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# SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE LABOR FORCE OF THE CANADIAN RANCHING FRONTIER DURING ITS GOLDEN AGE, 1882-1901

SIMON M. EVANS

It is more than a decade since scholars like L. G. Thomas and David H. Breen challenged the assumption that the Canadian ranching frontier was a straightforward case of technological and land-use diffusion from the United States.<sup>1</sup> Breen argued that the Canadian government had played a significant role in bringing the range cattle industry into being within the North West Territories during the 1880s and went on to trace the manner in which the Department of the Interior overtly supported the ranchers for the next twenty years. Under this regulatory umbrella, upheld by the forceful presence of the North West Mounted Police, a society evolved that sought

to preserve the best features of the familiar old world in a new and expansive environment. What emerged was not an experimental frontier society seeking new freedoms, but rather a conservative community that saw its mandate as the maintenance of imperial Victorian values.<sup>2</sup>

Breen's thesis was sustained by his analysis of the government documents establishing the legislative framework of the lease system and the annual reports of the various departments whose task it was to administer regulations. His picture of the kind of society that emerged in the foothills was based on an evaluation of the corporate elite that raised the capital to underwrite the "cattle kingdom" and on the diaries and published memoirs of those drawn to the foothills region both by its aesthetic appeal and by the real opportunities beckoning to those who possessed some capital. Between them, Breen and Thomas successfully established that the Canadian ranching community had markedly different characteristics from that of the United States. Their conclusions were corroborated by Patrick Dunae's work on privileged immigrants and by Sheilagh Jameson's thoughtful studies of foothills society.<sup>3</sup>

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Ronald Rees synthesized many of these ideas elegantly in a chapter in his *New and Naked Land*.<sup>4</sup> This body of scholarship focused particularly on the social characteristics of those who participated in the range industry, relying to a considerable extent on the written impressions of well-educated ranchers and cowboys. No attempts were made to evaluate the characteristics of the labor force as a whole, perhaps because few data were available.

My own work largely supported Breen's, particularly with regard to the foothills country. Adopting the spatial perspective of the historical geographer, I tried to demonstrate, however, that American companies and personnel had far reaching influences on the Canadian range in particular regions and at particular times.<sup>5</sup> Thus Wallace Stegner's evocation of the last days of a great Texas cattle outfit is accurate for the Whitemud River during the first decade of the twentieth century, while the adventures of Anglo-Canadian tenderfeet as they learned the ranching business may depict the reality of the foothills during the 1880s.<sup>6</sup> In another paper, an attempt was made to weigh "American diffusion" of cattle and technology against a "Victorian transplant" of social attitudes and metropolitan economic ties.<sup>7</sup> Government infrastructure, capital, and market flows north and south of the international border were compared, and the characteristics of the "actors" in the settlement process were analyzed. The conclusion was reached that we should be cautious lest in our zeal to embrace what was peculiarly "English" or "eastern" about the Canadian ranching frontier we forget the enormous debt the United States range cattle industry owed to British capital and on-the-spot management.

In a paper presented to the Canadian Historical Association and later published in *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, Professor W. M. Elofson reopened the historiographical debate on the origins and characteristics of ranching in western Canada.<sup>8</sup> He challenged the conclusions of the revisionist historians, suggesting they had gone too far. In their eagerness

to depict the social fabric of the English shires in Alberta's foothills, they had ignored the degree to which the frontier environment spurred the evolution of new ways of doing things. Pointing out that the public at large admired the expertise of American cowboys in coping with the exigencies of frontier life, he suggested that this gave rise to a sort of second level social elite:

British and eastern ranchers may well have had their grand balls and their polo clubs, but on the streets of Calgary and Fort Macleod it was the frontier cowboy who caught the public imagination. It was his special status in virtually everyone's mind that shaped and directed popular culture.<sup>9</sup>

Elofson, by no means an old fashioned environmental determinist, did point out the manner in which severe winters and the depredations of wolves, fires, and diseases like mange led to borrowing of adaptive strategies from "frontiersmen." He also argued that experienced American "riders" played a disproportionately important role in establishing the ranching industry in the north; indeed, he argued that "American cowboys had to be employed on all the major ranches because they alone were up to the task in hand."<sup>10</sup> It is to evaluate this contention in the light of newly available evidence that we must now turn.

#### THE RANGE LABOR FORCE

A neglected characteristic of the Canadian cattle industry during its "golden age" is the nature of the labor force employed both by the great cattle companies and by small family outfits.<sup>11</sup> Breen has argued that one of the attractions of ranching was its allowing a certain separation between owners and managers on the one hand and workers on the other—between ranch house and bunk house.<sup>12</sup> We know a great deal about the young men and women who graced the Millarville race course, went to church at Christchurch, and gathered in evening dress for the Bachelors' Ball. But



FIG. 1. *Branding at the Spring Roundup, Longview, 1892. Mounted or standing left to right: George Winder, Jim Byron, George Emerson, Harry Baines, Hugh Byron, and Henry Meinsinger. Kneeling: Walter Ings and Ben Rankin. Photograph courtesy of Glenbow Archives, NA 5182-1.*

we know little about the men who rode as “reps” in the great roundups of the 1880s, who choked in the dust of the trail herd as it moved slowly toward its winter range or sweated with branding iron and knife in the corrals of foothills ranches. Their action frozen into a static pose to accommodate the photographic techniques of the day, the men in this foothill corral (Fig. 1) came from a variety of backgrounds. Emerson and Meinsinger were “frontiersmen,” at home on either side of the border. Emerson had worked with the Hudson’s Bay Company and spoke Cree and Blackfoot. Meinsinger had spent ten years at the Red River settlement and had married a Métis woman. Two were U.S.-born: Ben Rankin had trailed a herd in from Montana for Tom Lynch and stayed on to work for the Quorn ranch, while Jim Byron, whose parents were Scots, was from the lumber camps of Michigan. Harry Baines, the only Englishman in the group, was born in Lancashire and was equally at home in the saddle or behind the bar serving drinks in the High River Hotel. Finally, George Winder

and Walter Ings were Canadians. Winder was the son of Inspector William Winder of the North West Mounted Police; although born in Quebec, he had spent most of his young life within sight of this corral in the Porcupine Hills. Walter Ings came from Prince Edward Island. He established the “Rio Alto” Ranch with his brother Frederick and was the only man in this group to maintain “eastern” social pretensions. He hunted, ran two packs of hounds, and shipped in a beautiful piano when he married.

#### THE 1891 AND 1901 CENSUSES: SOME BACKGROUND

The nominal returns of the 1891 and 1901 Canadian censuses provide an opportunity to examine the makeup of ranch communities in some detail.<sup>13</sup> Such was the pace of change in the North West during this decade, however, that comparisons between the two censuses must be approached with caution. The provisional district of Alberta was divided into only

TABLE 1

## PLACE OF BIRTH: DISTRICT OF ALBERTA, 1891 AND 1901

	1891		1901	
	Number	%	Number	%
Total Population	25,277		65,876	
Canadian Born	18,717	74.0	35,366	53.7
British Isles	4048	16.0	7120	10.8
British Possessions	307	1.2	142	0.2
Europe	508	2.0	11,762	17.8
U.S.A.	1251	5.0	10,972	16.7
Other	446	1.8	514	0.8

Source: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Canada Census*, 1891 and 1901.

three sub-districts and served by 24 enumerators in 1891; by 1901 there were 134 sub-districts and 139 enumerators.

The period from 1891 to 1901 was a dynamic one for the provisional district of Alberta. The population rose from 25,000 to 66,000. Most of this increase resulted from immigration stimulated by rising wheat prices, falling transport costs, and technological developments, and spurred by the vigorous leadership of Clifford Sifton at the Department of the Interior.<sup>14</sup> Since the source regions from which immigrants were drawn changed significantly, the proportion of the population of Alberta-born in different jurisdictions changed too. Those born in the United States increased from 5 percent to 17 percent, while those born in Europe rose from 2 percent to 18 percent of the total. (See Table 1.)

In 1891 the Canadian range cattle industry was less than a decade old and the major ranches were widely scattered along the Bow River both east and west of Calgary, along the Belly and Oldman rivers both upstream and downstream from Macleod, and along the Whoop-Up Trail, which joined the two. Therefore, enumeration areas from Morley to Gleichen

and from Pincher Creek to Lethbridge were included to encompass the main ranching areas. The four Calgary enumeration areas in 1891 enclosed wide tracts of ranching country and were included for this reason (Fig. 2).

The Macleod sub-district was chosen as the sample area for the 1901 census. It included the heart of the foothills ranching region, but excluded both Calgary and Lethbridge. The population of the five Calgary enumeration areas exceeded the total population of the entire Macleod district by this time. Undoubtedly, a considerable number of people engaged in ranching were enumerated within the Calgary area, but the inclusion of what was overwhelmingly an urban area would complicate the overall picture. Similarly, the majority of the 2300 people in Lethbridge were engaged in mining or in the provision of goods and services for the surrounding area.

In April of the census years a squad of enumerators rode out into the country and visited every ranch, homestead, or bachelor shack. They collected a wealth of information concerning the age, origin, occupation, and citizenship of each inhabitant. The manner in which these men carried out their duties

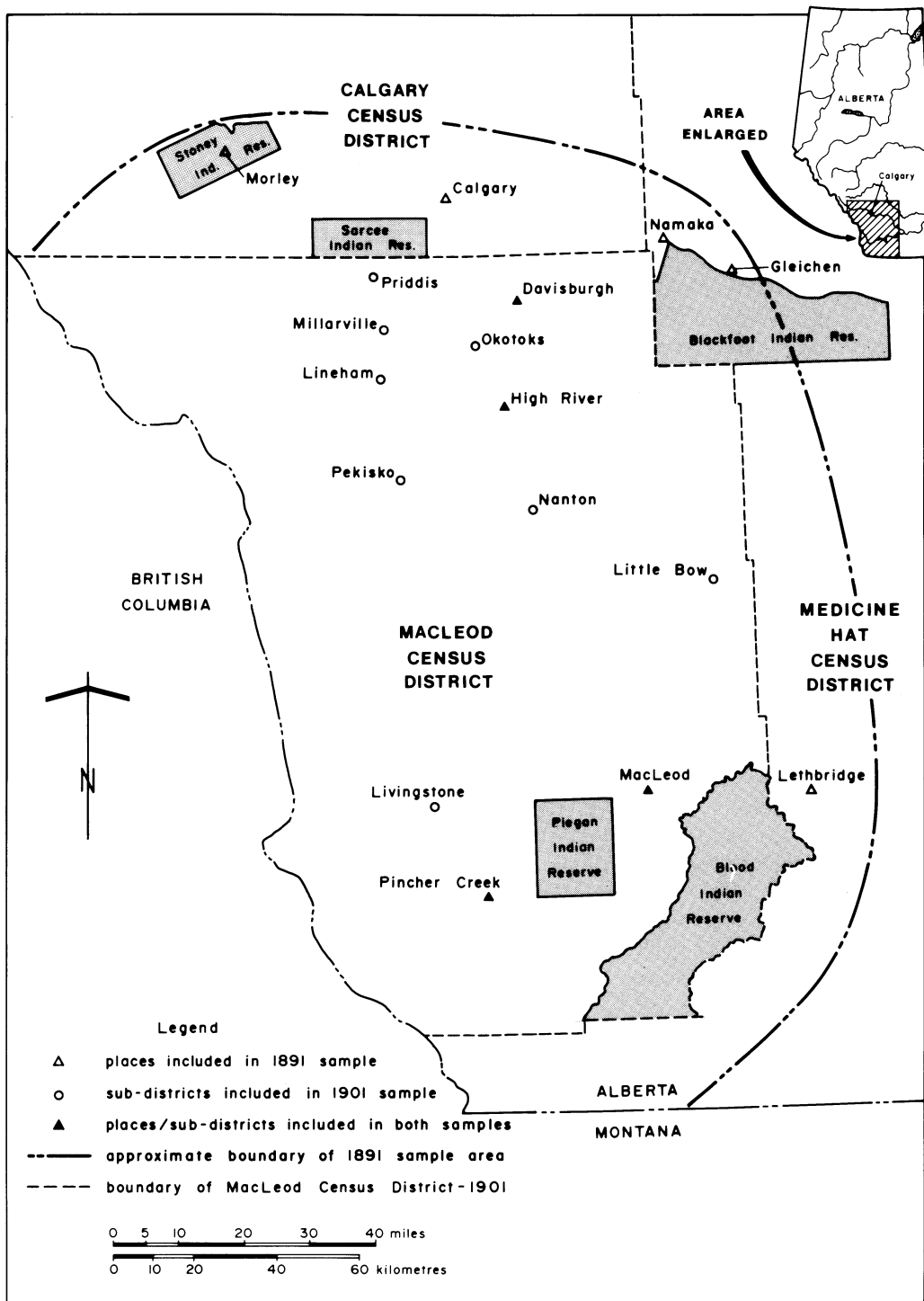


FIG. 2. Census sub-districts and enumeration areas in 1891 and 1901 samples. Courtesy of Simon M. Evans.

influenced the quality of the data available to us. In 1891 the High River district was well served by W. E. Holmes, who was himself involved in ranching and later became a magistrate, while school teacher William Ives dealt with the complex Pincher Creek district with comparable skill. Enumerators like these were careful to distinguish between employees and employers. They used terms like "cowboy," "teamster," "ranch laborer" for the former, and "cattle breeder," "stock breeder," or "horse rearer" for the latter. Others tended to classify all those who worked with animals, in whatever capacity, as ranchers, and all who tilled the soil as farmers. Some enumerators were also apt to use ditto marks freely in the occupations column of their forms. Thus even the children in a ranch family were sometimes inadvertently classified as ranchers. Enough has been said to suggest that this data source, although valuable, has shortcomings. The most straightforward and least ambiguous way to use the census material is to isolate and compare individual ranch communities. Enumerators grouped individuals according to the buildings in which they lived (a particular ranch can be identified by recognizing the names of the owner or his foreman) as well as by occupations (i.e., cowboys, cooks, or "ranch apprentices") and by locations.

#### INDIVIDUAL RANCH COMMUNITIES, 1891

The Bar U Ranch was one of the four great corporate ranches that dominated the social, political, and economic life of the Canadian ranching frontier during its golden age.<sup>15</sup> It was underwritten by the Allan family of Montreal, who were interested not only in an exciting speculative investment, but also in hides for their leather interests and in a light but valuable cargo for their ships plying the trans-Atlantic run. The census returns record eighteen persons living at the Bar U on 6 April 1891. The manager's household comprised Fred Stimson, his wife Mary, his cousin Joseph, his niece and nephew Nell and Percy Bowen, and Mary Bigland, the maid. Samuel Leighton

kept the books for the North West Cattle Company; Everett C. Johnson, from Wyoming, was ranch foreman; the vital role of cook was occupied by James Barbour.<sup>16</sup> The ranch horses were in the care of Thomas Luck, while Henry Longabough (Harry Alonzo Longabaugh), also known as the Sundance Kid, was responsible for breaking new mounts.<sup>17</sup> Herb Millar, Richard Cowell, and Percy Bowen were cowboys; young Thomas Hamilton handled the farm chores. There were four teamsters recorded, although some of these men were possibly delivering spring supplies to the ranch and not part of the permanent complement. Stimson and his family were from Quebec, but the foreman and three of the cowboys had been born in the United States, as had two of the teamsters. Thus it appears that most of the skilled labor force was made up of Americans. Only Bowen from Quebec and Cowell from Ireland were exceptions.

The Cochrane Ranch along the Belly River in the Macleod District, managed by Senator Matthew Cochrane's sons, William and Ernest, was another of the great corporate ranches of the lease period.<sup>18</sup> James Patterson was foreman, and there were nine riders. Interestingly enough, two butchers were living on the ranch, which suggests that the lucrative contracts to supply meat to the Indian Reserves bordering the ranch involved slaughtering and quartering the beef for delivery. Patterson and four of his cowboys had been born in the United States; in addition, the cook and one of the butchers were from south of the line. As with the Bar U, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that American cowboys played a significant role in the operations of this large Canadian outfit.

Was skilled labor from the United States a necessary condition for a successful ranch? "Middle order" ranches, like the Winder and the Military Colonization Company, did employ several American cowboys, but others flourished apparently without southern expertise. The Winder Ranch had been founded in 1880, when Superintendent William Winder retired from the North West Mounted Police

and gained the backing of some prominent businessmen from Montreal and Quebec's Eastern Townships. Since 1882 Charles Sharples, the son of a wealthy timber family in Quebec City, had managed the ranch, which had survived the accidental death of its founder in 1885. By 1891 it was in its last year of operation, 3000 head of cattle and 700 horses being sold in 1892.<sup>19</sup> The census records three cowboys from the United States among the employees, including George Brown the foreman. The Military Colonization Company was founded by Thomas Bland Strange, partly as an economic venture and partly to train young Englishmen and eastern Canadians in the skills of ranching.<sup>20</sup> In 1891 there were seven "ranch apprentices" and four professional cowboys on the ranch, two of whom, the foreman Roy Cowan and Howard Randall, were American.

Lack of expert help from the United States does not seem to have been a major factor inhibiting the successful development of smaller ranches in the foothills. Walter Ings and his brother came from Prince Edward Island to establish the Rio Alto (O. H.) Ranch.<sup>21</sup> Frank Bedingfeld and his mother Agnes came from England and joined Joseph H. Brown, from Ireland, in a partnership that built up the outfit that was to become the E. P. Ranch.<sup>22</sup> John Thorp had just arrived from England and settled on what was to become the nucleus of the Cartwright's D Ranch.<sup>23</sup> Walter Skrine and "Billy" Cochrane had both come from England and established themselves along Mosquito Creek, while Ernest Cross, at the a7, was from Quebec.<sup>24</sup> Among these successful emergent cattlemen, only Cross employed a cowboy from the United States, although most of these men had served some kind of apprenticeship on a major ranch before going into business on their own.

#### INDIVIDUAL RANCH COMMUNITIES, 1901

If Americans played a significant leadership role in guiding the Canadian range cattle industry through the 1880s, what happened during the ensuing decade? On the big

corporate ranches there was considerable continuity in management but an almost complete turnover in the work force. At the Bar U, the Stimson family was still in residence at the main ranch house, although it would be their last year there.<sup>25</sup> The foreman was Charlie McKinnon from Ontario, and the "muscle" was provided by three young cowboys from Quebec and Prince Edward Island. The only man with experience in the United States was forty-four-year-old Frederick Latur, who had been born in England but held United States citizenship. He was settled at the ranch with his wife and daughter. George Brandt, the teamster, and his wife Josephine, the cook, came from Denmark and Sweden respectively. On the Belly River, William Cochrane was still managing the Cochrane Ranch, his permanent labor force reduced in number. Only one of his three riders was from the United States. Two young employees, one from Quebec and the other from Russia, described themselves as "farmers" and were engaged full-time at haying and growing fodder crops. The bunkhouse at the Walrond Ranch housed six cowboys, three from the United States. From this fragment of evidence one might conclude that the importance of American expertise had decreased during the decade. The same trend is apparent on well established smaller ranches. Walter Skrine employed a Chinese cook and a Québécois nurse for his daughter Mary, but his two ranch hands were from Ontario and Nova Scotia. John Norrish too employed two Canadian born riders. At the a7 Ranch, Ontarian John Blake was manager and Harry Brown, from England, foreman. Twenty-six year old Andrew Scott was the only member of the community from south of the line.

There were still many American-born ranchers and ranch hands working the range in southern Alberta, however. They had spread from the large corporate ranches to smaller individually owned outfits, many skilled cowboys from the United States having left their positions as employees as soon as they had established a stake. Ed London had brought in



a herd from Montana for "Billy" Cochrane's C. C. Ranch. After staying over the winter to see the stock settled, he moved to Pincher Creek, where he put down roots and raised a family.<sup>26</sup> George Lane left the Bar U after a bout with typhoid; when he recovered he worked as a buyer for the Winnipeg meat packing firm of Gordon, Ironsides and Fares but soon purchased the Flying E Ranch and then the YT.<sup>27</sup> E. C. Johnson also left the Bar U and worked as a cattle buyer, while W. D. Kerfoot built up a small ranch in Grand Valley, having parted company with the Cochrane Ranch after a court case.<sup>28</sup> Such men of course remained vital sources of range lore wherever they resided. They had the experience and leadership qualities necessary to plan and manage local roundups and to head up efforts to control mange or tackle the wolf problem; moreover, they were often the advocates for local interests to the stockmen's associations and the government. So the process of the diffusion of technology and know-how went on uninterrupted.

The independence that was the reward of owning an outfit did not appeal to all cowboys. Several of the riders at the Bar U in 1891 were older than might have been expected. They had been part of the original trail crew that came north in the early 1880s. For those who preferred the hard but care-free life of a hand to the responsibility of running a ranch of one's own, a job with one of the big outfits provided significant advantages with regard to security, living conditions, and, perhaps most important, prestige. Herb Millar had been a teenager when recruited in Chicago by Fred Stimson in 1881 to take some pedigree bulls north to High River.<sup>29</sup> By 1891 he was twenty-nine years old and had made a name for himself as a first-rate hand; a decade later Millar was working for George Lane at the YT Ranch where Lane held the cattle he was buying for the Winnipeg meat packing firm of Gordon, Ironsides and Fares. The census records no less than fourteen cowboys at the ranch. In all likelihood this was a temporary situation, for teams of riders would be sent all

over the ranching country to bring in bunches of cattle and then trail them slowly north to Strathmore or some other shipping point along the Canadian Pacific mainline. Six of this group of cowboys had been born in the United States. It seems likely that Lane, himself an American, favored skilled riders from south of the line.<sup>30</sup> His business at this time involved selecting particular animals out of a herd, cutting out, roping, and trailing cattle—work that required top-line cowboys and that traditional riders enjoyed. A job with Lane put off for a while the need to undertake demeaning work like haying and fencing; a cowboy could continue to spend all of his working day on horseback.<sup>31</sup>

#### ORIGINS OF THOSE WORKING ON THE RANGE

One gains a more general impression of the significance of the United States presence by studying a sample of all those engaged in the cattle industry in southern Alberta. (See Table 2.) These adult members of the labor force were variously described by enumerators as cowboys, stockbreeders, ranchers, ranch hands, stock rearers, horse breakers, and cattle breeders. Of the 657 men working on the range in 1891 as owners or hired hands, 42 percent were Canadian born, while a further 37 percent came from the British Isles. Seventeen percent were from the United States, and 5 percent from other origins. These proportions remained similar in the 1901 census, despite the fact that the total number of inhabitants of the District of Alberta born in the States rose from 1251 (5 percent) to 10,972 (16.7 percent). One must conclude that the great influx of Americans was absorbed in the farm sector and in urban occupations, not on the range.<sup>32</sup>

#### OCCUPATIONS OF THOSE BORN IN THE UNITED STATES

The census returns make it possible to examine the occupations of those born in the

TABLE 2  
BIRTH PLACE OF THOSE "WORKING ON THE RANGE"

	1891		1901	
	Number	%	Number	%
Canada	272	41.5	292	43.4
British Isles	243	37.2	244	36.3
U.S.A.	110	16.8	101	15.0
Others	30	4.5	36	5.3
Totals	655		673	

Occupations: Cowboy, Stock breeder, Rancher, Horse breaker, Livestock breeder, and Cattle breeder.

For 1891 Census, enumeration sub-districts selected from Alberta District 197: Calgary 1, 2, 3, & 4, Davisburg, Fish Creek, Gleichen, High River, Lethbridge, Macleod, Morley, Namaka, and Pincher Creek.

For 1901 Census, Macleod Census sub-district.

Source: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Canada Census*, 1891 and 1901.

United States, allowing us to look at the American contribution to the labor force of the Canadian range from another perspective. (See Table 3.) Both samples show that numerous immigrants from the United States came to Canada in family groups. In 1891 fully 56 percent were children, wives, or dependent adult women, in marked contrast to the population of southern Alberta as a whole which, like frontier regions in general, was dominated by young immigrant males. Many family groups had a complex immigration history. Parents born in Scotland, for example, had spent long enough in the United States to have three children there. In several cases parents born in Manitoba or Assiniboia had American children. The occupations of those born in the United States who participated in the labor force covered the whole spectrum of employment opportunities. In 1891 about 30 percent worked on the range, while 23 percent were involved in farming and 27 percent in "central place" activities. The 1901 sample was drawn from the heart of the ranching coun-

try and did not include the growing farming regions around Calgary or the Mormon settlement south of Lethbridge. More than 54 percent of American-born immigrants were involved in ranching, 15 percent in farming, and 19 percent in service activities. Work on the range was an important option for incoming Americans but by no means the only one chosen.

#### DISCUSSION

What light do these newly available census data throw on the ideas of Thomas and Breen? Breen suggests that

American influence, contrary to popular belief, was restricted to the few American foremen and cowboys whose duties were confined mainly to the physical management of cattle. Moreover, after 1885 the number of Americans constantly diminished and by 1890 even most cowboys were Canadian or British.<sup>33</sup>

TABLE 3  
OCCUPATION OF U.S. BORN BY MAJOR GROUP

	Number	1891 %	%*	Number	1901 %	%*
Children	376	44.4		176	42.2	
Wives	100	12.1		52	12.4	
Ranchers & Cowboys	108	13.1	30.0	103	24.8	54.2
Farmers	66	8.0	18.3	14	3.3	7.4
Farm labor	16	1.9	4.4	14	3.3	7.4
Trades	42	5.1	11.7	16	3.8	8.4
Commerce	19	2.3	5.3	3	0.7	1.6
Railway	19	2.3	5.3	3	0.7	1.6
Hotels, etc.	10	1.2	2.8	5	1.2	2.6
Professions	5	0.6	1.4	7	1.7	3.7
Labor	63	7.6	17.5	16	3.8	8.4
Others	12	1.4	3.3	9	2.1	4.7
Totals	827			418		

The columns marked %\* refer to percentages of the labor force.

The different sample areas affect these figures radically; direct comparisons between the two censuses should be avoided.

Source: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Canada Census*, 1891 and 1901.

The census, on the other hand, shows that at least as late as 1891 many of the big corporate ranches had American foremen, and a large proportion of their cowboys also had experience on southern ranges. The owners had enormous investments in cattle to protect and naturally sought out the most experienced and expert help they could find. In several cases they found the right man through the good offices of the Montana Stockgrowers' Association.<sup>34</sup> The census figures demonstrate that we can take contemporary observations at their face value. The American correspondent of the *London Times*, for instance, gave an outsider's assessment of the Macleod area while visiting in November 1886: "The management of these ranches is generally in the hands of

Englishmen and Scotchmen with Ontario men, but the foremen, herders, and cowboys are mostly from the States."<sup>35</sup> Veteran rancher H. M. Hatfield echoed these words as he reminisced in 1908: "In 1886 and prior to that date some of the ranch managers were Americans, all the foremen, nearly all the cowboys. . . ."<sup>36</sup> Nor did riders and ranchers from the United States disappear during the 1890s; their numerical and proportional importance remained remarkably constant. Many Americans established their own outfits, however, and by 1901 the bunk houses of the large corporate ranches sheltered men from a wide range of backgrounds who had honed their range skills on Canadian grasslands. Typical was Charlie McKinnon, foreman of the Bar U, seen here



FIG. 3. Bar U cowboys, general roundup, 1901. Sitting left to right: N.W.M.P. Brand Inspector; Lionel Fitzherbert; unidentified; Charlie Lehr, back to post with cap; and Milt Thorne. Lying down, left to right: Charlie McKinnon, boots in foreground, face hidden; F. R. Pike; Ted Hills, on back with feet on Hugh Robertson; unidentified; and Mike Herman, near stove with striped kerchief. Photograph courtesy of Glenbow Archives, NA 1035-6.

with the roundup crew resting up in the chuck wagon tent (Fig. 3). McKinnon hailed from Ontario and had learned his business on various ranches in the foothills. He had already served for nine years with the Bar U. Milt Thorne, the horse breaker, was one of three brothers born in New Brunswick but raised in High River. The three Englishmen—Hills, Robertson, and Fitzherbert—would be referred to as “New Canadians” today. Hills had arrived in 1885 and had spent all his working

life in Canada. Fitzherbert had been apprentice to a famous Newmarket trainer but had emigrated, while still a young man, when he grew too large to become a top class jockey. Mike Herman came from Montana; his father was Dutch, his mother Irish. A protégé of George Emerson, he was a wizard with a rope and destined to spend the rest of his life in Alberta. Finally, Charlie Lehr, a famous chuck wagon cook, was born in Prussia and moved west by way of the “Pennsylvania Dutch”

settlements in the eastern United States. The crew came from wonderfully eclectic backgrounds.

Much remains to be done. It may be possible to establish a list of the names and origins of the foremen who served the major ranches and the "captains" who organized the open roundups through the turn of the century. The importance of foremen from the United States is suggested by a review of the history of individual ranches: Cottrell, Lane, and Johnson at the Bar U; Frields and Patterson at the Waldron; and Kerfoot, Jesus Navarro (Ca Sous), and Dunlap at the Cochrane, to mention a few. But how long did this hegemony last, and how complete was it?

The significance of the American contribution to the development of ranching in Canada depends on the premise that cowboys and cattlemen from the south possessed skills and managerial experience that could not be replicated locally. A corollary is that it took a considerable time to obtain these skills and that incoming Americans continued to enjoy marked advantages with respect to employment throughout the golden era. But it is important to examine critically both the skills that southern riders brought with them and the ease and speed with which such attributes could be acquired.<sup>37</sup>

It would be a mistake to imbue American cowboys with mythic skills. The fact that a man had been born in the western states, or indeed had worked with a United States cattle company, did not necessarily mean he was an experienced and expert rider.<sup>38</sup> In any trail outfit or roundup crew a hierarchy of skills defined the status, and sometimes the pay, of individuals. Larry McMurtry gets the make up of his fictional trail crew exactly right in *Lonesome Dove*.<sup>39</sup> Two or three experienced hands acted as "non-commissioned officers" and directed the efforts of a motley collection of green kids. The vast majority of riders who followed the herds north from Texas only made one trip.<sup>40</sup> Many of them were lured westward by the mystique of the ranching frontier, pro-

moted by dime novels, posters, and western shows. They included college graduates, mid-western farm boys, recent immigrants, and refugees from the industrial towns of the east. What is remarkable is the speed with which greenhorns learned a variety of survival skills and transformed themselves into useful cowboys. Jo Rainbolt tells the stories of several such men in her recent book *The Last Cowboy*.<sup>41</sup>

New arrivals to the foothills of Alberta displayed the same drive to learn new skills fast and thoroughly. As Fred Ings remarked, "Most of our best riders came from the States and they taught us all we knew of cattle lore. Over there cattle and roundups were an old story; to us they were a new game. We were young and learned quickly, we had to, as it was essential that we knew these things well."<sup>42</sup> Young Edward Hills wrote home to his parents in Sussex, England, from a roundup camp outside Fort Macleod in May 1885 and explained how the famous black cowboy, John Ware, had shown him how to lead the cavvey safely across the treacherous Old Man River.<sup>43</sup> Bob Newbolt told the story of how a Mexican rider had shown him how to master a wild horse after watching him struggle to stay mounted.<sup>44</sup> One thinks too of Charlie Douglas serving rather a grim apprenticeship at the Quorn Ranch, of sixteen year old Frank Bedingfeld at the Bar U, and of Hatfield, Hopkins, and Gardiner, each being tested by the rigors of the new land, by weather, illness, and loneliness, and somehow managing to hang on and master the skills necessary to maintain viable ranches.<sup>45</sup> To date, our analysis of the Canadian ranching frontier has focused on social ambiance rather than on the professional lives of the ranchers and cowboys. An emphasis on sporting activities and dances has trivialized the real achievements of those who successfully established the ranching business in the foothills. Young men on both sides of the international border responded to the challenges of survival and of learning a new business. They were highly motivated by their image of

"cowboying," by the need to win the approval of their informal instructors, and by competition with their peers. Perhaps a focus on the methods by which technology spread may be more productive than an emphasis on real or apparent differences between cowboys north and south of the line.

#### SUMMARY

More than fifty years ago L. G. Thomas coined a pithy epitaph for the Canadian ranching frontier: "the body may have been American but the soul was English."<sup>46</sup> He acknowledged that many stockhands were American but never explored what this implied. Subsequent scholars followed his lead, concentrating their attention on the "English soul" rather than the "American body." The nominal census data, for all their shortcomings and ambiguities, show that one out of every five or six men working on the Canadian range was American. Not all were veterans of trail drives or steeped in range lore, for some were cooks and others teenagers who had done most of their learning on the Canadian grasslands; but as a group they brought with them the equipment, language, and skills that had originated along the Mexican border. The collective biographies of those born in the United States demonstrate an influence out of all proportion to their numbers. Many of the skills of cowboying could be learned quite quickly, but "cow sense" and the experience necessary to enable foremen to react confidently to any emergency were priceless assets that men like Patterson or Lane brought with them. They had to be capable of commanding the respect of a large and unruly labor force and of deploying it effectively. Moreover, they had to watch markets and prices and juggle their options to maximize profits. Without their contribution it is hard to imagine how the major Canadian ranches could have been established or survived. We must, therefore, concur with that shrewd observer of the Montana-Alberta border country, Paul F. Sharp, that "Ranching

in Alberta produced an interesting synthesis of the codes of Victorian England's upper class with those of the Great Plains frontier."<sup>47</sup>

#### NOTES

I would like to thank my colleagues at Parks Canada in Calgary and the Friends of the Bar U Historical Ranch for their encouragement and support.

1. Lewis G. Thomas made his first contribution with his master's thesis in 1935. This was followed by a number of articles published during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. These were collected by Patrick A. Dunae in *Ranchers' Legacy*. Lewis G. Thomas, "The Ranching Period in Alberta," (master's thesis, University of Alberta, 1935); Patrick A. Dunae, ed., *Ranchers' Legacy: Alberta Essays by Lewis G. Thomas* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1986); and David H. Breen, *The Canadian Prairie West and the Ranching Frontier, 1874-1924* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983). This book was based on his Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Alberta, submitted in 1975. His research therefore dates from the early 1970s.

2. David H. Breen, "The Turner Thesis and the Canadian West: A Closer Look at the Ranching Frontier," in *Essays on Western History*, ed. Lewis H. Thomas (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1976), pp. 147-56.

3. Patrick A. Dunae, *Gentlemen Emigrants: From the British Public Schools to the Canadian Frontier* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1981); Sheilagh S. Jameson, "The Social Elite of the Ranching Community and Calgary," in *Frontier Calgary*, ed. Antony W. Rasporich and Henry C. Klassen (Calgary: McClelland and Stewart West, 1975), pp. 57-70; and Sheilagh S. Jameson, "Women in the Southern Alberta Ranching Community: 1881-1914," in *The Canadian West*, ed. Henry C. Klassen (Calgary: Comprint Publishing, 1977), pp. 63-78.

4. Ronald Rees, *New and Naked Land: Making the Prairies Home* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1988), pp. 136-54.

5. Simon M. Evans, "American Cattlemen on the Canadian Range, 1874-1914," *Prairie Forum* 4 (1979): 121-35.

6. Wallace Stegner, *Wolf Willow* (New York: Viking, 1966).

7. Simon M. Evans, "The Origin of Ranching in Western Canada: American Diffusion or Victorian Transplant?" in *Essays on the Historical Geography of the Canadian West*, ed. L. A. Rosenvall and S. M. Evans (University of Calgary: Department of Geography, 1987), pp. 70-94.

8. Warren M. Elofson, "Adapting to the Frontier Environment: The Ranching Industry in Western Canada, 1881-1914," in *Canadian Papers in Rural History* (Gananoque: Langdale Press, 1992), 8: 307-27.
9. Ibid., 317.
10. Ibid., 315.
11. For an important new comparative study placing Canadian cowboys in the context of range experience throughout the New World, see Richard W. Slatta, *Cowboys of the Americas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).
12. Breen, "The Turner Thesis" (note 2 above), p. 153.
13. The nominal return forms are made available after ninety years. Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Canada, 1891*; *Census of Canada, 1901*. Provincial Archives of Alberta, microfilms T-6425, T-6551, and T-6552.
14. Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies* (University of Toronto Press, 1984), pp. 245-50.
15. Edward Brado, *Cattle Kingdom: Early Ranching in Alberta* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1984), pp. 105-25. In December 1991 the Canadian government purchased the headquarters site of this historic ranch to establish a new National Historic Site celebrating the part played by ranching in the economic history of Canada. See Simon M. Evans, "Review Essay: Some Research on the Canadian Ranching Frontier," *Prairie Forum* 19 (Spring 1994): 101-10.
16. Everett C. Johnson was born in Virginia in 1860. He worked for the Powder River Cattle Company and was a roundup captain by the time he was nineteen years old. He was a friend and hunting companion of Owen Wister, who may have used his knowledge of Johnson's life in creating the character of "The Virginian." D. H. Andrews recommended him to the North West Cattle Company, describing him as "a first rate cowman, in fact I think about the best all round cowman in this country and he is very good with young horses." "Stair Ranch Letterbook," 29 October 1892, p. 350, Glenbow Archives, M2388, Glenbow-Alberta Institute, Calgary; and Cochrane and Area Historical Society, *Big Hill Country* (Calgary: D. W. Friesen, 1977), p. 318.
17. The presence of this famous outlaw was recorded by Fred Ings, who described him as "a thoroughly likeable fellow, a general favorite with everyone, a splendid rider and top notch cowhand." Frederick William Ings, *Before the Fences: Tales from the Midway Ranch* (Calgary: McCra Printing, 1980), p. 52. While at the Bar U, Longabaugh acted as best man for his friend Johnson, whom he had known in Wyoming. Cochrane Historical Society, *Big Hill Country* (note 16 above), p. 318; and personal communication from Donna and Paul Ernst, May 1993.
18. Brado, *Cattle Kingdom* (note 15 above), pp. 58-80.
19. Ibid., p. 142.
20. Thomas Bland Strange, *Gunner Jingo's Jubilee* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1988).
21. Ings, *Before the Fences* (note 17 above), p. 7.
22. Simon Evans, *Prince Charming Goes West: The Story of the E. P. Ranch* (University of Calgary Press, 1993), pp. 49-55.
23. Guy Weadick, "Edwin Aubrey Cartwright of the D Ranch," *Canadian Cattlemen* 13 (May 1950): 12-15.
24. Nanton and District Historical Society, *Mosquito Creek Roundup* (Calgary: D. W. Friesen, 1975), pp. 36, 39; and High River Pioneers' and Old Timers' Association, *Leaves from the Medicine Tree* (Lethbridge: Lethbridge Herald, 1960), p. 446.
25. In 1902 the North West Cattle Company's board of directors sold the Bar U Ranch to George Lane without informing their manager at the ranch, Fred Stimson, of their negotiations. He sued them.
26. High River Pioneers', *Leaves from the Medicine Tree* (note 24 above), p. 446.
27. Elizabeth Sexsmith Lane, "A Brief Sketch of Memories of My Family," June 1945, Glenbow Archives, M652 (note 16 above).
28. Cochrane Historical Society, *Big Hill Country* (note 16 above), pp. 317, 388.
29. High River Pioneers', *Leaves from the Medicine Tree* (note 24 above), p. 34.
30. At the Willow Creek Ranch Lane had installed Everard Wilder and his family to manage his ranch. They were all from the United States, as was J. G. Hollowell, one of four riders.
31. The literature tends to emphasize that cowboys were reluctant to undertake any work that could not be done on horseback. See Slatta, *Cowboys* (note 11 above), pp. 82-84. In Canada, however, haying soon became a vital component of ranch life and most riders had to play their part in it. Similarly, those cowboys lucky enough to be retained on the payroll during the long winter would turn their hand to any chores.
32. Once again it is important to note that the 1901 sample area was smaller than the one used in 1891. There is no reason to suppose, however, that any of the fringe areas omitted would have contained a disproportionate number of rangemen born in the United States.
33. Breen, *Canadian Prairie West* (note 1 above), p. 30.
34. "A Pioneer Stockman," *Farm and Ranch Review* 17 (20 September 1922): 9.

35. *Macleod Gazette*, 30 November 1886, quoting *Times* (London).

36. H. M. Hatfield to the Provincial Librarian, June 1908, Glenbow Archives, M494 (note 16 above).

37. Our understanding of the origins, spread, and mingling of various traditions will be greatly enhanced by Terry Jordan's new book. See Terry G. Jordan, *North American Cattle-Ranching Frontiers: Origins, Diffusion, and Differentiation* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993).

38. "Contrary to popular myth, not all cowboys were highly skilled horsemen." Slatta, *Cowboys* (note 11 above), p. 74.

39. Larry McMurtry, *Lonesome Dove* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985).

40. David Dary, *Cowboy Culture: A Saga of Five Centuries* (New York: Knopf, 1981), p. 275; see also Edward Charles Abbott, *We Pointed Them North: Recollections of a Cowpuncher* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), p. 194.

41. Jo Rainbolt, *The Last Cowboy: Twilight Era of the Horseback Cowhand, 1900-1940* (Helena: American and World, 1992).

42. Ings, *Before the Fences* (note 17 above), p. 25.

43. Edward F. J. Hills Letters, No. 43, 25 May 1885, Glenbow Archives, M7988 (note 16 above). The term "cavvey" was commonly used on the northern ranges for the "remuda" or band of saddle horses.

44. Angus McKinnon, "Bob Newboldt Pioneer of 1884" *Canadian Cattlemen* 23 (February 1960): 26.

45. J. L. Douglas, "Journal of Four Months Holiday to Canada and the USA, August to December, 1886," Glenbow Archives, M337, p. 33 (note 16 above); Evans, *Prince Charming* (note 22 above), pp. 49-55; The Hatfield Diary, Glenbow Archives, M480; Monica Hopkins, *Letters from a Lady Rancher* (Halifax: Goodread, 1983); and Claude Gardiner, *Letters from an English Rancher* (Calgary: Glenbow Museum, 1988).

46. L. G. Thomas, "The Ranching Period in Alberta" (note 1 above), 171.

47. Paul F. Sharp, *Whoop-Up Country: The Canadian American West, 1865-1885* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), p. 240.