FRENCH PATTERNS IN WESTERN CANADIAN LANDSCAPES

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> RON WILLIAMS

Many scholars have explored the rich variety of settlement patterns brought to the Canadian Prairies by European immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including such unique features as the Mennonite "street village" and Ukrainian church and cemetery compositions. But the first wave of physical impressions on the land in the Canadian West, following those implanted everywhere by the First Nations, was essentially French, transplanted from New France. Just as Virginia provided the pattern for Texas, according to American landscape scholar J. B. Jackson, or New England for the American Middle West, Quebec traditions established a first template for the towns and rural areas of the western provinces of Canada.

THE QUEBEC TRADITION

To trace that influence, let us first recall some of the familiar agricultural and community patterns of Quebec, after which we will explore some of the ways in which those patterns influenced the early landscape development of the West.

Most obvious is the relation between navigable rivers and agricultural patterns in New France. During the first two centuries after its establishment, travel in New France relied on its excellent network of major waterways, principally the St. Lawrence and its great tributaries, including the Richelieu, the Chaudière, the Saint-Maurice, and the Ottawa, and their many branches. Farms and villages were laid out along that ready-made transportation system. The French authorities distributed large blocks of land along the rivers to

FIG. 1. OTTAWA RIVER AND LONG-LOT FARMS. AIR VIEW. | RON WILLIAMS

FIG. 2. LE RANG, WINTER VIEW BETWEEN MONTREAL AND TROIS-RIVIÈRES, QUEBEC. | RON WILLIAMS

FIG. 4. GRANDE-PILES, CEMETERY. | RON WILLIAMS

FIG. 3. GRANDE-PILES, TOWN AND CHURCH, ST. MAURICE RIVER, QUEBEC. | RON WILLIAMS
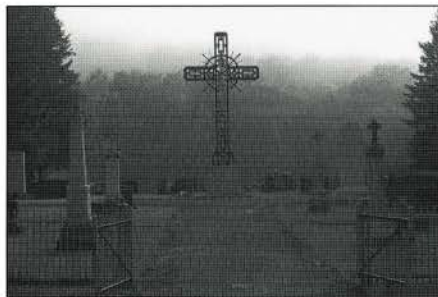

FIG. 5. JARDIN DES SULPICIENS, MONTREAL. | PETER JACOBS

seigneurs, who recruited colonists or *censitaires*, and assigned to each of them a long, linear farm laid out perpendicular to the waterway, the sole means of access. As the system became successful, the first row of farms along the rivers filled up; a second and subsequent rows were established behind it along roads called *rangs*. There could be many of these roughly parallel *rangs*, connected at intervals by perpendicular roads called *montées*. Seen from a distance, the *rang* is a long thin line of farmhouses, barns, and outbuildings—almost a continuous settlement. An advantage of this system is the proximity of farmsteads, which permits people to live fairly close to their neighbours and to share community and mutual support. Another advantage, particularly evident in sites of irregular topography like those of the Île d'Orléans or Beauce, is that each farm enjoys a variety of soil types and growing conditions—fertile bottomland for row crops, higher and

drier flat land for grains, rough pasture and woodlot in less fertile, stony soils at higher elevations.

This line of settlement becomes a village almost imperceptibly, through a densification of the *rang*, usually at its intersection with a *montée*. The parish church, the most striking building in each village in terms of both size and location, is often located near this intersection and, at the same time, remarkably sited with respect to the larger natural landscape. A classic approach is the hilltop site, as at St-Jean-de-Matha in the Lanaudière region, where the church is located at the highest point in the village. Another archetype sites the church directly on the axis of a major road, as at Charlesbourg just north of Quebec City, where the church of Saint-Charles-Borromée terminates the *Trait Carré*, or square-pattern main road, at the centre of that historic town. In the Mauricie region at Grandes-Piles,

a third approach is used: the church—like every building in town—faces straight out onto the Saint-Maurice River, the essential *ligne de force* of the whole region.

In addition to its relationship to the larger landscape, the church is usually carefully related to smaller man-made landscapes as well. Those include the churchyard and especially the cemetery, which, in Quebec's vernacular tradition, is formal and symmetrical, enclosed by symbolic evergreen trees. Gravestones are organized in rows perpendicular to a central axis dominated by the cross, which rises physically and metaphorically above all... even death. The church and cemetery are usually components of a larger composition: an intricate complex of buildings and enclosed spaces, which is either the *noyau villageois* of a town or a self-contained institution such as a hospital, college, or convent. The private gardens of such institutions are often beautiful and welcoming places—and surprisingly practical. Some, like those of the monastère des Ursulines in Quebec City, may be among the oldest gardens of their tradition in the world. All include spaces that are sacred in character, like the intimate corner reserved for the Virgin Mary in convent gardens, and the more imposing *calvaire* statue of Jesus. But extensive areas have always been reserved for gardening of vegetables and fruit trees to put food on the table (many such institutions were semi-autonomous) and of flowers for the altar or for pure enjoyment. A third role played by those spaces is to provide recreation and escape for the *religieux* or *religieuses*, and their students or patients. Thus the gardens could easily include a volleyball court, a garden swing, or a little "English cottage" used as a temporary retreat, as at the Hôtel-Dieu in Quebec City. What these gardens are **not** are museums—they have changed constantly over the centuries to respond

to new conditions, yet have always maintained an inherent aesthetic coherence.

The limits of the village were often clearly defined, in the eighteenth century, by *chapelles de procession*, tiny chapels at the edge of town that were the object of a kind of pilgrimage on Corpus Christi day—the *Fête-Dieu* celebrated each June—when the entire congregation would parade from the parish church out to the little chapel where a special service was held. Parish boundaries were also defined, by wayside crosses or *croix de chemin*. Some of these crosses can still be seen all over Quebec, not necessarily "official," but often put up by individuals or groups. A great many remain in particular regions, such as the Mauricie, and some survive in dense urban landscapes, quiet reminders of a vanished rural past. The human presence with its symbols is also extended out into the broader natural landscape through *chemins de la croix* as at Saint-Élie-de-Caxton or at the famous Saint Joseph's Oratory in Montreal, where a crooked and tortuous path leads gradually up the mountain, passing the stations of the cross, finally arriving at the summit, where a powerful *calvaire* dominates the scene. The reverse view, from mountaintop to surrounding countryside, is the final majestic experience of what has been a demanding pilgrimage.

One of the remarkable ensembles of religious and civic buildings and spaces typical of those described above is found at Lachine, Quebec, where the Saints-Anges-Gardiens church and collège Sainte-Anne create a powerful composition near the western entrance to the Lachine Canal. It is an impressive complex whether seen from up close or from a distance across the water. The church is set well back from the river road and, along with the presbytery right beside it, frames a great open space lined by mature trees.

The view back to the water focuses on a silhouetted statue of Jesus (a common sequence, seen at Pointe-Claire and many other waterside locations). A little further along are the intimate gardens of collège Sainte-Anne; and throughout, dozens of examples of excellent craftsmanship in stone, glass, and wrought iron.

THE FUR TRADE

By a strange coincidence, that building complex is the hinge between New France and the West. Just across a narrow waterway from the college of the Sisters of Sainte-Anne stands the main warehouse of the Northwest Fur Trading Company, from which annual waves of giant canoes took goods up Lake Saint-Louis, through the Great Lakes and to the West, and came back with furs.

It was the fur trade that opened Western Canada—what was then Rupert's Land, later the Northwest Territories—to influence and settlement from Eastern Canada. Trading for furs with native peoples was as old as the first European incursions into the St. Lawrence valley. In the sixteenth century, before the foundation of Port Royal or Quebec City, French and Basque sailors maintained seasonal trading posts on the lower river, bartering for furs with the Innu or Montagnais. As New France was settled and furs were exhausted in nearby areas, the frontier of the fur trade moved west to Three Rivers and Montreal, then via the Great Lakes to Detroit, the strategic hinge that provided access to the whole inland empire of the Mississippi, and to Huronia, the "land between the lakes." Here, rivalries between Indian nations for the control of trade with the French led to warfare and hostility. Consequently, trade routes moved north and west up the Ottawa River and across Georgian Bay to the fur-rich forests of the Northwest.
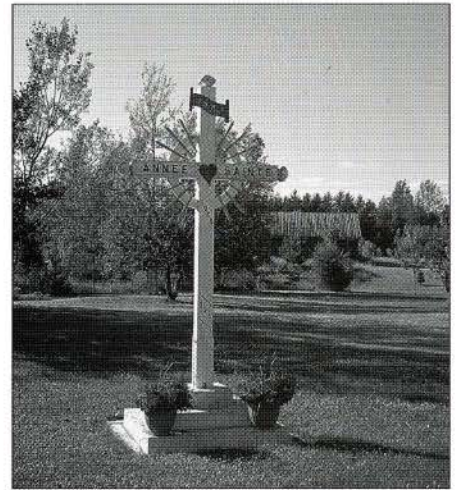

FIG. 6. CROIX DE CHEMIN, THE MAURICIE REGION, QUEBEC. | RON WILLIAMS

FIG. 7. SAINT-ÉLIE-DE-CAXTON, QUEBEC. VIEW FROM *CALVAIRE*. | RON WILLIAMS

FIG. 8. SAINTS-ANGES-GARDIENS CHURCH AND COLLÈGE SAINTE-ANNE, LACHINE, QUEBEC. VIEW ACROSS THE WATER. | RON WILLIAMS
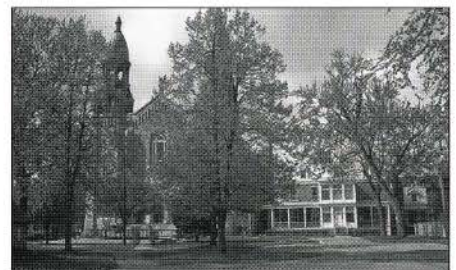

FIG. 9. SAINTS-ANGES-GARDIENS CHURCH AND PRESBYTERY. MAIN OPEN SPACE. | RON WILLIAMS
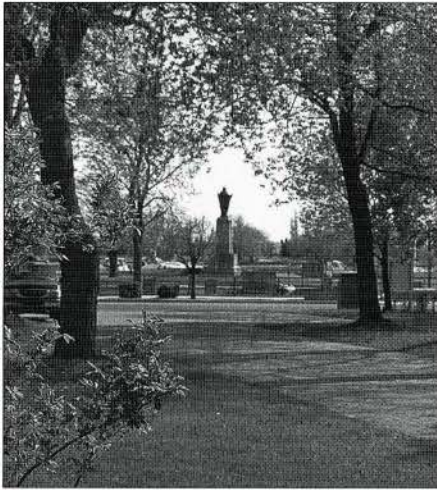
FIG. 10. STATUE OF JESUS. VIEW FROM CHURCH TO WATERWAY. | RON WILLIAMS

FIG. 11. NORTH WEST CO. WAREHOUSE, LACHINE, QUEBEC. | RON WILLIAMS
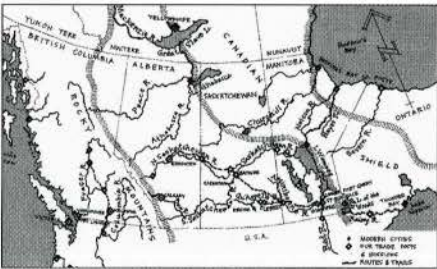

FIG. 12. MAP, RIVERS OF WESTERN CANADA (SHOWING LOCATIONS MENTIONED). | RON WILLIAMS

FIG. 13. LOWER FORT GARRY, HBC TRADING POST. | RON WILLIAMS

The next fur frontier was even further north, on the shores of Hudson Bay, explored by French Canadian voyageurs Pierre-Esprit Radisson and Médard Chouart des Groseilliers. Rejected by the French authorities, the partners sought support in London, leading to the establishment of the British-based Hudson's Bay Company in 1670. The first "HBC" posts on the sea, situated at the mouths of rivers flowing from the west, were easily bypassed by French traders from Montreal who canoed across the Great Lakes to the Lake of the Woods, and thence into the Prairies, where they intercepted Cree and Assiniboine expeditions headed for Hudson Bay, thus being first to buy the furs. Central to that French mission was the de la Vérendrye family of Three Rivers, who established, from 1730 to 1760, a chain of western forts strategically located on those great rivers, which, like their counterparts in Eastern Canada, were the first highways of the West. Once French voyageurs from the East went beyond the Great Lakes and crossed the watershed into Lake Winnipeg, they were at the nexus of a thousand-mile communication system receiving water from the south via the Red River and its tributaries, and from the west through the two branches of the Saskatchewan River, which drain a vast area reaching to the Rocky Mountains. Through an amazing accident of geological history, that water then finds its way across the Canadian Shield to Hudson Bay, where the ocean-going vessels of their British rivals were waiting for furs.

This rivalry was little changed when the French régime was replaced by a British administration in Canada in 1763. The North West Company, a loose coalition of Montreal-based traders, often of Scottish origin, maintained the previous French strategy and continued to outflank the Hudson's Bay Company, which finally began to establish posts in the interior in 1774.

The trading posts or "forts" established by the trading companies along the rivers usually consisted of one or two large open spaces enclosed by lodgings for artisans and clerks, storehouses, and a "big house" for the traders, all surrounded by a wood palisade or stone fortification. Vegetables were cultivated in gardens inside the walls, and small farms nearby produced grains and provided pasture for livestock. Each fort was a small and isolated village, entirely surrounded by a world that belonged to the First Nations, "an isolated dot in an Aboriginal sea." Fort Langley, founded by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1827 near the limit of navigation of the Fraser River in British Columbia, is a typical example. About 200 by 75 metres in area, it housed a remarkably cosmopolitan community of some 106 residents, consisting mainly of French Canadians, Hawaiians, and Scots, along with a number of Iroquois and Englishmen. North of Winnipeg on the Red River, Lower Fort Garry follows the classic fort configuration, but it is also distinguished by the elegance of its structures, the stone construction of its walls and of some buildings, and the unusual aesthetic concern shown in the layout of its garden. Created in 1831 as the home base of the governor of the Hudson's Bay Company and the "nerve centre" of all its operations in the North and West, the fort could not long fulfil that role, since the real commercial centre of the region remained at Upper Fort Garry, a few kilometres to the south in what is now downtown Winnipeg.

Many of the traders and voyageurs stayed for years at those remote posts, in constant contact with members of the First Nations, who established villages nearby and provided all the furs. The traders often established temporary or permanent marriages with native women from the tribes of their Cree, Ojibwa, or

Assiniboine trading partners. When they retired, they and their descendants, the *Métis*, often established farms—on the linear river-lot pattern, for exactly the same reasons as in Quebec—near the trading posts.

INFLUENCE OF THE RIVER-LOT PATTERN ON THE LAYOUT OF WESTERN CITIES

There was fierce competition between the two major rivals, the Hudson's Bay and North West Companies, particularly in the period from 1800 to 1820. The two companies came to blows near the forks of the Red and Assiniboine rivers in 1816 after the Hudson's Bay Company authorized Lord Selkirk, an influential member of their governing board, to establish a settlement of displaced Scottish farmers at that strategic location. Though the settlers were not French, their farms were laid out in the familiar Quebec pattern of long lots, perpendicular to the Red River. Each settler received a 100-acre farm (40.5 ha), about 2 miles (3 km) deep, on the west bank of the river, another 2 miles for haying, and a woodlot on the forested east side of the river.

The little settlement received a new wave of residents when the great commercial rivalry between the two companies finally concluded with their fusion under the HBC name in 1821. As happens today, the merger was followed by ruthless downsizing and "rationalisation." Many former fur-trade employees, out of a job, set up farms on the traditional long-lot pattern along the Red River and the Assiniboine. Their farms were grouped by language and religion: French Catholics to the south, Scots Protestants to the north. The original riverside farm layout and the "rang" west of the Red, along with the main cart tracks to the west, have defined the urban pattern of the rapidly
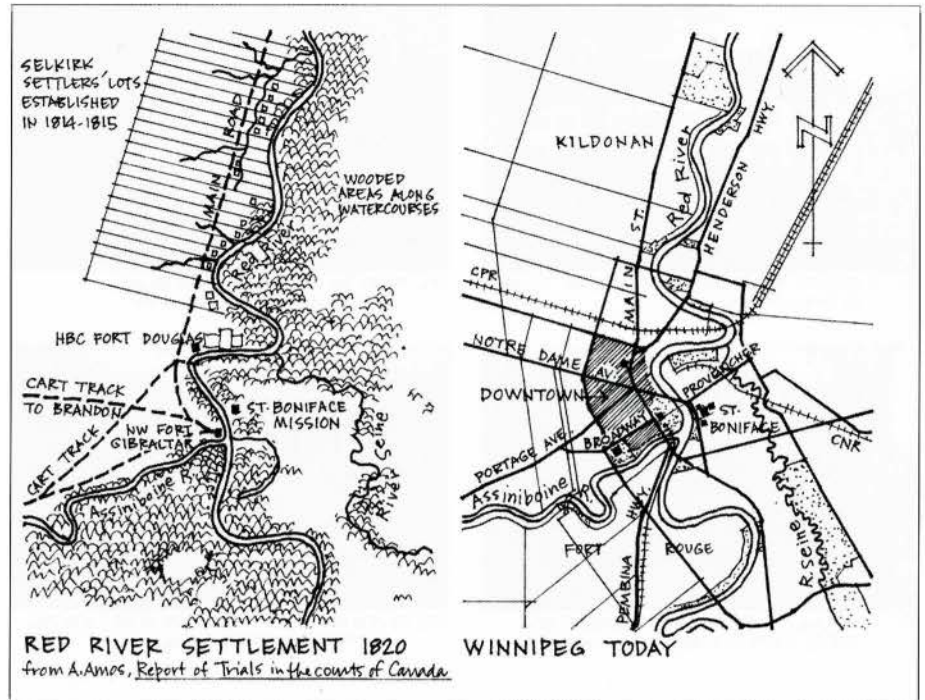

FIG. 14. MAP, WINNIPEG 1820 AND 2000. | AFTER A. AMOS, 1820, *REPORT OF TRIALS IN THE COURTS OF CANADA*, JOHN MURRAY, LONDON, AS ILLUSTRATED IN ARTIBISE, ALAN F.J., AND EDWARD H. DAHL, 1975, *WINNIPEG IN MAPS/WINNIPEG PAR LES CARTES 1816-1972*, INFORMATION CANADA, OTTAWA

expanding city of Winnipeg right up to the present day. Two of the principal roads mentioned above became today's legendary Portage and Main.

The same pattern was adopted at Edmonton, a key location for both companies, who founded forts there in the 1790's, on high ground above the North Saskatchewan River. When the Hudson's Bay Company lands were transferred to Canada in 1870, the company retained 1000 acres (405 ha) of land around its post. The Provincial Legislative Assembly now occupies that auspicious site, and around it, on both sides, the Methodist church helped Scottish ex-employees establish farms, laid out as always on the river-lot pattern. Again, the settlers were not French, but they followed the Quebec template. An examination of the plan of modern Edmonton clearly shows the influence of that early layout on today's urban pattern.

FIG. 15. RIVER ROAD (BOUL. TACHÉ), ST. BONIFACE, MANITOBA. | RON WILLIAMS

FIG. 16. COUVENT DES SŒURS GRISES, GARDEN WITH STATUE OF THE VIRGIN MARY, ST. BONIFACE, MANITOBA. | RON WILLIAMS

FIG. 17. COUVENT DES SŒURS GRISES, BUILDING AND STATUE OF LOUIS-RIEL. | RON WILLIAMS

FIG. 19. CENTRAL AXIS AND CATHEDRAL FAÇADE, ST. BONIFACE, MANITOBA. | RON WILLIAMS

FIG. 21. ENTRANCE ROAD TO BISHOP'S PALACE, ST. BONIFACE. | RON WILLIAMS

FIG. 18. ENTRANCE TO CEMETERY WITH MONUMENT DES BRAVES, ST. BONIFACE, MANITOBA. | RON WILLIAMS

FIG. 20. VIEW ACROSS RED RIVER ON AXIS OF THE CATHEDRAL, ST-BONIFACE, MANITOBA. | RON WILLIAMS

FIG. 22. CIRCULAR GARDEN AND VIEW TO RIVER, BISHOP'S PALACE, ST. BONIFACE. | RON WILLIAMS

SAINT-BONIFACE, CENTRE OF FRENCH CIVILIZATION IN THE WEST

In order to establish institutions for the rapidly growing population, Lord Selkirk, the leader of the colony, invited the bishop of Quebec to send missionaries to establish schools and hospitals. In 1818 two men arrived, one of whom was the future Bishop Provencher. The missionaries received land for their mission on the east side of the Red River at a place they called Saint-Boniface, where they quickly built a little log-cabin church. From that simple beginning was to grow the great religious and cultural centre of the Canadian West. Along the river—lifeline of the region—a whole series of structures and spaces would be built, all oriented to the old river road. That thoroughfare, so reminiscent of many in Quebec, was named for Archbishop Alexandre Taché (1823-1894), and a second boulevard, perpendicular to the first—equivalent to a *montée* back in New France—bears the name of his predecessor, Joseph-Norbert Provencher. Those

two bishops made great contributions to the many diverse communities that established themselves along the Red River in the nineteenth century.

At the southern limit of that old civic centre stands what is considered to be the oldest building in Manitoba, erected in 1847 and now a museum: the couvent des Sœurs Grises or Sœurs de la Charité. Its quiet garden celebrates the inspiration of the church, a typically appealing statue of Mary, who is never placed in an imposing setting like the *calvaire*, but is almost at ground level, and a powerful sculpture of Louis Riel, martyr to the cause of French, *Métis*, and Catholic peoples of the West and, increasingly, the symbol of resistance and affirmation for all residents of the Prairies. Riel's tomb is nearby in the cimetière de Saint-Boniface, a great formal open space located some distance to the north of the convent. The cemetery is laid out in classical New France symmetrical style, with rows of headstones perpendicular to a central axis. Lilacs and honeysuckles contribute a

more picturesque aspect, softening somewhat that austere composition. The traditional emblems of the church are given places of honour—the *calvaire* on a major cross-axis—as are memorials to those who built or defended the French culture on the Prairies: the tombs of Provencher and Taché, and the monument des Braves, dedicated to the *"Français de l'Ouest, morts pour leur patrie 1914-1918"* and in subsequent wars.

The axis of the cemetery continues east and passes through the façade of the cathédrale de Saint-Boniface, the fourth church built on that site. Designed by the eminent Manitoba architect Étienne Gaboury, it is a modern church, deliberately understated and self-effacing, framed by the ruins of the baroque façade of the third cathedral, begun in 1906 and destroyed by fire in 1968. Looking back towards the river, the open façade of the old cathedral frames an axial view that continues right down to the water, where there is a new boat landing. Further along that axis, one has a view of the nearly

completed Forks project in downtown Winnipeg across the river, and then of the dome of the Via Rail Station (formerly Union Station), almost right on the axis. A striking example of urban design… or perhaps just a happy coincidence, juxtaposing two powerful forces in the settlement of the West!

Finally, at the northern extremity of that remarkable linear sequence is the Bishop's Palace, set back from the road by a formal and axial ceremonial driveway enframed by a double row of elms and spruces. From the gallery of that elegant building, constructed in 1864-1865, the visitor looks out on a beautiful circular garden in which junipers, peonies, irises, and other perennials surround the inevitable statue of the Virgin Mary; that modest space is a treasure. Beyond the garden, looking back down the driveway, a shaft of space opens up to the Red River. Here, as at the cathedral, the fine workmanship and finesse of wrought-iron gates add to the impact of the overall composition.

Several other institutions situated to the east and south of that central node complete the portrait: the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface, a former orphanage, and the general hospital. As a civic design ensemble, this grouping of buildings and spaces recalls strongly, in its character and organization, many similar arrangements in Quebec. The linear assembly of buildings and spaces along a body of water, the crest of a hill, or an important road is one of the classic urban compositions of Quebec, as seen in the complex of institutions of the Sœurs de Sainte-Anne and their neighbours at Lachine, or the cathedral of Rimouski and its companions, or the collège de Saint-Laurent in the northern suburbs of Montreal.

The longevity of the relationship between the civic centre and the river at Saint-Boniface is also fascinating—now uninterrupted for almost two hundred years, the oldest such place in the West. In contrast, on the Winnipeg side or "left bank" of the Red, huge areas of prime real estate were occupied by railroad yards for a century, as in Montreal and Toronto. Only in the last 20 years has that land been reclaimed to create the magnificent river walks and public spaces of the Forks project.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH ELSEWHERE IN THE WEST

The impact of the Roman Catholic Church and its energetic leaders was felt far beyond Saint-Boniface. Everywhere, the church played a major role in the colonization of the West and left its mark on the landscape. The Mission District of modern Calgary owes its name to the mission Notre-Dame-de-la-Paix, which had already been in place for some years when the Royal Northwest Mounted Police founded Fort Calgary in 1875. The mission served as a base of operations for the colourful oblate missionary Father Albert Lacombe (1827-1916), who provided inspiration and support to the Francophone settlers of Northern Alberta.

Other oblate missionaries "carried the gospel" to native peoples living around Fort Langley, B.C., in 1840; and, in 1859, Father Charles Pandosy founded the mission de l'Immaculée Conception in the Okanagan Valley, near the Hudson's Bay Company fort. Several of the original *pièce sur pièce* log buildings of the mission still exist today. The mission served as the original nucleus of the village that has today become the prosperous city of Kelowna. Father Pandosy, noticing the agricultural potential of that fertile valley blessed with an ideal climate, planted the first apple trees and grape vines of the Okanagan, now famous for its fruit and wines. In 1858, the sisters

FIG. 23. MISSION OF FATHER PANDOSY, KELOWNA, BRITISH COLUMBIA. | RON WILLIAMS

FIG. 22. VINEYARD ON WEST SHORE OF LAKE OKANAGAN, BRITISH COLUMBIA. | RON WILLIAMS

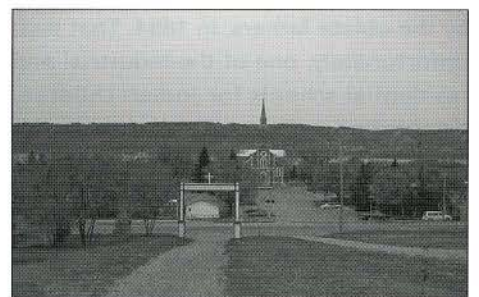FIG. 25. CHEMIN DE LA CROIX, LEBRET, SASKATCHEWAN. | RON WILLIAMS

FIG. 26. VIEW FROM HILLTOP, LEBRET, SASKATCHEWAN. | RON WILLIAMS

of Sainte-Anne, whose college we have seen at Lachine, Quebec, accepted a call to the West Coast. In their new home near HBC's Fort Victoria, they created a masterpiece of architecture and landscape at the académie Sainte-Anne, which became the administrative centre for missions that carried those intrepid sisters throughout the islands and rivers of British Columbia, Alaska, and Yukon, where they established a great number of schools and infirmaries.

LEBRET, SASKATCHEWAN

The planning concepts and principles of New France are not just found in the big centres of population; the *Métis* people established villages and river-lot farms along many of the less populated valleys of the Prairies, including those of the Bow River west of Calgary, the Qu'Appelle River in Saskatchewan, and the North Saskatchewan in Alberta. According to historian Graham MacDonald of Parks Canada, "The hand of the early French explorers and settlers is visible everywhere in the country, from the Atlantic to the Rocky Mountains, in the long-lot system that follows every river."

Lebret, a small village situated on the Qu'Appelle River northeast of Regina, is a typical example. Founded by Bishop Taché in 1865 as the first mission in Saskatchewan, its first chapel was built the following year and its first school, directed by the oblate fathers, in 1884. That was, unfortunately, one of the industrial and residential schools for Indian children, established by several churches at the request of the federal government, the many wounds from which may finally be starting to heal today. A convent followed at the turn of the century, and a seminary in 1926. Finally, in 1929, a striking *chemin de la croix* was built, very simple and austere but perhaps closer in feeling

to the original Way of the Cross in the Holy Land, an arid place like much of Saskatchewan, where agriculture is always a struggle. The view from the hilltop, after completing one's short pilgrimage, discloses a parish church built foursquare to the river, just as one may see in innumerable locations along the St. Lawrence or its tributaries.

BATOCHE, SASKATCHEWAN–LAST REFUGE OF THE *BOIS-BRÛLÉS*

By a strange sequence of coincidences, errors, and miscommunications, the river-lot agricultural system in the West—so sensible and effective—became the focus of controversy and eventually a contributory factor in two armed struggles. Although the physical expressions of that system in the West were almost identical with those in Quebec, the legal system of tenure supporting them was entirely different. There were no *seigneurs* or *seigneuries* in the West and, while many land claims were filed, the "ownership" (though vague) of all the land by the Hudson's Bay Company meant that most farmers were regarded as tenants or mere squatters, without clear title to the land they farmed. Those land rights could be unrecognized or ignored, allowing established farms to be taken over by others.

Such a conflict over property rights touched off the 1870 resistance in the Red River and, despite the successful conclusion of that struggle, a considerable number of *Métis*—the *Bois-Brûlés*—pulled up stakes and moved northwest. Many moved to a place called Batoche, where the cart track from the Red River settlement to Fort Edmonton forded the South Saskatchewan River. At Batoche, along with other *Métis* from Edmonton, the new arrivals set up the agricultural colony of Saint-Laurent. Following models familiar since the time of New France,

FIG. 27. SOUTH SASKATCHEWAN RIVER, BATOCHE, SASKATCHEWAN. | RON WILLIAMS

FIG. 28. CHURCH AND PRESBYTERY, BATOCHE, SASKATCHEWAN. | RON WILLIAMS

the colonists built their church and its presbytery on top of the plateau that encloses the river valley, carefully siting it with respect to topography, and they laid out their long, narrow farms in the lowlands, perpendicular to the river and separated from each other by dense hedgerows. The hedgerows are still there, but the farmhouses and barns have long disappeared. That abandoned valley reminds us that Batoche was the site of the last battle fought on Canadian soil, in 1885.

As at the Red River, within the Northwest conflict was a confrontation between two philosophies of land division and two ways of understanding property rights; a confrontation that, in retrospect, seems to have been completely avoidable. The landscape of Batoche, now a National Historic Site, is powerfully evocative. The openness and simplicity of its abandoned site, unembellished by gardens or monuments, communicates strongly the story of the tragic events that occurred there. Ironically, on the site of a far larger and

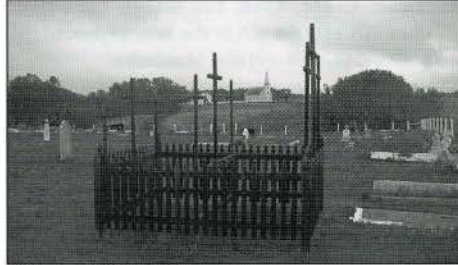FIG. 29. HEDGEROWS AND ABANDONED FIELDS, BATOCHE, SASKATCHEWAN. | RON WILLIAMS

FIG. 31. CEMETERY, BATOCHE, SASKATCHEWAN. | RON WILLIAMS

FIG. 30. PLAINS OF ABRAHAM (BATTLEFIELD PARK), QUEBEC. | RON WILLIAMS

FIG. 32. ORTHOGONAL SYSTEM OF LAND DIVISION ON THE PRAIRIES. AIR VIEW. | RON WILLIAMS

more well-known battle that had been fought over a century before on the Plains of Abraham, in Quebec City—now a great urban park that accommodates thousands of people enjoying a remarkable variety of activities—, it is easy to forget that you are on a battlefield, despite the presence of forts and cannons. But at Batoche, the battlefield is always there.

The church and presbytery remain at the top of the hill. The graveyard is located a little distance away on the plateau, situated slightly lower than the church, and laid out in traditional formal arrangement with a fenced boundary.

LINES AND SQUARES: REVOLUTIONARY CHANGES TO THE LANDSCAPE PATTERNS OF THE WEST

The two conflicts of 1870 and 1885 marked the end of French influence on the large-scale landscape patterns of the West, although small-scale patterns (such as the chemin de la croix at Lebret

and the saw-mill town of Maillardville near Vancouver, laid out around its neat church square in 1909) continued to be repeated well into the twentieth century. That decline of influence was not due to a dearth of francophone settlers; although Ontario and Europe became dominant sources for new immigrants to the Prairies after 1870, substantial French migration to the Prairies was maintained during that period, primarily from Quebec, but also from France and New England. There is today a considerable Francophone population in each of the Western Provinces, often concentrated in areas of original French settlement.

What really ended the influence of French physical patterns in the West was rather the institution in the 1870s of a new system of land division, established by the federal government as a means of dividing up land efficiently in order to accommodate the tremendous number of new immigrants who would be arriving on the newly-constructed Canadian Pacific Railway. That new system imposed onto the

landscape a square grid one mile (1.6 km) on a side, which permitted the immediate creation of "quarter-section" farms of 160 acres (64 ha) throughout the lands of Western Canada which were thought to be suitable for agriculture. That included the vast grasslands in the southern area of the present provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, as well as a band of land through British Columbia along the rail line and large sectors of the inland plateau and lower mainland of the Pacific Province. In contrast with the proven system of surveying and allocation of farmlands of New France, which was founded on concrete facts of the landscape such as the hydrographic network, topography, and agricultural potential, the Dominion Land Survey Act ignored all natural elements. It envisioned an implacable and universal geometric continuity throughout the West, which was to become an immense patchwork quilt defined by baselines and meridians, ranges and townships.

That system was inspired by the Public Land Survey System established by the United States through its Land Ordinance of 1784 and subsequent Northwest Ordinance of 1787. It was markedly inferior in many ways to the traditional river-lot or rang-et-montée system, particularly in the isolation it imposed on farm families and through its neglect of water, a key ingredient for agriculture in every landscape, and particularly so in the drought-prone lands of the Southern Prairies. But it achieved its goal of opening the West to rapid colonization and inspired an egalitarian spirit, which characterizes the culture of Prairie Canada up to the present.

CONCLUSION

Although the main period of French landscape influence in the West ended long

ago, the heritage of that first wave of European settlement on the Prairies and in British Columbia remains very much alive. The patterns of long-lot farms are still plainly visible in the layouts of major cities and of small towns, and they can still be seen along many rivers throughout the West. One shudders to imagine what people in the Okanagan would be drinking today had it not been for Father Pandosy; and we may all enjoy a number of well-preserved architectural and landscape jewels, from Victoria to Winnipeg and points north, which are the permanent legacy of New France to Western Canada.

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