

The Canadian prairie west before 1896 was, for the most part, seen as a veritable hinterland by the Canadian government. It was a territory sparsely inhabited by European settlers and, despite the large numbers of Indigenous peoples who had long occupied the land, the Canadian government still considered it unsettled.¹ Beginning in 1867 the government of Canada had wanted to attract thousands of new settlers, but decades later the west remained a land of uncertain possibility. The Department of the Interior, under the Liberal government of Wilfrid Laurier, began an ambitious initiative that ultimately resulted in almost three-quarters of a million people, mostly of European heritage, migrating to Canada between 1896 and 1905.² There were favourable circumstances by then, of course, for settlement in Canada, especially the closing of the American west in the early 1890s. Canada's propaganda campaign, launched in eastern, northern and central Europe and in Britain and the United States, sparked much interest about the Canadian prairie west. An epidemic of prairie west settlement fever soon spread throughout Europe and the United States. As a result, multitudes left their homelands to begin new lives in Canada.

Clifford Sifton, the Minister of the Interior from 1896 to 1905, largely masterminded a successful program of propaganda that reached a myriad of nationalities who were seeking a fresh start, wanting to expand their agricultural operations and escape such things as landlordism, poverty, and religious persecution in their homelands.³ A few years into the Wilfrid Laurier era, the benefits of western Canada were well-known in parts of the United States of America and in Europe generally. Sifton's beguiling rhetorical constructs, embedded within the language of

¹ Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987. 162-163.

² Ninette Kelley and Michael Trebilcock, *The Making of the Mosaic: A History of Canadian Immigration Policy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998. 121: "When Sifton resigned in 1905, approximately 650,000 immigrants had entered Canada during his nine-year term in office, more than 60 per cent of whom had come in the three years prior to his departure."

³ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 249-250.

opportunity and promise, enticed those who could break the soil and establish farms in a seemingly pulchritudinous region of Canada. The prairies encompassed, from the perspective of newcomers influenced by the propaganda, most of Canada's so-called agricultural lands in the late 19th century, and Canadian politicians were keen to promote an ideal image of the region for newcomers. The selling of the prairie west, a place of assured opportunity and reward, was through the mode of propaganda. One public relations researcher and writer named Edward Bernays says propaganda's "invisible governors" dictate the "habits and opinions of the masses."⁴ Sifton's promotional literature, particularly the promotional booklets used to attract immigrants to Canada, characterized Bernays' typification of propaganda. Some primary sources are required to be analyzed as designs of propaganda, and as persuasive pieces of promotional literature of Sifton's promotional campaign. The booklets analyzed are *Timely Remarks by Septimus Field and Letters from Western Canadian Settlers* (1898) and *Western Canada: Manitoba and the Northwest Territories, Assiniboia, Alberta and Saskatchewan* (1899).

The two booklets of promotional literature were designed by the Department of the Interior and the Government Printing Bureau during Clifford Sifton's tenure as Minister of the Department of the Interior. They boldly portrayed the west in its idyllic nature, and implied that a can't-be-missed opportunity was awaiting the newcomer. They appeared accurate, highly researched, sharp in their experience-based descriptions and pastoral in narrative. However, as Ronald Rees writes, much of the writing within Canada's promotional literature highlighted only the good, and not the real struggle one had to wrestle with day in and day out.⁵ The pieces of promotional literature chosen for this thesis therefore represent ideal prototypes for the Federal

⁴ Edward Bernays, *Propaganda*. New York: Ig Publishing, 1928, 37-38.

⁵ Ronald Rees, *New and Naked Land: Making the Prairies Home*. Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1988. 1.

Government's promotional campaign that hid the fact that Canada's prairies would take a lot of fortitude, and that nothing about migrating to a new land augured success for all newcomers.

Western Canada was published by the Canadian government and *Timely Remarks* was written from an agriculturalists' opinion named Septimus Field.⁶ Other historians have used Sifton's more well-known promotional pieces like *The Last, Best West* in their research, but not the two particular pieces used for this essay. Both *Septimus Field* and *Western Canada* unveiled the prairie west as a veritable gold mine awaiting the male and female newcomer, using a number of linguistic structures and rhetorical devices common in propaganda to persuade them. Techniques such as card-stacking and the bold assertion are evident in both publications. Claims about the prairie's rejuvenating climatic effects on people or the westerner's superior aptitude, workmanship and quality of life were described in the literature in ways that dispelled notions of uncertainty and unconquerability.⁷

The literature's prose presents its information in a "gendered experience," but it is really targeting the male newcomer.⁸ The narrative of the literature -- however obvious Sifton's bias comes across with regards to favouring males -- is replete with masculine representations of the prairie west. This was, back in the day, a common way to uphold an idea or position of power (i.e. the vocations of farming or ranching) reserved only for a man which, in turn, relegated women as role-players confined to limits and boundaries regard where they could go or what

⁶ It is possible that Septimus Field was 'created' from the imagination of a propagandist author. No records of any sort currently exist of Mr. Field, save for his location Asessippi, Manitoba. He wrote an earlier booklet that was published in 1895 titled *The Canadian North-West*, but it essentially relays much of the same information as *Timely Remarks*.

⁷ Q.v. The essay does not shed much light on women's experiences in the prairies, nor does it include a feminine framework because of the lack of reference to these themes in the booklets. For a two-way appraisal of masculinity and femininity in the context of women, colonial and gender history refer to Anne McClintock's *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

⁸ Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, *The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in History and Theory, second edition*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016. 269.

work they involve themselves with. In the profession of history, ignoring that this ever existed as a historical ideology negatively affects a woman's perspective and place in history. In prairie west history today, this has had an impact on historians and has resulted in incorporating and filling historical gaps; seeking out and formulating new questions and creating interconnections for today's gender historians; to further advance the gendered template of study; defining the parameters of inclusion; and in viewing a woman's historical significance as a *settler* (and not just as a farm wife) in relation to her environments (domestic, social and consumerist environments). Indeed, a more in-depth study could further this essay's analysis. Added further, a more gendered outlook on the feminine ideals of Canadian expansionism, the individual female-settler achievements and their place in the settler environment could be expounded upon. These perspectives characterize the uniqueness of the Canadian prairie west, and they need further investigation as a subject of study in history. Unfortunately, this important matter cannot be delved into in this essay. A Canadian prairie west settler woman has a unique place in settlement history, though, and I acknowledge their place in the history of the prairie west. If it were possible, their perspectives would be included in a longer version of this essay because there is more to just a generic impression of women in history through a masculine lens that portrays women as "universal subject...defined in [her] particularity"⁹

In the 1890s and 1900s, both genders familiarized themselves with the prairie experience discussed in Sifton's booklets. They read about homesteading experiences on the prairies, the country's rules and regulations, religious freedoms, job types, the tax structure, provincial education systems, types of game to hunt, the grain varieties and various agricultural-lifestyle advantages, and societal, climatic and geographical features unique to the rural landscape.

⁹ Green and Troup, *The Houses of History: A Critical Reader in History and Theory*, second edition, 268- 269.

However, these booklets were only one aspect of the promotional literature that comprised the Federal Government's campaign towards prospective newcomers. That material (advertisement posters, pamphlets and postcards) contains a plethora of broader historical connections to propaganda and addresses broader topics on Canadian immigration history and economic theory but their affiliation to these topics and themes will not be explored in great detail in this essay.

Immigration and national policy and the expectations of and reactions to the prairie west in examining the factors of selling the west are considered first in this essay, before it turns to the consideration of the types of persuasion found within the promotional literature. This thesis *in toto* investigates the prairie west's settlement evolution from Confederation, the favourable circumstances for bringing in many newcomers during the Laurier era, and then seeks to understand what made the booklets (within in the context of the promotional literature campaign) so persuasive and appealing that they contributed to a huge influx of newcomers. Canada's favourable circumstances are only a relatively minor component of the thesis; most attention is focused on the themes that pertain to the promotional literature's depiction of Canada. It should also be noted that, despite the role of race and colonialization theory and Indigenous displacement in the settlement process, these important themes are not covered in this thesis, in part, because the pieces of promotional literature examined did not include, for one thing, an Indigenous perspective or their reaction towards settlement, nor does the literature provide a critique of the immigration policies as they existed in the late 19th century. Yet, I understand that these themes can have an impact on the way Canadian history is written and inter-generationally passed down orally, and that these very types of history can act as personal but powerful statements for those historians who continue to write more inclusively.