

History 470

Essay

Post-War Changes in Rural Alberta's Farm Communities

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Within twenty years the population of Lamont County, Alberta, fell from 12,600 in 1941 to 6,754 in 1961.¹ This near fifty percent drop was the result of push and pull factors. For many farmers the post-war period was the time to either invest heavily in mixed farming, electrification, and machinery, or quit the business. Many quit to pursue employment in Canada's growing industrial and service sectors. High startup costs also discouraged would-be farmers. New consolidated schools also improved rural education to prepare youth for non-agricultural employment. As the rural population declined and transportation improved, the small home-towns and villages began to lose their original economic role. A study of the Village of Chipman, in Lamont County, Alberta, demonstrates some of the rural lifestyle changes and causes of farm depopulation in the post-war period to the early 1960s.

The family histories in Chipman's local history, Pride in Progress reveal the outward migration of the children and grandchildren of the original pioneers. For example, Tom (1877-1959) and Anna Achtemichuk (d.1958) were children when their respective families immigrated to Canada from Europe in the late 19th century. The couple was married in the Chipman area in 1900. They had thirteen children, of which ten survived to adulthood. Only two children remained in the area. Their son John took over the family farm, and one daughter married a farmer from nearby St. Michael. Of the eight children who left Chipman, three moved to Edmonton, two went to Vancouver, and the others moved to other towns in Alberta.² By 1982, two of John Achtemichuk's children (3rd generation) had already moved to Edmonton.³ After reading approximately twenty family histories, I will generalize and say that many family experiences were like the Achtemichuks. If the original homestead was

¹1971 Census of Canada: Population: Census Subdivisions Historical, Catalogue 92-702, v.1 pt.1 Bulletin 1.1-2, July 1973, Table 2, p. 2-107.

²"Achtemichuk, Tom and Anna," Pride in Progress (Chipman: Alberta Rose Historical Society), p. 239-241.

³Achtemichuk, Verna, "Achtemichuk, John and Verna," Pride in Progress (Chipman: Alberta Rose Historical Society), p.241-242.

still in the family it was usually being farmed by a son. Almost all of the original pioneers' descendants would end up leaving the district.

Alberta's dramatic rural-urban demographic shift occurred after thirty years of stability. For three decades, 1911 to 1941, 70 percent ($\pm 1\%$) of Alberta's population resided in rural areas.⁴ By 1961 the proportion of rural Albertans plunged to 38 percent.⁵ When compared to other regions of Canada, the prairies were relatively slow to urbanize. Table 1 shows that Ontario and British Columbia were 50 percent urban by 1911, and Quebec reached this level in 1921. In comparison, Alberta did not become predominantly urban until 1956.⁶ Table 1 also shows the stability of Alberta's urban sector from 1911 to 1941. After 1941, Alberta's urban component underwent tremendous growth, doubling between 1941 and 1961. In 1961, Quebec and Alberta were the two most-urbanized provinces in Canada.

Table 1
Percentage Urban⁷ Share of the Population, at Census Dates, 1901 to 1961⁸

	<u>1901</u>	<u>1911</u>	<u>1921</u>	<u>1931</u>	<u>1941</u>	<u>1951</u>	<u>1956</u>	<u>1961</u>
Canada	35	42	45	50	51	54	55	58
Maritimes	24	31	36	36	38	36	38	41
Quebec	36	44	51	59	60	64	67	72
Ontario	40	50	56	59	60	58	56	57
Manitoba	25	39	39	42	41	46	50	56
Saskatchewan	6	16	17	20	21	30	36	43
Alberta	16	29	30	31	31	46	54	62
British Columbia	46	51	46	55	53	51	49	47
Yukon & NWT	19	20	-	-	6	10	8	23

During the 1950s, only two provincial rural regions -- Ontario and British Columbia - experienced rural growth due to migration, as shown in Table 2. All other provinces underwent rural decline. Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta saw net rural decreases over 20 percent. Alberta's cities led the nation in attracting

⁴Isabel B. Anderson, Internal Migration in Canada, 1921-1967 (Ottawa: Economic Council of Canada, 1966), p. 10.

⁵Ibid., p. 10.

⁶Leroy O. Stone, Urban Development in Canada: An Introduction to the Demographic Aspects(Ottawa: Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1967), p. 15.

⁷Urban includes people living in incorporated cities, towns, or villages with populations 1000 or over.

⁸Isabel B. Anderson, Internal Migration in Canada, 1921-1961 (Ottawa: Economic Council of Canada, 1966), p. 10.

the most migrants (400 per 1000), followed by Newfoundland (263 per 1000). Larger rural centers that had hospitals and populations close to 1000, generally sustained or gained population. In Alberta, the 1931-1961 statistics show a decline in rural farm population with a slow increase in the rural non-farm sector.

Table 2
Rate of Net Migration for the Urban and Rural Population of Each Province, 1951 to 1960
(Number per 1,000 population)⁹

	<u>Urban</u>	<u>Rural</u>
Canada	163	-52
Newfoundland	263	-163
Prince Edward Island	150	-209
Nova Scotia	-50	-52
New Brunswick	116	-173
Quebec	169	-228
Ontario	128	139
Manitoba	215	-240
Saskatchewan	248	-290
Alberta	400	-227
British Columbia	111	243

Alberta's changing rural/urban population ratios coincide with labor trends noted by the Alberta Bureau of Statistics. In 1951 it noted that agriculture was the only industry with a declining labor force.¹⁰ All other economic areas -- service, trade, manufacturing, transportation, storage, communication, construction, mining, quarrying, oil, and others -- were creating new jobs. Table 2 shows that Alberta's urban growth exceeded the rural decline, therefore Alberta's cities were also attracting people from outside the province.

Chipman is located in the County of Lamont, forty-five miles east of Edmonton.¹¹ The area just south of Chipman, near Beaver Lake, was the first region in the area to be settled.¹² In the 1880s it attracted Anglo-Canadian ranchers because of its lack of large trees. Early homesteaders mistook the treeless Beaver Lake region to be a misplaced piece of grassland prairie. In actuality there were few trees because the soil was a poor quality

⁹Based on Isabel B. Anderson, Internal Migration in Canada, 1921-1961 (Ottawa: Economic Council of Canada), p. 20.

¹⁰Alberta Bureau of Statistics. Facts and Figures, 1954 ed., (Edmonton: A. Shnitka, 1954), p. 351.

¹¹See Appendix 4 for a map of Alberta showing Chipman's location.

¹²Peter Stefura, MP Vegreville. House of Commons Debates: Official Report. 3rd Session, Twenty-Second Parliament.(Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, Queen's Printer), v.1 1956, p. 217.

gumbo. This made the land easier to clear, but also made it less productive. Since better land was available only a few miles away, many settlers relocated.

After 1897 there was an influx of European immigrants to the region, primarily from Ukraine, Poland, and Germany.¹³ A typical homestead farm consisted of a "simple home," an "ample vegetable garden," small cleared fields for crops, a "cow or two, at most a team of horses, some chickens, possibly a few pigs and some simple equipment such as a walking plow and a harrow."¹⁴ In the days prior to the construction of the CNR line by 1906, there were a few country stores, but settlers generally traveled to Edmonton for supplies such as flour, salt, sugar, tea, kerosene, clothing, and equipment.¹⁵ Chipman's local history notes that the 45-mile trip to Edmonton took approximately two days by sled or wagon. Homesteading policies stipulated that farmers build a dwelling and live on their land. As a result, Alberta's farming districts were populated with homesteads on every other quarter section of land (1 or 2 families per square mile).

The arrival of the Canadian National Railway in 1905-06 made rural life much easier by providing a link to remote services (see Appendix 2: Canadian National Railway Edmonton to Lloydminster).¹⁶ Villages and towns quickly sprouted up along the track at the grain gathering places, which were regularly spaced at horse-hauling distances (approximately every 10 miles). The towns and villages along the railway developed into centers catering to the commercial, cultural, and spiritual needs of local farmers. By today's standards the distances between these communities is very small. For example, on today's highways the four-mile trip from Chipman to Lamont takes only ten minutes, but, by horse and wagon the trip would have taken approximately one hour each way (approx. 4

¹³Ibid., p. 217.

¹⁴Nicholas Holowaychuk and Mrs. Nick Antoniuk, "The Early Years," in Pride in Progress (Chipman, Alta.: Alberta Rose Historical Society, 1982), p. 3-5.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁶Swyripa, Francis, The Ukrainian Bloc in East Central Alberta: A Report Submitted to the Director Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village, Alberta Culture (n.p.:n.p.), Vol. 2, p. 176.

miles/hour).¹⁷ As late as 1948, the Lamont Banner thanked a guest for "[coming] all the way from Chipman...over these roads too."¹⁸ Although some farmers owned cars in the 1910s and 1920s, most roads were ungravelled and unpaved and limited travel until the 1950s.

The 1920s were Chipman's boom days. There were hotels, restaurants, grocery, drug, and general stores, a tailor, barber, shoe maker, stock broker, and real estate agent, garages, blacksmiths, and livery barns, implement dealers, butchers, flour mills, creameries, and lumber agents. Although most necessities were available in town, Chipman lacked medical facilities. The closest hospitals were in Mundare (1930-) and Lamont (1912-).

Chipman's population peak occurred in 1931 (284 people), but it declined in the 1930s for several reasons. First, in 1928, the Canadian Pacific Railway built a rival railway from Lloydminster to Edmonton, north of the existing CNR (see Appendix 2). The new line was only six miles north of Chipman. New grain depots and communities immediately developed along the new track and cut into Chipman's market. The Depression further stressed the commercial sector. Then, in 1931, a fire destroyed the east side of main street. Despite these setbacks the community persisted. In 1950 it had a small, but thriving commercial sector. There were approximately forty businesses in Chipman in 1950, thirteen in the 1970s, but only a handful by the 1980s and 1990s (see Appendix 1).

The Village of Chipman: Economic Survey (1950) reported that the village's 1946 population was less than two hundred, but noted that its hinterland contained 4,725 people, mostly farmers.¹⁹ The hinterland was described as extending "eight miles north to twelve miles north east, eight miles east, fourteen miles south and four miles west," roughly 264 square miles²⁰ The zone's boundaries were defined by neighboring towns and villages. Chipman's hinterland lost over one thousand people in the 1950s. Overall, Lamont County's

¹⁷Nicholas Holowaychuk and Mrs. Nick Antoniuk, "The Early Years," in Pride in Progress (Chipman, Alta.: Alberta Rose Historical Society, 1982), p. 5.

¹⁸"Power Farm Hand?" Lamont Banner, v.2 no. 17 Apr 29, 1948.

¹⁹Alberta Industrial Development Board. Village of Chipman: Economic Survey, p. 9.

²⁰Ibid., 9.

population plunged from 12,600 in 1941 to 8,778 in 1951, almost a 30 percent drop within one decade.²¹

In 1939 Chipman had the advantage of being located on one of two graveled highways that linked Edmonton to Lloydminster.²² At the time highways were the responsibility of the provincial government, but local roads were a municipal responsibility. As a result, highway construction became a provincial campaign issue. For example, the Social Credit government made it known that they were responsible for hard surfacing the 40 miles between Chipman and Vegreville in 1950.²³ Hard surfaced roads were the ultimate roadway, because they were passable in all weather conditions. During the 1952 provincial election campaign, Michael Ponich, Vegreville's Social Credit incumbent,²⁴ reminded his constituents that his government was responsible for upgrading the dirt trail from Chipman to Mundare to graveled-highway status.²⁵ To Chipman's misfortune, Highway 16 became the main route for traveling east of Edmonton. Even though Highway 16 was only a few miles south of Chipman, the highway totally bypassed the village and greatly reduced Chipman's drive-by business.²⁶

During the post-war period secondary roads were improved due to increasing numbers of car-owning rural families (46 percent in 1941 to 73 percent in 1961).²⁷ Alberta's social credit government continued to promise to improve Alberta's road system. Better "market roads" helped farmers ship their products and connected them to more service areas (such as Chipman-Mundare and Chipman-Vegreville highways built in the early 1950s). This led to increased competition amongst rural merchants. Rather than sticking to home-

²¹ 1971 Census of Canada: Population: Census Subdivisions Historical, Catalogue 920702, v.1 pt. 1 Bulletin 1.1-2, July 1973, Table 2-107.

²² Alberta Department of Public Works. Highway Map of Province of Alberta, Canada 1939. (n.p.: Alberta Department of Public Works), 1939.

²³ "Gravelling to Include 200 Miles of Roads," Edmonton Journal, March 21, 1950 in Alberta Scrapbook Hansard, Reel 15, 1949-1951.

²⁴ Michael Ponich was Vegreville's MLA from 1944-1955.

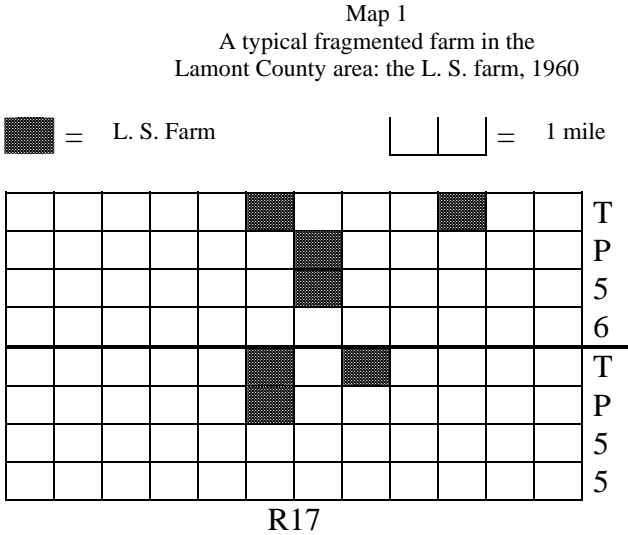
²⁵ Vegreville Observer, Jul 30, 1952.

²⁶ American Automobile Association. Official Road Map Western Canada: Alberta & British Columbia. (Washington: American Automobile Association), 1960.

²⁷ Earl Tyler, The Farmer as a Social Class, 62.

town shopping, the better roads made it easier to travel to stores that had better selection, prices, or quality. Chipmanites could easily drive to Vegreville, Lamont, Fort Saskatchewan, or Edmonton to get any of the services that their village lost between 1950 and 1970, such as the barber shop, butcher, shoe repair, or feed mill (see Appendix 1).

Better roads also made it possible for farmers to work land located at greater distances from their home quarter. This was important due to the unavailability of large adjacent sections of land. Fragmented farms also allowed farmers to select quarters of land with the best soil. Good roads were needed to connect farmers to their remote pieces of land. Map 1 is an example of a fragmented Alberta grain farm in 1960.²⁸



The oldest quarter (160 acres) in the L.S. farm was purchased by his father Harry in 1935. Harry had just got married and was starting his own farm. In 1940 Harry expanded his crop land by renting an additional quarter. This increased the total acres farmed to 360. During the 1950s two more quarters were acquired. In both cases the owners were selling or renting because they were moving to Edmonton -- this was the case for much of the land that came available at that time. Another 160 acres were purchased from a retiring farmer -- also a very common scenario -- in the early 1960s, bringing the total acres farmed to 700. The growth of

²⁸Interview with L.S., March 10, 1999.

the Stelmach farm is typical of the period, as shown in Table 3. The decline in the number of farms coupled with increased farm size indicates that available land was almost always purchased by existing farmers.

Table 3
Increase in Farm Size, Alberta 1931-1961²⁹

	<u>1931</u>	<u>1941</u>	<u>1951</u>	<u>1961</u>
Total Farms	97,408	99,732	84,315	73,212
Average Acres	400	434	527	645

In the 1940s farm size increases were possible due to the widespread use of machinery. Although crop production had begun to modernize in the 1920s, the process had been stalled and reversed by the Depression. Unlike the dust bowl regions of southern Alberta and Saskatchewan, the farmers in northeastern Alberta continued to bring in good crops. The problem for them was the low price per bushel. Grain worth \$1.00 in 1929 sold for approximately 20 cents in 1932.³⁰ This forced many farmers to revert to horses because they could no longer afford fuel or maintenance for their equipment. Once the economy improved farmers quickly made up for lost time.

Table 4
Farm Mechanization, Alberta 1931-1961³¹

	<u>1931</u>	<u>1941</u>	<u>1951</u>	<u>1961</u>
Tractors	21,996	36,445	65,369	65,898
Combines	2,461	4,910	19,569	36,602

Table 4 shows that the first phase of modernization was a run on tractor purchases between 1941 and 1951. In 1948 The Lamont Banner noted that within two years the number of prairie draught horses dropped by 907,000 due to increased tractor use.³² Tractors improved production because they increased the amount of land worked in a season.

²⁹Ibid., p. 64, 66.

³⁰Grant MacEwan, Power for Prairie Plows, (Saskatoon: Prairie Books, 1971), p. 97.

³¹Earl Tyler, The Farmer as a Social Class, p. 64, 66.

³²The Lamont Banner, v.2 #19, May 13/48, p.1.

By 1961 fifty percent of Alberta's farmers owned a combine. Combines were a significant capital purchase and good investment for farmers with a lot of land, but they were a bad investment for the small farmer. In 1958 W.B. Baker noted that many small Saskatchewan farmers were in financial trouble because they were "top-heavy with equipment investment" with "narrow" or "negative" profit margins.³³ Combines were a significant labor-saver because they eliminated the need to hire and feed a threshing crew; with a combine "two people could do the work that a gang of twenty had done."³⁴ The twenty-year buying run on large farm equipment and parts was strong enough to sustain three implement dealers in Chipman during the 1950s and early 1960s. There were also combine dealers in the nearby towns of Star and Holden (twelve and fourteen miles away from Chipman respectively). Having saturated the market by the mid-1960s head offices began reducing number of regional dealers. Chipman had been a well-known farm implements center, so its dealerships persisted longer than most. In 1970 Chipman still had two implement dealers. By 1980 all of Chipman's implement suppliers had closed, so farmers needed to travel to either Vegreville or Camrose for equipment or parts.

Two advertisements from 1952 show the differences between large and small farming operations in the 1950s (see Appendix 3 The Bank of Montreal advertisement shows an exhausted young farmer taking a break from horse plowing. "Fil," the "Farm Improvement Loan" spokesperson, poses a solution: "What you need is a tractor!" Even with a tractor the young farmer had a slim chance of competing with the guy depicted in the Swelka & Skripitsky ad. Swelka & Skripitsky, a Chipman-based implement dealer, was already depicting its customer as a big-business farmer, professionalised and wearing a business suit as he operated his combine. By 1956 prairie field crop production was fully modernized.

³³W.B. Baker, "Changing Community Patterns in Saskatchewan," *Canadian Geographical Journal*, v.56 #2 (Feb, 1958), p. 46.

³⁴Ian Macpherson and John Herd, "The Business of Agriculture: Prairie Farmers and the Adoption of Business Methods," in R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer (eds.), *The Prairie West: Historical Readings*, 2nd ed. (Edmonton: Pica Pica Press, 1992), p. 485.

Old methods like using "oxen," "horses," and "threshing" had become "happy memories for the Old-Timers."³⁵

Another major investment that significantly affected farm life was rural electrification. Vegreville was one of three electrification test sites built by Canadian Utilities Ltd in 1945.³⁶ Upon completion the company hosted "field days" to show off powered equipment. The Western Producer praised the benefits of electrification: it would be a "labor-saver for the farmers" and improve "farm homes for the women."³⁷ In 1948 the average cost of bringing power to a farm was \$800.00.

Public or private ownership of the power companies was one of the hottest issues in the August 17, 1948 provincial election. Citizens voted on the "Power Plebiscite" that asked whether they were "for or against the Province immediately taking over from the private companies the generation, transmission and distribution of power."³⁸ Premier Ernest Manning discouraged public ownership by saying that setting up a public utility would cost "millions" of dollars.³⁹ As expected, the CCF were "militantly in favor of public ownership."⁴⁰ The Liberals wanted to create a power system like Manitoba's, in which the provincial government fully paid for power construction costs.⁴¹ The vote was close, but in the end private control was supported.⁴²

The debate regarding the provincial government's role in providing power did not end with the 1948 Power Plebiscite. Throughout the 1950s opposition parties continued to propose changes to the existing system. The CCF stuck by its plan of government ownership.⁴³ The Liberals would pay all construction costs.⁴⁴ The PCs compromised,

³⁵Advertisement in The Western Producer, June 28, 1956.

³⁶"First Field Day on Rural Electrification," Western Producer, Jul 5, 1945.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Vegreville Observer, Aug 11, 1948, n.p.

³⁹Ibid., n.p.

⁴⁰Ibid., n.p.

⁴¹Vegreville Observer, Jul 9, 1952, Jun 8, 1955, Jun 22, 1955,

⁴²On August 18, 1948, the Vegreville Observer declared that private ownership had won. Preliminary results (2,359 out of 2,760 polls), 108,691 voted for private control, verses 101,194 for government control

⁴³Vegreville Observer, Jun 22, 1955.

saying that they would pay 40 percent of new power construction costs, with a \$600 ceiling. Farmers who already had power would get a 40 percent refund.⁴⁵ For the most part Albertans continued to give Social Credit overwhelming support, and the alternative power plans had no impact on government policy. If farmers wanted power they would have to pay the construction costs themselves.

Farmers reduced costs by forming Rural Electrification Co-operatives Associations. Co-operatives were a popular collective buying and marketing systems during this time period and could be formed for any collective buying or marketing system. They were quasi-socialist in their approach, but unlike socialism, membership was voluntary. Six rules governed co-operative organizations: (1) open and voluntary membership; (2) democratic control; (3) limited interest on share capital; (4) return of surplus to members; (5) co-operative education; (6) co-operation amongst co-operatives.⁴⁶ Co-operatives were owned by the people who used them and provided products and services at cost. For example, the United Grain Growers co-operative handled grain, sold "warm morning coal," "oil heaters, aluminum roofing, wire fencing, farm hardware, binder and baler twine, Weedone 2,4-D, Anticarie, and livestock and poultry feeds."⁴⁷ The Alberta Wheat Pool is another example of a grain-handling co-operative. Although Chipman did not have a Co-op Store in the 1950s, there was one located eight miles north in St. Michael (1942-1990s). The St. Michael Co-operative sold "everything a rural community could need," such as groceries, produce, hardware, veterinary supplies, and stock feed.⁴⁸ In 1942 the sale of twine accounted for 10 percent of the St. Michael Co-op's business.⁴⁹ Co-operative administrators learned management skills and understood the needs of their members. In the 1950s two Vegreville-

⁴⁴Vegreville Observer, Jul 9, 1952, Jun 22, 1955.

⁴⁵Vegreville Observer, Jun 10, 1959.

⁴⁶Brett Fairbairn, Building a Dream: The Co-operative Retailing System in Western Canada, 1928-1988. (Saskatoon, Sask.: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1989), p. 5.

⁴⁷Country Guide, Nov 1952, p.35.

⁴⁸John Melnyk, "St. Michael Co-operative Association," in Pride in Progress, (Chipman, Alta.: Alberta Rose Historical Society, 1982), p.89-90.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 91.

area politicians had experience in running co-operatives before they became politicians.⁵⁰ The farmers' utilization of co-operatives shows their systematic approach to business and ability to large community-wide projects.

Formation of Rural Electrification Co-operative Associations illustrates the co-operative process. Farmers wanting power began the process by deciding the boundaries of a proposed Rural Electrification Area (REA), then all farmers within the zone were invited to a general meeting. If there was strong interest a provisional board of directors was appointed. The power company then mapped a tentative power line and estimated construction costs which would be divided equally amongst the members. Financing was available from Alberta Treasury Branches at an interest rate of 3 1/2 percent. Construction costs could be reduced by clearing trees, etc. Members of the Chipman REA were expected to dig the trenches required for their own transformer poles, as well as spend at least 16 hours clearing brush. The total cost of electrification for the Chipman REA was \$127,520 in 1954, approximately \$1,500 for each of the 51 members.⁵¹

Once the power was in place many farm and home chores were mechanized. In 1953 The Lamont Journal published an article listing the wattage required to run the most popular power equipment. It included: milking machines, cream separators, chick brooders, poultry house lighting, water warmers, freezers and refrigerators, feed grinders, hammermills, grain-cleaning fans, water pressure systems, power tools, welders, ranges, washing machines, and vacuum cleaners.⁵² These goods improved farm efficiency and improved the quality of life in the rural homes. The Homemakers, a housewife club, had been attempted to improve rural living standards since at least 1944. Table 5 shows the areas targeted for improvement during the 1944 Saskatchewan Homemakers convention.

⁵⁰Stanley Ruzycki (CCF), MLA Vegreville, 1955-1958, was the director and board secretary of the "Consumers Co-operative Association," 1946-1955. Frank Fane (PC), MP Vegreville, 1958-1971, had been the secretary-treasurer of the Vegreville West Rural Electrification Association.

⁵¹Francis Sheptycki, "Chipman Rural Electrification," in Pride in Progress, p. 217.

⁵²"Farm Electrical Appliance Consumption.....," The Lamont Journal, v.3 #10, Mar 6/53.

Table 5
Availability of Conveniences, Farm & City, Saskatchewan, 1944⁵³

<u>Convenience</u>	<u>Farm Percent</u>	<u>City Percent</u>
Furnace Heating	12.9	62.1
Gas or electric cooking	7.3	76.6
Electric Lighting	20.0	99.1
Bathing Facilities	7.3	75.8
Flush toilet	8.0	86.7
Refrigeration (all kinds)	22.2	70.0
Mechanical refrigeration	4.0	35.0
Radio	60.7	91.3
Telephone	29.2	56.7
Electric vacuum cleaner	4.3	41.0

Electricity was needed to operate many of the desired conveniences such as "furnace heating," "refrigeration," and "bathing facilities." Although electricity made chores easier and farm life more comfortable, it also increased the farmers costs. They needed to make payments on their REA loan, pay power bills, and buy all the new power equipment. Freezers were a popular item, and could be purchased at the Antoniuk and International Harvester dealership in Chipman in the 1950s.⁵⁴

Beginning in the 1940s farm income from poultry and livestock became increasingly important. Throughout the forties, non-grain commodities made up nearly 50 percent of the average farmer's income.⁵⁵ International factors contributed to this increase, especially wartime subsidies and bonuses.⁵⁶ For example, during the WWII Britain's lost its European bacon supply. They looked to Canada to fill the void, and Canadian bacon suddenly became part of the English breakfast. Within six years -- 1939 to 1944 -- Alberta's pork production tripled.⁵⁷

Selling non-grain products was a simple process during the war and post-war period. Some dealers searched for raw product via newspaper ads. For example, Larry's Produce, in Vegreville, purchased its poultry via the Vegreville Observer: "Poultrymen! Bring Your

⁵³"Better Housing Holds Spotlight," The Western Producer, Jul 6/44.

⁵⁴Lamont Journal, Mar 12, 1953, p.12.

⁵⁵Alberta Bureau of Statistics. Facts and Figures, 1954 ed., p.68.

⁵⁶Ibid., p.45.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 45.

Broilers, Turkeys and Chickens. Tuesday is killing day. Top Grades and Prices!"⁵⁸

Chipman also had a butcher in the 1950s. Like Larry's Produce, the Chipman butcher probably was the intermediary who purchased and processed local livestock for sale in the cities. Selling eggs was easy too. Farmers took their product to a grading station, like Chipman's, which survived until at least 1970. Businesses like the egg grading station and butcher brought farmers to town, and increased the likelihood of home-town shopping. In the 1950s the extra cash could be spent buying necessities in any of Chipman's forty businesses such as the grocery, hardware, or general stores. However, the better roads of the 1950s allowed farmers to deliver their product to a wider area, therefore over time home-town buying became less important.

The Chipman Creamery (1948-1957) was an initiative of the Chipman Board of Trade. Its history is described in Pride in Progress.⁵⁹ After making an application to the Social Credit Government, local researchers gathered statistics on the number of interested cream shippers and milking cows located within a ten mile radius of Chipman. Once the application was approved by the Dairy Commission, \$100 shares were sold to finance the business. The money was raised locally. Once established, the creamery supplied "milk, chocolate milk, butter milk, cottage cheese, and butter" to eight towns and villages in the region. Like Larry's Produce, the Chipman Creamery also advertised for its raw product in local newspapers: "Be Wise...Ship Your Cream to Us. Where Grading is Fairer and Cream Cheques Bigger."⁶⁰ Like Larry's Produce, the Chipman Creamery ad emphasized that they would give "top" or "fairer" grades. This shows that there was competition for farm commodities. In the late 1950s, the Chipman Creamery faced increased competition with larger companies like Palm Dairy and the NADP. They could not compete with NADPs

⁵⁸Vegreville Observer, June 3, 1959.

⁵⁹Melnyk, John, "The Chipman Creamery," Pride in Progress (Chipman: Alberta Rose Historical Society), p. 81-82..

⁶⁰Lamont Journal, Aug 1, 1952, p. 3.

four cent bonus per pound of butterfat or Palm Dairy's low prices. Palm Dairy bought the Chipman Creamery in 1957 and continued to operate it until it was destroyed by fire in 1964.

Price fluctuations have always been a problem for farmers, but during World War II, and in the decade that followed, the Agricultural Prices Support Act⁶¹ helped farmers by setting guaranteed prices. Feeding the Allies also increased demand for Canadian agricultural products. The fixed grain, feed, and livestock prices created an economy conducive to investment because farmers could calculate fairly accurate profit projections. After the war, the Agricultural Prices Support Act remained in effect until the late 1950s in an attempt to prevent the inflation that had followed World War I.⁶² This federal policy helped create the strong farm incomes of 1946 and 1951 as shown in Table 6.

Table 6
Average Earnings Per Member of the Canadian Labour Force and Average Income Per Farm Operator, Alberta, Census Years, 1931-1956 (in 1956 dollars)⁶³

Year	Average Earnings Per Member of Labour Force With A Job	Average Net Income Per Farm Operator in Alberta
1931	\$1,510	\$185
1936	1,560	344
1941	1,960	1,130
1946	2,550	2,991
1951	2,810	4,834
1956	3,260	2,592

Farm income fluctuations were often due to factors beyond the farmers' or governments' control. Grain crops and livestock could be affected by the weather, diseases, or insects. Wet grain could not be stored for long, and the lack of grain dryers forced farmers to sell damp grain quickly. Over time more farmers acquired dryers, therefore they could store dry grain for longer periods and hold it until they wanted to sell. Extended grain storage led to the reduction of grain elevators over time. Ironically good crop years also hurt the farmers pocketbook because market surpluses created price reductions. The unpredictability of agriculture was one farming's major drawbacks and many farmers quit for

⁶¹Agricultural Prices Support Act (1944) full title is: An act for the support of the prices of agricultural products during the transition from war to peace.

⁶²Mr. Gardiner, House of Commons Debates: Official Report. 23rd Parliament, v.4, p. 3777-3782.

⁶³H.J. Uhlman, A Study of the Impact of Demographic and Economic Change in Rural Alberta on the Financing of Education. Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Alberta, 1959, p. 150.

this reason. Nevertheless, the post-war years were better than most, and farmers used the extra cash in a variety of ways, such as buying extra land, electricity, machinery, diversifying into mixed farming, or by investing in things that would improve the overall quality of life.

In the early 1950s, Alberta's provincial government expanded its "Farm Aid" program due to its popularity.⁶⁴ This program allowed farmers to get free advice from agriculturists at home. The goal of the program was to cut farms costs and increase production. In 1950 the program had already helped 57 farmers, and the Minister of Agriculture said that 500 more farmers were on the waiting list. High interest in the program shows that farmers were clearly interested in finding ways to improve their profits.

Even though Social Credit government's popularity was extremely solid during the period, in 1955 the Vegreville provincial constituency elected a CCF candidate. Stanley Ruzycki defeated Michael Ponich, the Social Credit's party whip, who had held the Vegreville seat from 1944 to 1955. The lack of an Alberta hansard makes it difficult to evaluate Ruzycki's impact. Perhaps his defeat after one term is telling. Newspaper clippings in the Alberta Scrapbook Hansard show that Ruzycki attempted to help farmers by trying to get the license fees removed from tractors. He argued that work horses had not been licensed, and since tractors replaced horses they should not be licensed either. Although his appeal was unsuccessful, it does demonstrate how extra charges like license fees increased farming costs. His constituency may have wanted to get back on the winning team, and get more of the perks like the highways Ponich bragged about in the 1950s. Ruzycki was defeated by A.W. Gordy, a Social Creditor who held the seat from 1959 until the Progressive Conservative sweep in 1971.

The federal government created the Farm Improvement Loan (FIL) program in the late 1940s in order to help farmers mechanize. Since FILs were partially guaranteed by the federal government, farmers were more likely to qualify for these bank loans.⁶⁵ FIL loans

⁶⁴"Farm Aid Service to Be Extended," Edmonton Journal, Feb 23, 1950, in Alberta Scrapbook Hansard, Reel 15, 1949-1951.

⁶⁵Debates of the House of Commons, 22 Parliament, ??

ceilings were \$3,000 in 1945 and \$5,000 in 1955. MP's complained that the FIL limits were too low because average efficient farm required \$20,000 worth of machinery.⁶⁶ As the name of the program suggests, FIL loans were designed to improve existing farms. They did not provide funding for new farmers trying to become established.

In the 1950s farmers, federal and provincial politicians complained that the "cost-price squeeze" was making it impossible for young farmers to get started. People did not want corporate farms to take over rural Canada and destroy the idealized, pastoral image of the farmer. One such idealised image was described by a Member of Parliament in 1956:

Life on the farm provides an atmosphere...
where the noblest virtues and the soundest
traditions will bloom. Rural life guarantees
a strong, well-balanced race, sound in body and
mind...Farmers are cool-headed and thoughtful...
True farmers can raise their soul to summits
where the real meaning of life is understood.⁶⁷

Alberta MLAs like Chester Sayers and Grant MacEwan also wanted to prevent the takeover of rural "land barons" and "corporation farms."⁶⁸

In Alberta, opposition parties pressured the Social Credit to develop a system to help new farmers. In 1956, Social Creditors favored a non-interventionist strategy:

It would be unwise to give young farmers everything
they need to become established. The best way... "is
to get in there and work hard and do a little
worrying - then you'll appreciate what you have."⁶⁹

The provincial government believed they were doing young farmers a favor by not allowing them to get into debt: "there would be bad years again and it might prove too much for the young farmer who did not go through the depression of the 1930s."⁷⁰ However, by 1957

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 2520.

⁶⁷Mr. Michaud, MP (Kent, N.B), Debates of the House of Commons, 22nd Parliament, 3rd Session, v.1, 1956, p. 296.

⁶⁸Grant MacEwan quoted in "Government to Study Young Farmers' Loans," Edmonton Journal, Mar 21, 196? in Alberta Scrapbook Hansard, and Chester Sayers quoted in "Liberal Bid to Aid Farmers Given Support by Minister," Edmonton Journal, Aug 24, 1955 in Alberta Scrapbook Hansard, 1955.

⁶⁹Mr. Halmrost, quoted in the Edmonton Journal, Apr 2, 1958, in Alberta Scrapbook Hansard, 1956

⁷⁰Ibid.

Alberta's government agreed that they would try to help young farmers by creating the Farm Loan Act of 1957.

Alberta's Farm Loan Act was designed to help farmers sell to their sons, but it was extremely unpopular. In its first year only 35 applications had been processed, of which 18 had been approved. Under the program, the new farmer needed a 20 percent down payment, the provincial government advanced 40 percent of the cost, and the remaining 40 percent was to be financed by the seller at 4 1/2 percent interest over 20 years.⁷¹ Some MLAs suggested that there would be more interest in the program if the down payment was lowered to 10 percent. Others said that the program was unpopular because the retiring farmers thought they might be dead by the time they collected all their money.⁷²

Life also changed for farm children in the 1950s. Mechanization reduced the need for their labor on the farm and allowed children to stay in school longer. New consolidated schools replaced the sixty little one and two-room schools that dotted Lamont County every four miles or so. The consolidated schools reduced costs and provided a better quality of education.⁷³ New classes like home economics and shop were added. The focus of education also shifted. Rather than preparing children to become the next generation of farmers, education responded to the rural-urban migration trend and began preparing children for industrial employment.⁷⁴

Chipman's new consolidated school was built in 1952. It absorbed ten of the small neighboring districts and offered grades 1-9. High school students were bused to Lamont. Moving to the consolidated schools was a drastic change. Prior to consolidation students had attended one or two-room schools in which their classmates were their immediate neighbors. To compare the size difference, in 1952 the school in Wostok Hamlet was not yet

⁷¹"Social Crediter Raps Farm Loan Program," Edmonton Journal, Apr 2, 1958 in Alberta Scrapbook Hansard, 1958.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³"Further Centralization Advocated for Lamont School Division," The Lamont Journal, v.2 #14, April 4, 1952, p. 1.

⁷⁴"Here is a Better Deal for You: The Liberal Program," The Lamont Journal, v.2 #31, August 1, 1951, p. 4.

consolidated and had a total of fourteen students. In comparison, the new consolidated school in Andrew had 602 students. In the new schools children were in regular contact with students of other ethnic, economic, and social backgrounds. Farm kids and town kids were now educated together. Changes in the educational system paralleled agricultural changes: bigger was better. The universities and trade schools were, for the most part, located in larger cities. The centralized school system helped create a generation accustomed to traveling further distances in order to receive improved or specialized goods or services.

Daily commutes to the town would have increased business in Chipman's stores and places of recreation, like the bowling alley and pool room. In 1999, school kids can still buy pop and candy in the Chipman Mighty Mart. Regular town contact semi-urbanized the kids and made young people aware of the differences between town and country life. Most Alberta towns, for example, had electricity in the 1920s, and other conveniences such as waterworks and sewage systems long before the farmers did. Regular town contact also increased young people's awareness of the many consumer goods available.

Many young people chose to leave the countryside because they perceived farm life to be a more difficult life than that of the city. A 1952 The Western Producer article entitled "Farm Losing Labor Battle to Industry," it was noted that 70,000 young people were moving from the farms to the cities every year.⁷⁵ The author, Holland B. Blaine felt that many of the migrants were seasonal, part-time, or "unpaid, male, family workers."⁷⁶ Blaine stated that rural workers were attracted to city jobs because of good benefits like year-round job security, unemployment insurance, workers' compensation, pension plans, and holidays. There was also more to do in the city, and moving away from home was exciting too.

After 1941, Alberta's farming population quickly declined due to coinciding push and pull factors. Many rural people were drawn to the cities to pursue further education or employment in urban, non-agricultural sectors. The cost-price squeeze caused by

⁷⁵Holland B. Blaine, "Farm Losing Labor Battle to Industry," The Western Producer, July 3, 1952, p. 2.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 3.

electrification, mechanisation, and farm size prevented many young people from getting their own farms. Although W.W.II improved farm product prices, farmers feared another depression like the 1930s. Good years are inevitably followed by bad, and the causes of both are often beyond the farmer's or government's control. The resulting population drop, coupled with improved transportation for those remaining in rural districts, reduced the farmers' dependence on the home-town. These factors resulted in the continuous closure of small time businesses that has occurred since the 1940s.

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