-Canadians saw Jews as exclusively urbanites and therefore not useful in their plan to populate the prairies with farmers. Certainly this was not true; many of the Jews coming from the Pale of the Russian Empire were rural people with experience in agriculture, but reality could not break down the strongly held stereotypes of Canadian officials. Other than a few settlements established by Jewish relief agencies, there was little Jewish immigration to the prairies.

Asians met with even greater resistance than did Jews in this period. To some extent this was because they were a visible presence, especially in western Canada. In his book White Canada Forever, W. Peter Ward countered earlier arguments that anti-Asian sentiments were based in economic concerns and found rather that the prejudice Asians in Canada faced was a “problem in the social psychology of race relations.” For the most part, Canadians opposed all Asian immigration, including Indian, Chinese, and Japanese, although pressure from British imperial officials to not damage their relationship with the empire of Japan prevented Canadians from taking dramatic action against Japanese immigrants. Indian and Chinese immigrants were eventually barred from entry altogether. The reasons that native-born Canadians gave for objecting to Asian immigrants were based completely in stereotypes and a lack of understanding of the immigrants’ position. Among the most common complaints made against Asian immigrants was that they worked for wages that were too low and undercut native-born laborers. They were also accused of being amoral and having a corrupting influence, especially on white women. Finally, they were reviled for not bringing their families with them when they immigrated. Anglo-Canadians perceived this as a lack of commitment to Canada. There was little discussion of Asian immigrants’ potential to become farmers, although many of them, particularly Japanese immigrants, did engage in this profession. Often, in reality, the immigrant groups that were deemed undesirable by native-born Canadians had exactly
the qualities most desirable for prairie life, and this was certainly the case with African Americans.

African Americans had many of the characteristics that Canadian officials most wanted from immigrants. One particular group, the former slaves of the Creek tribe in Oklahoma, expressed an interest in immigration and would have furthered the goals of the government. These were experienced farmers who knew more about the prairies than did the average immigrant from the British Isles. Additionally, their push factors were strong; they were experiencing tremendous prejudice in Oklahoma and hoped that Canada would provide a more tolerant home. Soon after their initial contacts with the Canadian government, these hopes were dashed.26 Even otherwise open-minded politicians, such as Clifford Sifton, failed to support African American immigration, and eventually they were barred completely.27

This ethnic hierarchy was important to the way Canada recruited immigrants. Although the Immigration Branch produced some promotional materials for immigrants from the European continent, the vast majority of its efforts were directed at the United States and Britain. This work will address a series of documents produced by the Canadian government for distribution primarily in the United States as well as in Britain. Eventually many of these documents were translated into a great number of languages, but this was something of an afterthought.28 For example, the Immigration Branch translated its 1900 edition of Canada West into French for distribution to Franco-Americans in New England as well as in France and Belgium, but their literal translations of the English text led to such odd and unconvincing promotion as the following:

Ce qu’en pensent les Anglais: Causant avec un jeune anglais qui revent au Canada après un voyage fait pour revoir la mère-patrie, celui-ci disait en parlant du climat: ‘C’est après avoir passé quelque temps en Angleterre que l’on apprécie le climat du Canada Ouest.’29

It is apparent that these translations were of secondary concern to the Immigration Branch officials and that they did not put a great deal of effort into the non-English editions of these works. On the other hand, there was a fair amount of concern that surrounded the production of the English-language versions of these works.

**Desirable Immigrants**

Just as Canadian officials had strongly held notions as to whom they did not want to recruit, they also had ideas as to which immigrants would be most beneficial for the region. As discussed previously, this group was largely families who would live on their farms. One group that the Canadian government felt sure it could encourage to immigrate was tenant farmers. As Cecilia Danysk noted in her book *Hired Hands*, tenants were desirable because they were in a precarious economic position. They teetered between the status of farm owners, who were the highest class of farmers, and farm laborers at the bottom. Although you could make a good living as a tenant, the future was not secure, and therefore they were a group receptive to the Canadian immigration campaign.30 In large part they were open to the Canadian message because land was actually becoming a scarcer commodity in the United States. Beginning around 1893, with Frederick Jackson Turner’s observation of the end of the frontier, American farmers began to panic that there would be no land left for them on which to expand, and certainly none for their sons. This made farmers, especially tenants, even more open to Canada.

Immigration Branch officials had an additional reason for recruiting not only tenants but also farm laborers. Farm laborers had lower expectations for life on the prairies. Men who had been owners or even tenants in their home countries would expect to achieve that same standard of living in a relatively short time. Hired hands were more desperate just to get land of their own, and the government hoped that they would not expect much beyond that.
Additionally, the farmers who were already in the region needed seasonal help with their farms, and Canada hoped to provide this assistance in the form of young farm laborers who would work for a few seasons before starting farms of their own. For this reason, the government followed the lead of the railways and recruited men who had "no money but muscle and pluck." 

**Sources Used**

For the most part, the covers analyzed in this work came from issues of *Canada West* housed at the Bruce Peel Special Collections Library at the University of Alberta, and the conclusion drawn from them are backed up by evidence from the National Archives of Canada. These are the volumes concerning immigration and they contain most of the official documents produced and received by the Immigration Branch for the period concerned. This paper discusses *Canada West* issues from the end of this period in Canada’s immigration policy, in most part because they are the most well-developed examples of the themes discussed. The earlier covers focus less specifically on women, children, and families than do those from this later period. These covers are the clearest examples of the topics discussed in this work, although families were certainly important to immigration officials earlier in the campaign.

Finally, before moving into a detailed discussion of the covers, it is important to specify what themes will be illustrated in this work. The first topic is Canada’s emphasis on the importance of women to farms. Much of Canada’s promotion dealt with the role of women in prairie society, although this material was not always addressed to women. In a related vein, the immigration officials who created these documents often emphasized the material development of prairie communities as a way of reassuring men and women alike that their new homes would be comfortable and modern. Women were made aware of the social and cultural institutions they could expect to find in their new homes. Men, on the other hand, were informed of the types of agriculture they would practice on the prairies; both mixed and grain farming were emphasized in different covers. On the covers distributed in Britain, the immigration officials emphasized that Canada was a part of the empire and that immigrants could hope to find many British institutions recreated in Canada. Finally, these officials acknowledged that they could not hope to create generations of family farms in the West without children, and they were represented in the cover images as well.

Canada’s immigration campaign began in earnest in 1898 and continued into the 1930s. There was a brief lessening, but not a complete cessation, during the First World War; otherwise it was a continuous, although evolving, effort. The major differences between the propaganda produced early in this period and that produced later are in the themes addressed. Additionally, developments in printing allowed for the production and distribution of detailed images. It is in this later period that the Canadian government came to produce large numbers of colorful, image-filled publications such as *Canada West*. The covers discussed here were produced between the years of 1921 and 1930, when these documents were not only visually stunning, but also began to include new themes. The earlier magazines are aimed at men who would be establishing homesteads in remote areas. As time went by, Canadian immigration material focused more on the amenities to be found in the West, such as schools, churches, telephone networks, and other signs of white settlement. One major concern that became apparent as immigrants came to Canada was that the number of men in the prairies vastly outnumbered women. This threatened the government’s vision for a society made of farm families, and in order to correct this imbalance Canada issued advertisements that were aimed directly at women. The cover of *Canada West* from 1921 is a good example of these new forms of promotion.
THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CAMPAIGN

Earlier covers of Canada West depicted men working in fields or with livestock. Although their texts mentioned families, women and children did not appear in the cover imagery. This changed with the 1921 issue. The predominant figure on this cover was the woman in the foreground. Although there are three men working in the background, they are much less significant than the woman figure. She represents the postwar vision for prairie development, the face that the Canadian government wanted to put on the prairies. There were two intended audiences for this image. Men were meant to draw from it the idea that they could be more prosperous farmers in Canada because they could concentrate on the fieldwork while women, whether a housekeeper or a wife, would take care of domestic issues. As Frank Oliver said, “Canada is establishing a landed aristocracy” in the Canadian West, and in order to do so men needed someone to care for their household (CW 1911, 37).

For women, this image was meant to have a similar but subtly different message. They were supposed to place themselves in the position of this woman, who demonstrated that there was a place for women in this society. The Canadian advertisements concentrated heavily on addressing issues of interest to women, and in many cases the government produced documents that were explicitly directed at potential women immigrants. Whether as wives or domestic worker, women were essential to the proper functioning of a farm. Recognizing the important contributions women made to farms, the Canadian government recruited women to the region, often advertising explicitly for domestic servants. They encouraged women, both in the more general brochures and in documents created solely for distribution to women, by explaining the advantages of domestic work in Canada.

According to these documents, Canadians were kinder employers than their European counterparts, emphasizing class less and providing better working conditions. The government claimed that even untrained domestics could make high wages in Canada, although they did acknowledge that wages were higher in the cities than in rural communities.

In addition to specifying the types of women that they wanted to immigrate, the Canadian officials were clear about whom they did not want as well. In many of the documents they produced to recruit women, the authors included a section with a title like “classes for which demand is small.” They listed professions such as “telephone clerks, typists, stenographers, and telegraph clerks.” Just as with men, Canada only wanted certain classes of women—those who could further the goals of the government for western development.

Finally, these promotional works emphasized the gender imbalance in the Canadian West. Many of these documents encouraged young, unskilled women to immigrate on the hope that they could marry quickly. The other point of view was that women who came to
Canada as domestic servants should work for as long as possible before marriage. Explaining this argument, one government publication stated that girls have a better chance of having homes of their own in Canada than they have in England, but she must remember than in many cases where a farmer on a homestead wants a wife it means that she is to have all the drudgery and worry of a farm house in embryo and get no wages for her efforts. The longer a girl works in Canada at a good wage the more particular she becomes in the selection of a life partner. 35

The author of this pamphlet went on to say that “there are Jacks for every Jill in Canada, but every Jack is not possessed of sufficient money to keep a wife.” 36

The woman on the 1921 cover did not seem to be suffering on the prairies. The whole scene has a pleasant sense to it. She dresses fashionably, lives in a new house, and has access, at least through catalogs, to commercial goods. Immigration Branch officials were aware of the growing importance of consumerism, and they frequently referred to the availability of goods for purchase in the West. They acknowledged that the farmer “likes to have his house well furnished and his boys and girls well dressed” (CW British ed. 1911, 33). Certainly this appeal to the consumer side of life was not lost on women either. In this 1921 edition the authors said that

the guiding hand of woman and her refining influence is seen in all sections of the country. The clap-board shack or mud hut have given place to the comfortable home with its wide open fireplace, its walls adorned with beautiful pictures; with flower gardens and vegetable plots which bear testimony to the presence of women. (9)

These were major points that the Canadian advertisers made in their literature aimed at women. As they said in the 1911 British edition, “the settler of today has no longer the pioneer's fear of untoward conditions” (33). Overall, agriculture was not the primary focus anymore; it was instead a means to obtaining a better life, the real goal of immigration to Canada. The picnic lunch that dominates in the foreground is a symbol of the prosperous, leisurely life that the Canadian government promised to immigrants. Picnics were a common theme in the Canadian immigration literature because they were an extreme demonstration of the leisure that officials wanted farmers to count on. As the authors said in the 1923 British edition of Canada West, “throughout the country districts there are the parties, the picnics, and the gatherings of people, just as in the ‘old home back east’” (1). In order to create this scene a farmer would have to have several things: a wife or housekeeper to prepare the meal, the money to buy the picnic baskets and the dishes, and the time to enjoy the meal. This would mean that this farm, and by extension the region, was well past the pioneer stage (CW 1923, 24).

MATERIAL GOODS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PRAIRIES

The cover produced in 1923 reinforced the idea that the prairies were highly developed. In the background is an apparently prosperous farm with many modern conveniences; in the foreground, a relatively new and neatly maintained house. The house appears to have been built with many purchased materials, and it is landscaped. The barn also contains manufactured construction items. Through this emphasis on the availability of dimensional lumber and other building products, Canadian Immigration Branch officials wanted to dispel the idea that the West was in the pioneer stage and convince people that they would not have to live in log cabins or sod houses. As early as the 1914 edition of Canada West, the government made a point that new houses in the West were being built with concrete foundations, emphasizing their permanence and comparing these houses with the ones settlers left
behind (CW 1914, 3). They directly addressed the subject of homebuilding in the 1925 edition of Canada West:

[One of the first essentials to a farm is a warm comfortable house. All kinds of building materials can be had in each of the Provinces of Canada. Advice as to the best plans and equipment for a house in Canada may be obtained from the Supervising architect of the Department of Health, Ottawa, or from the Department of Agriculture in the capital of each Province. Plans and specifications concerning equipment are supplied free. (Inside back cover)]

Houses themselves were part of the commercial development of the West, and Canadian officials recognized that no amount of consumer goods would be of interest to farm families if they did not have nice houses to display them in.

Another sign that this region is highly developed is the power lines in front of the house. Electricity was one of the signs of development that potential immigrants were looking for in the West, and Canadian officials made a point of mentioning the existence of extensive power networks. The 1922 Canada West noted that “there is in Manitoba a power commission, vested with very wide power in extending the system throughout the rural districts of the Province. The farmers along the power lines will avail themselves of this excellent and cheap means of getting light, heat, and power” (CW 1922, 16). These authors knew that farmers and their families had the option of moving to the city if rural conditions were not livable, and so they emphasized the ease of farm life.

In front of the house is a maintained road and on that road is a car. These things allowed farmers to travel more easily and therefore contributed to the sense of community in the prairies. Automobiles were common subjects in the immigration propaganda and all of these documents suggest that farmers could expect to afford cars themselves (CW 1922, 16). In fact, the later editions of Canada West included pictures of cars full of teenage girls out for an afternoon’s entertainment (CW 1921, 3). The Canadian government even encouraged farmers from the United States to travel to Canada by automobile when they immigrated, saying, “the excellent roads throughout all parts of the country lend themselves wonderfully to this means of transportation. Crossing the boundary line that divides the United States from Canada is easily negotiated, the owner of the car having satisfied the boundary officials that he has met all the requirements” (CW 1921, 3). As with other equipment, the Canadian officials hoped that prosperous American farmers would bring their cars with them to the Canadian West. Furthering the sense of community are the two houses that you can see in the background. One very nearby and the other in the distance, these houses suggest that this is a community; you could visit your neighbors with little difficulty, especially if you had a car.

Roads were also valuable for another reason: they allowed children to get to schools. From nearly the beginning of this campaign, the authors emphasized that schools were readily available; they were initially established in five-square-mile districts with at least four residents and at least twelve children between the ages of five and sixteen, but eventually these were consolidated into much larger districts (CW 1922, 22). By the 1920s Canadian officials started to acknowledge that many children went to school by bus. This was a necessity not just because of the distances traveled, but also because of the weather. The 1924 edition of Canada West addressed this by saying that “the vehicles used in transporting the children [to school] afford proper protection from inclement weather either summer or winter, and the establishment of consolidated schools has shown a pronounced increased in attendance.” Even though farmers in many cases wanted their children to remain farmers as adults, they were also concerned for their education because of the impact of scientific farming. Roads and school buses made it pos-
sible for children living in rural areas to get a better education and the automobile allowed families to interact with their neighbors. This was exactly how Canadian officials had envisioned the development of this region. Mrs. J. O. Smith, a settler in the prairies, said in the 1918 edition of Canada West, “We have good roads, which mean much to the farmer, and with automobiles at hand, distance is disappearing. We have rural mail service and telephones and there is no feeling of isolation” (CW 1918, 16). The Canadian advertisements frequently emphasized that life in the West was not the lonely, drab existence that many potential immigrants might have imagined.

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PURSUITS

These advertisements went into great detail about the pastimes and social interactions that women could expect in the prairies. As they said, “the farmer and the farmer’s wife in central Canada cannot complain of isolation” (CW 1918 16). According to Canadian officials, she also could not complain about the work she had.

[M]odern labour-saving devices, modern heating, lighting, water, and sanitary systems are being adapted more and more on the farms, lessening the women’s work and making the home more congenial. The opportunities for social intercourse with friends and neighbours are made more frequent, with the automobile banishing the old handicaps of distance. (CW 1923)

If all the promises came true, women who immigrated to the Canadian West could look forward to lives of leisure, spending a small portion of their day on housework and the majority of their time socializing and relaxing.

This farm is a great example of the society that Canada wanted to create in the West. We can guess from this picture that it is a family farm. To begin with, if we look closely at the front porch of the house in the foreground, there is a woman sitting in a swing, reading a book. There is also a child sitting on the front steps. The woman demonstrates an important point. Canada repeatedly asserted that women who immigrated to the West would not live lonely lives of drudgery; they would have social and intellectual stimulation. For this woman, she could obtain social interaction through visiting her neighbors. The book on her lap demonstrates that she also had access to intellectual pursuits. These advertisements included a great deal of information on the sorts of intellectual and cultural outlets that women would find on the prairies, including gardening, reading, and music. As the Immigration Branch stated in the 1921 Canada West, “there are traveling libraries, traveling motion picture outlets, boys’ and girls’ clubs and women’s institutes. Agricultural fairs are held in all the principal communities. In addition to their educational value they have a distinct social side” (CW 1921, 16). Immigration officials pointed out how easily women could recreate their former lifestyles. For example, they said “the piano trade in central Canada is reported as exceedingly active, and the £80 or £100 required for purchase weights very lightly” (CW British ed. 1911, 33). To attract women immigrants, officials felt that they had to assure them of their happiness.

AGRICULTURE IN THE WEST

Giving further evidence that this is a family farm, the farmer depicted was engaged in mixed agriculture. Two men are cutting hay in a large field, and the family has a herd of cattle grazing in the field behind the hay. In the foreground are at least eight horses, not including the four being used in the field. The other animals in the scene include chickens and a dog near the house. Mixed farming was a typical strategy for a family farm, and it was one that the Canadian government encouraged in the early years of the immigration push.
It was also a way of including women in agricultural production. In many of the brochures, women were told that they could raise vegetable gardens and small animals in the Canadian prairies, and that this activity would bring them both money and pleasure (CW 1924, 21).

Another aspect of Canada's campaign that we can see in this image is the presence of farm equipment. The two men in the hay field were using mechanical equipment to cut the hay. The 1927 edition of Canada West depicted a man riding a tractor pulling a disc plow, with a caption reading, "The general purpose tractor supplements horse power on many Manitoba farms" (8). One of the reasons why Canadian officials preferred American immigrants was their hope that these farmers would own equipment and bring it with them.

**CANADA IN THE EMPIRE**

One feature that appears on some of the covers is a large Union Jack. It appears to have been added later in 1923 or in 1924 and it is out of scale to the rest of the scene. In fact, it is nearly as large as the house it stands next to. This flag seems to have been added as an afterthought and a way to reinforce to the viewer the importance of imperial institutions in Canada. Without the flag there is nothing in the image to distinguish the scene as particularly Canadian; it could be a landscape in the United States as easily as Canada. Immigration officials did tailor their recruitment efforts to either the United States or Britain, and in these documents they sometimes acknowledged one country or the other. Most of these texts were not specific on this subject.

The dominant feature of this cover is another icon that separated Canada from the United States. As with the flag, this out-of-scale woman was Miss Canada, the traditional representative of the country. Often in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Canadian political cartoons, Miss Canada was depicted as the beautiful, graceful contrast to a lecherous, grotesque Uncle Sam. Some cartoonists went to the extreme of showing Uncle Sam in various attempts to molest or rape Miss Canada. She was also a mini-Britannia, a representative of how British institutions were adapted, yet maintained, in the colonial environment. In the case of this particular image, Miss Canada was pulling back a curtain made of grain to show the potential immigrant what would await them in the Canadian West. She symbolized the Canadian government in the sense that she was welcoming people to this new land. Miss Canada was a sort of ambassador, demonstrating the potential of a modern country with a rich British heritage.

A similar cover appeared on the Canada West magazine published in 1930. Many of the aspects of the scene depicted on this cover are the same as the 1923-24 cover. There was a modern farmhouse, barn, and outbuildings,
which appear to have been built from manufactured materials. Above the house we can see power lines. The image also suggested mixed farming through the representation of both livestock and grain production.

The most striking feature of this image was the woman with the child. Similar to the woman and child in the 1923 image, she represented the importance of women to the farming system that Canadian officials wanted for the prairies. In order to achieve a society based on family farms, Canada needed to ensure that the male-female ratio in the region was balanced. To achieve this, the Immigration Branch actively recruited single women to the prairies. As mentioned previously, one of the ways in which the Canadian government tried to appeal to women was to assure them that they would not have to give up all the niceties of life in an urban, industrial setting. They wanted women to feel that they were not leaving behind civilization by coming to the West. In this particular case, the woman's fashionable dress was meant to send this message. It may have been store-bought, but if not, it still demonstrates that the woman at least had access to information about fashionable clothing. The message to women was that they would not be held hostage in a man's country, with no outlets of their own.

Many of these themes reappear in the 1928 cover of Canada West. In this image we can see a modern farmhouse, barn, and other outbuildings, all of which appear to have been constructed from purchased materials. Additionally, the house is in a fashionable style for the late 1920s, demonstrating that farmers in the Canadian West had access to new architectural plans. We can also see power lines above the house, which, as mentioned earlier, suggest that the West was highly developed. Finally, upon close examination one can see a tiny figure of a woman on the front porch of the house, and she is wearing the short hemline popular in the 1920s. All these elements are repeated from earlier covers, but the 1928 Canada West also featured new themes.

**FARM FAMILIES AND CHILDREN**

The previously discussed Canada West covers focused heavily on women and their place in western Canadian society, but women were not the only subjects of the immigration campaign. Children were another, and we can see this represented in the 1928 cover featuring a young boy. He was hidden under a haystack, giving the appearance that he was at play. Canadian authorities felt that this was an important message. Just as they tried to reassure potential immigrants of enough development to give women a sense of security, they also wanted families to know that they could make happy lives for their children in the Canadian West. The boy was not engaged in farm work; he obviously had the leisure to just play. This suggests that the family was prosperous enough to be able to afford to hire labor for the farm—and that there was labor to hire. As Cecilia Danysk suggests, this was not always the case, and the Canadian government addressed this in their propaganda by attempting to recruit young men who could work as hired hands, as well as by reassuring older, more established farmers that they would have help in their work. This does not mean that all children were free from work on the farm. Some certainly did have to do chores, but according to the propaganda, it was easy work that would be beneficial in teaching children about running a farm. In the 1921 Canada West the government said that farm work for children "creates an important interest and builds for splendid citizenship," as well as providing young people with a means of earning money (6).

These documents emphasized the benefits of the Canadian West for raising children, making statements like "the country is an ideal place for children to grow to strong young manhood and womanhood, with healthy, strong bodies, clean, pure lives, souls with a broad clear outlook, and a vision of things that counts for more than wealth" (CW 1918, 17). Although this statement contained a tacit
admission that farming might not be the most profitable line of work, the officials hoped that families would have ideological reasons for wanting their children to remain on the farm.

The boy on the cover could also refer to a project that many in Canada and Great Britain were advocating at the time. This was a plan to resettle poor, orphaned boys from the British Isles on farms in western Canada. Advocates of this program, known as boy settlement, hoped that it would not only relieve the pressure on the British government to take better care of these children but also provide a labor source for farmers in western Canada. The idea was that these boys would be settled on special farms in the prairies where they would learn farming techniques. This would prepare them for lives as either farm laborers or preferably independent farmers with their own homesteads in the future. Many Canadians expressed interest in this scheme because it provided for a reliable stream of immigrants from a desirable ethnic group who could be trained in the latest techniques of scientific agriculture. One problem the plan might have created was a gender imbalance; the West already had an overwhelmingly male population, and there seems to have been no similar plan to recruit girls.

Another new theme in the 1928 cover was the emphasis on a different type of farming. In much of the previous immigration literature the government had emphasized that farmers could engage in mixed farming. They encouraged this system for several reasons. First, it reduced the risk of failure; if there were a blight that killed all of one crop, you would have other things to sell at the end of the season. Similarly, it also protected farmers against low market values. For immigrants who were new to farming, it gave them a chance to see what crops their homesteads were best suited to and what they had a knack for raising. Finally, if a family needed to subsist from their produce, mixed farming allowed for better nutrition and multiseasonal harvests.

This 1928 cover makes no reference to mixed farming. The only agricultural enter-

prise we can see in this image is the farmer using the team of four horses to pull a harvester in the field. It is not surprising that this image, produced relatively late in the Canadian immigration campaign, should de-emphasize mixed farming. In the late 1920s Canadian farmers engaged in commercial monoculture. The largest single crop was wheat, and farmers were producing it on a huge scale. Canadian farmers produced enough wheat for the nation to not only be self-sufficient, but to actually be an exporter. From almost the beginning of their advertising campaign, Canada had made note of the large amounts of money that farmers could make producing these kinds of commercial crops. The ultimate goal of the campaign was to populate the prairies with farmers engaged in commercial monoculture.

One final element of this 1928 cover was the prominent maple leaf. It was during this period that the government seems to have adopted the maple leaf as a symbol of Canada.
Its appearance in this image signifies this new use as a symbol.

As we have seen, the Canadian government campaigned actively for immigrants beginning with the election of the Liberal Party in 1896. This campaign lasted into the early 1930s, when the combination of the Great Depression and the threat of war on the horizon gradually drew the government’s attention to other topics. This is not to say that Canada completely abandoned attempts to recruit new immigrants after the early 1930s. As late as the 1960s Canada maintained their recruitment office on Trafalgar Square in London, and agents in Britain continued to give presentations to potential immigrants, although by that time they were no longer interested in farmers but instead concentrated on women who could work in industry.

The efficacy of this immigration campaign is still up for debate. In reality, there were many eastern European immigrants, especially from the western part of what is today the Ukraine, and these people helped to shape western Canadian society. In the context of this work, it does not really matter whether or not the ads were effective. In fact, there is no real consensus on this issue; much of the evidence suggests that they were not particularly helpful. What we can see from these advertisements is that Canadian government officials had a very specific image of the society they wanted to create in the prairies. Canadian officials did not want immigration to be determined solely by push and pull factors. They wanted immigrants who either were British or would be amenable to maintaining British institutions. Canadian officials saw the West as a place that should be populated by prosperous, white, Anglo-Saxon or at least Germanic, family farmers who would then contribute to building a modern society with all of the developments and conveniences to be found in eastern Canada. In order to establish their envisioned society, Canadian officials knew that they would have to allay the fears of the families to whom they advertised, and they acknowledged that men asked themselves questions such as, “Can I take my wife and family with me, with assurance that social conditions will be congenial, that the children’s education will not be neglected, and that when they grow up they will find themselves surrounded by opportunities such as are not to be expected in my present circumstances? No man, certainly no head of a family, can ask himself more important questions than these” (CW 1924, 1). These documents demonstrate that the bureaucrats who ran the Immigration Branch were intent on recruiting a specific type of immigrants and that these immigrants can be seen on the cover of Canada West.

NOTES

1. Canada Department of the Interior, Immigration Branch, Canada West pamphlet (“Last Best West”) (copies), record group 76, vol. 390, file 541601, National Archives of Canada, Ottawa. Material from this collection is hereafter cited by volume and file number.


3. John Oldland, “How the (Canadian) West Was Won” (unpublished paper, Division of Business Administration, Bishop’s University, Lennoxville, Quebec, 1989), 10.

4. Ibid., 8.

5. Ibid.


7. Ibid.


9. Ibid., xix.


11. Ibid., 103.

12. Cecilia Danysk, “‘A Bachelor’s Paradise’: Homesteaders, Hired Hands, and the Construction


16. Ibid.


18. Abella and Troper, None Is Too Many, vi.

19. Ibid.

20. Troper, Only Farmers Need Apply, 1.

21. Ibid., 22.


30. Danysk, Hired Hands, 41.

31. Ibid., 53.


34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Canada Department of the Interior, Immigration Branch, Western Canada: Free 160 Acres Farm Lands; Where and How and All About It: Information and Facts for the Prospective Settler, 1903, 2.

38. Danysk, Hired Hands, 16.