

"As entertaining as fiction." Great Plains Quarterly

ON THE FRONTIER

*Letters from the Canadian West
in the 1880s*

William Wallace

edited by KEN S. COATES
and BILL MORRISON

ON THE FRONTIER

ON THE
FRONTIER

*Letters from the Canadian West
in the 1880s*

William Wallace

edited by KEN S. COATES
and BILL MORRISON

© 2015 University of Regina Press

All rights reserved. No part of this work covered by the copyrights hereon may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means — graphic, electronic, or mechanical — without the prior written permission of the publisher. Any request for photocopying, recording, taping or placement in information storage and retrieval systems of any sort shall be directed in writing to Access Copyright.

Printed and bound in Canada at Marquis.

COVER AND TEXT DESIGN: Duncan Campbell, University of Regina Press

COPY EDIT: Anne James

INDEX: Patricia Furdek

COVER PHOTO: “Old lock on an old grey weathered barn door” by Valerie Hunter.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

—Wallace, William, active 1881-1886

[“My dear Maggie—”]

On the frontier : letters from the Canadian West in the 1880s / William Wallace ; edited by Ken S. Coates and Bill Morrison.

A republication of “My dear Maggie—” published in Regina by Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1991. With new cover, layout, introduction and front matter.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Issued in print and electronic formats.

ISBN 978-0-88977-408-7 (paperback).—ISBN 978-0-88977-410-0 (html).

—ISBN 978-0-88977-409-4 (pdf)

1. Wallace, William, active 1881-1886—Correspondence. 2. Pioneers—Manitoba—Correspondence. 3. Immigrants—Manitoba—Correspondence. 4. Frontier and pioneer life—Manitoba. 5. Manitoba—Social life and customs. I. Coates, Kenneth, 1956-, editor II. Morrison, William R. (William Robert), 1942-, editor III. Title. IV. Title: [“My dear Maggie—”].

FC3367.2.W34 2015 971.27'3 C2015-904221-6 C2015-904222-4

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



U OF R PRESS

University of Regina Press, University of Regina
Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, S4S 0A2
tel: (306) 585-4758 fax: (306) 585-4699
web: www.uofrpress.ca

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada. / Nous reconnaissons l'appui financier du gouvernement du Canada. We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts for our publishing program. This publication was made possible through Creative Saskatchewan's Creative Industries Production Grant Program.

Canada

Canada Council
for the Arts



Conseil des Arts
du Canada

creative
SASKATCHEWAN

CONTENTS

PREFACE.....	<i>vii</i>
INTRODUCTION.....	<i>ix</i>
1881.....	<i>1</i>
1882	<i>63</i>
1883	<i>137</i>
1884.....	<i>191</i>
1885.....	<i>247</i>
EPILOGUE.....	<i>297</i>
INDEX.....	<i>305</i>

PREFACE

We first heard of the Wallace papers in 1985 when we were teaching history together at Brandon University. At that time, Tom Mitchell, a friend and colleague (later archivist) at Brandon University, brought them to our attention. They had been in the university archives since 1941, but apparently had been largely unexamined. A glance at them, however, was enough to convince us of their historical value, and after some false starts, we were lucky to be able to convince the Canadian Plains Research Center to publish them.

We were also fortunate in our research assistants: Roberta Kempthorne, who did most of the research on which the maps are based, as well as collecting much local information, and Bruce Stadfeld, who transcribed many of the letters into readable copy in the summer of 1986. Glenn Icton provided research support for the new introduction to the letters. Brandon University and the University of Victoria provided logistical support for the preparation of the original volume. Tom Mitchell kindly scanned the original maps and photos for the second edition. Monica Ball of the Manitoba Legislative Library provided the population statistics for Shellmouth.

Another source of good fortune was the fact that when we started working on the papers in 1986 there were still members of the Shellmouth community who remembered the Wallace family. Isabel Joy, then in her nineties, had known William Wallace for decades, and had acted with him in amateur theatricals during World War I. She appears with him in the 1914 picture of the Shellmouth Amateur Dramatic Society contained in this book, and she was able to give us personal reminiscences of him. Another long-time resident of

PREFACE

the community was Sarah Wileman, the daughter of a man who had worked for Wallace later in his life, and who had lived in the house with him for some years as a young girl. Local residents Earl Morrison (no relation) and Emile Busch gave us photographs of the Wallaces that they had saved. This was also a stroke of luck, because none of the Wallaces had children, and since William died in 1943, we could easily have been without images of any of them. Now, in 2015, these personal connections have vanished, and there must be few if any people in the district with direct memories of the Wallace family.

These papers are a treasure, possibly a unique Canadian collection. They consist of twenty years of long descriptive letters, not like a diary, but more like a series of articles written for distribution or publication. Reading them is akin to reading a realistic novel about early prairie settlement, albeit one totally lacking a love story.

On the Frontier: Letters from the Canadian West in the 1880s was published in 1991 by Canadian Plains Research Center, in a small edition under the title *My Dear Maggie: Letters from a Western Manitoba Pioneer*, and soon went out of print. We are delighted that the University of Regina Press has agreed to republish this fascinating collection of letters.

INTRODUCTION

By 1880, the Dominion of Canada, formed in 1867, had grown from a confederation of four provinces into an ambitious transcontinental nation that stretched from Nova Scotia to the west-coast province of British Columbia. In between lay a vast stretch of territory, home to First Nations and Metis people, massive herds of bison, and millions of acres of grasslands. The vast prairie lands of Western Canada held the key to a grand national dream of the country's future. Canadian nation builders, particularly in Ontario, saw in the western lands the promise of endless opportunity and the greatest of all dreams, the chance to build a country stretching from sea to sea, enriched by the millions of farmers who would populate the prairie expanse.

This was no original plan, no made-in-Canada strategy for national greatness, for a template existed south of the border. The United States of America, once locked into a North-South set of coastal states that stretched from Maine to Florida, had unleashed its commercial and entrepreneurial potential when it started to expand westward after the Civil War to the central plains. Through the later decades of the nineteenth century, America built a network of railways that reached, like an eager hand, into the western interior. The new infrastructure, coupled with the promise of free or cheap land to those who ventured into the region to establish farms, captured the imagination of Europe and attracted millions of immigrants. In short order, America's population and economic output grew dramatically.

And now it was Canada's turn. The acquisition of Rupert's Land in 1870 led to the creation of the postage-stamp-sized province of Manitoba and the nationally controlled Northwest Territories. The

other pieces quickly fell into place. The Dominion Lands Act of 1872 dangled the prospect of free land in front of prospective settlers. A series of treaties with First Nations—Treaty One in 1870 to Treaty Seven in 1877—removed the original peoples as a threat to would-be settlers, a promise enhanced with the creation of the North-West Mounted Police in 1873. The promise to British Columbia that a railway would be built as a link with eastern Canada promised western settlers access to markets and supplies. Canada had copied the American example, with the notable exception of using treaties rather than the army to deal with Aboriginal occupation of their traditional territories. Where the westward expansion of the United States was marked by long and bitter Indian wars, Canada's was destined to be dominated by treaties, reserve lands, and Indian agents.

But the flood of settlers did not come as early as planned. The American west still had land available, with better railway networks and a warmer climate. Not until the 1890s, with the closing of the American frontier, would the promise of western expansion south of the 49th parallel start to fade. Canada expected and planned for millions of immigrants and settlers. They came at first only in the thousands, well below the grandiose vision of a western landscape transformed from prairie grasslands to prosperous farms. Canada's day in the prairie sun came later, following the danger of the 1885 Rebellion on the plains and after the election of Wilfrid Laurier and the Liberals in 1896 and the development of an aggressive immigrant promotion campaign targeted at Eastern Europe. The period in between, from 1870 to 1896, was one of national stagnation, marked by the Pacific Scandal over railway contracts that toppled the Conservative government of John A. Macdonald, low rates of settlement, weak economic returns from prairie agriculture, wild speculation in railway construction, and tensions with Metis and First Nations that culminated in an aggressive and nasty campaign against the First Nations and the 1885 Metis uprising led by Louis Riel.

This period, between the excitement of creating a transcontinental nation and the promise of the late-nineteenth-century settlement boom, is somewhat of a blind spot in the understanding of Canada's past. The challenges and responses of the First Nations and Metis have attracted a great deal of attention. James Daschuk's 2013 work, *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss*

of Aboriginal Life, is but the latest in an impressive list of books describing government perfidy, Indigenous determination, and conflict over the west's future. But there was settlement during this period, especially in western Manitoba. Starting before 1870, and particularly after 1880, newcomers came west, seeking land and opportunity in the British-Canadian territories north of the American republic. Soon the settlers outnumbered the Indigenous peoples.

To settle in the West in the 1870s and 1880s, particularly if it meant venturing west of the relative security of the Red River valley and the growing city of Winnipeg, was a risky gamble. Disappointing it may have been for the country as a whole, but this was also one of the most fascinating and challenging—and little known—episodes in Canadian history. Getting inside the life histories of these early settlers, understanding the risks and survival strategies of the first Europeans trying to create lives for themselves on the western plains, has been difficult. A window into them was opened, however, when William and Andrew Wallace, two brothers from England, arrived in western Manitoba with their father, Peter. Immediately they started writing regular letters to their sister, Maggie. In the process, they produced one of the classic testimonials about the early history of Canada. *On the Frontier* tells, in their words, the remarkable, harrowing, funny, and sometimes daunting experiences of the early western settlers.

The Wallaces were among the first settlers to western Manitoba and what is now eastern Saskatchewan, part of the “Manitoba land boom” of the early 1880s. When they moved from their first homestead near Brandon to the Shellmouth district, they were one of the first farm families in the district. They were the pioneers, the heroes, the builders, and the land they came to was, to their minds, “empty.” They stayed throughout the boom, the early years, and long after, the last of them living until 1948. Their own history mirrors that of settlement in that part of the prairies, and this alone makes these letters a valuable historical source. As well, they are just fun to read. They are long, descriptive, informal, humorous, and very personal, like extended diary entries, but meant to be read and passed around rather than kept secret.

Since these letters were first published as *My Dear Maggie*, research on prairie history and settlement has turned away from people like the Wallaces. Instead, much of the new scholarship deals with prairie settlers who were very much unlike the Wallaces and their neighbours: women,¹ Mennonites,² Ukrainians,³ Metis and First Nations,⁴ other

-
- 1 Anne C. Gagnon, "En Terre Promise: The Lives of Franco-Albertan Women, 1890–1940" (PhD dissertation, University of Ottawa, 1998); Nanci L. Langford, "First Generation and Lasting Impressions: The Gendered Identities of Prairie Homestead Women" (PhD dissertation, University of Alberta, 1994); Sandra Rollings-Magnusson, "Hitched to the Plow: The Place of Western Pioneer Women in Innisian Staple Theory" (master's thesis, University of Regina, 1997); Sandra Rollings-Magnusson, "Canada's Most Wanted: Pioneer Women on the Western Prairies," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 37, no. 2 (May 2000): 223–238; S. Leigh Matthews, "Bound to Improve: Canadian Women's Prairie Memoirs and Intersections of Culture, History, and Identity" (PhD dissertation, University of Calgary, 2002); Lesley Erickson, "The Unsettling West: Gender, Crime, and Culture in the Canadian Prairies, 1886–1940" (PhD dissertation, University of Calgary, 2003); Catherine A. Cavanaugh, "'No Place for a Woman': Engendering Western Canadian Settlement," in *Women and Gender in the American West*, eds. Mary Ann Irwin and James F. Brooks (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004), 183–209; Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada's Prairie West* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997); Sarah Carter, "Categories and Terrains of Exclusion: Constructing the 'Indian Woman' in the Early Settlement Era in Western Canada," in *In the Days of Our Grandmothers: A Reader in Aboriginal Women's History in Canada*, eds. Mary-Ellen Kelm and Lorna Townsend (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 146–169.
 - 2 Roland Meyer Sawatzky, "The Control of Social Space in Mennonite Housebarns in Manitoba, 1874–1940," (PhD dissertation, Simon Fraser University, 2004).
 - 3 Roman Paul Fodchuk, *Zborna: Material Culture of the Ukrainian Pioneers* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006); John C. Lehr, "Governmental Coercion in the Settlement of Ukranian Immigrants in Western Canada," in *Immigration and Settlement, 1870–1939*, ed. Gregory P. Marchildon (Regina: University of Regina and Canadian Plains Research Center, 2009), 267–284.
 - 4 Gerhard J. Ens, *Homeland to Hinterland: The Changing Worlds of the Red River Metis in the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990); Stephen George Sliwa, "Standing the Test of Time: A History of the Beardy's/Okemasis Reserve, 1876–1951" (master's thesis, Trent University, 1993); Sarah Carter, *Aboriginal People and Colonizers of Western Canada to 1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Maureen K. Lux, *Medicine that Walks: Disease, Medicine, and the Canadian Plains Native People, 1880–1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

non-British immigrants,⁵ and ranchers⁶ among them. We could add to this list a substantial number of publications on law enforcement and other topics.

But little or none of this applies to the Wallaces. The elder Wallace was a widower, and his sons were lifelong bachelors, neither of whom seems to have had any personal relations with women at all, though the letters are full of coy references to matrimony. Nor were they involved with non-Anglo settlers, for as the table below shows, their neighbours were almost all white, British, and Protestant. They had almost no contact with First Nations, except to observe some of them nervously and unsympathetically during the 1885 Rebellion. To place the Wallaces in historical context, one needs to look at research dealing with prairie settlers who were like them, came at the same time, and had much the same experiences. Lyle

5 Jason F. Kovacs, "Con Artist or Noble Immigration Agent?: Count Esterhazy's Hungarian Colonization Effort, 1885-1902," in *Immigration and Settlement, 1870-1939*, ed. Gregory P. Marchildon (Regina: University of Regina and Canadian Plains Research Center, 2009), 285-313; Fred Stambrook and Stella Hryniuk, "Who Were They Really? Reflections on East European Immigrants to Manitoba before 1914," in *Immigration and Settlement, 1870-1939*, ed. Gregory P. Marchildon (Regina: University of Regina and Canadian Plains Research Center, 2009), 457-482; John M. Cobb, "German Lutherans in the Prairie Provinces Before the First World War: Their Church Background, Emigration and New Beginnings in Canada" (PhD dissertation, University of Manitoba, 1991); Wendy Lee Karhoffer, "Visions of a New Land: Government Recruitment of Norwegian Immigrants to Alberta, 1870-1930" (master's thesis, University of Calgary, 1991). Stella M. Hryniuk and Neil G. McDonald, "The Schooling Experience of Ukrainians in Manitoba, 1896-1916," in *The Prairie West: Historical Readings*, 2nd edition, eds. R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer (Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1992), 289-307; Maureen A. Pedersen, "Wherever Two or Three are Gathered: A Study of the Finnish Settlement at New Finland, Saskatchewan, 1888-1945" (master's thesis, University of Regina, 2004). Allan Rowe, "Prairie Shamrock: Irish Settlement and Identity in Western Canada, 1870s-1930s" (PhD dissertation, University of Alberta, 2009).

6 David H. Breen, *The Canadian Prairie West and the Ranching Frontier, 1874-1924* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983); W. M. Elofson, "Not Just a Cowboy: The Practice of Ranching in Southern Alberta, 1881-1914," *Canadian Papers in Rural History* 10 (1996): 205-216; A. B. McCullough, "Eastern Capital, Government Purchase and the Development of Canadian Ranching," *Prairie Forum* 22, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 213-235; Warren M. Elofson, *Frontier Cattle Ranching in the Land and Times of Charlie Russell* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004).

Dick's study of early settlement around Abernethy, Saskatchewan,⁷ is one of the best examples of such work.

Readers familiar with the literature mentioned above will find the Wallace letters to be a perfect example of the world view that is now called the "settler mentality." The phrase is often used pejoratively these days, but it was of course the way that the Wallaces and all their neighbours viewed their world. The prairies were a *tabula rasa* to them, a blank slate on which to write their futures. It never would have occurred to them that First Nations had any rights to the land, or that that land had any history before their arrival.

An important thing to note about the Wallaces, who arrived in Manitoba in the spring of 1881, is that they were not "men in sheepskin coats," to quote Clifford Sifton's famous description of the ideal prairie settler. When the three Scotsmen,⁸ Peter Wallace, aged fifty-nine, and his sons William, twenty-two, and Andrew, fifteen, came to Manitoba intending to establish a farm on the frontier, the more famous period of settlement was fifteen years in the future. They did not arrive in the west during the great wave of European migration that occurred between 1895 and 1914, but two decades earlier, during the Manitoba land boom of 1880–1881.

This period of migration was of vital importance to the prairies, and especially to the new province of Manitoba, for it was during these years that much of the region's basic social pattern was set. Yet it is much less well known than the later one, and has been ignored in a general assumption that the important immigration occurred at the time when Wilfrid Laurier declared that the twentieth century would belong to Canada. In 1883 there were actually 133,000 immigrants to Canada, a good percentage of whom came to the prairies. In 1890 the figure had declined to 75,000, and in 1896 to

7 Lyle Dick, *Farmers "Making Good": The Development of Abernethy District, Saskatchewan, 1880–1920* (Ottawa: National Historic Parks Sites, Canadian Parks Service, Environment Canada, 1989).

8 On Scottish settlement in the prairie provinces, see Alan R. Turner, "Scottish Settlement of the West," in *The Scottish Tradition in Canada*, ed. W. S. Reid (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976). For a popular account of prairie settlement, see Barry Broadfoot, *The Pioneer Years 1895–1914: Memories of Settlers Who Opened the West* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1976); Pierre Berton, *The Promised Land: Settling the West 1896–1914* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1984).

just under 17,000, after which time the “sheepskin coats” period began, with the number rising to over 400,000 in 1913.⁹ It is often thought that the important migration to Canada began in 1890, but the previous decade was of greater significance: over 849,615 came to Canada in the period 1880–89, and only 372,474 in the period 1890–99.¹⁰ The roots of the Manitoba farm economy in particular go back into the late 1870s and early 1880s, and the Wallaces were in on the ground floor of it.

The period of prairie history that saw the arrival of the Wallaces can be seen as a transition between the earliest days of European settlement—the largely unregulated era when the farm population clustered around the Red River colony—and the later boom period that began in the late 1890s. When Manitoba joined Confederation in 1870, the Metis made up the majority of its settled population. By 1880 the Metis were a minority in their own land, swamped by an influx of settlers from eastern Canada, most of them English-speaking Protestants from Ontario and the Maritimes, and by increasing migration from Great Britain. The aggressive white Anglo-Saxon population had little place for the Metis, who were, with government complicity, deprived of lands promised to them under the Manitoba Act.¹¹ By 1885–1886, at the point where this collection of letters ends, the population of Manitoba was overwhelmingly of British ethnic origin. In the Elton district near Brandon, where the Wallaces first took up land, the proportion of British settlers was almost 95%, and in Russell and Shell River districts, where the Wallaces eventually settled, the proportion approached 100%.¹² It was during this period

9 R. D. Francis et al., *Destinies: Canadian History Since Confederation* (Toronto: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1988), 112; “Room to Spare,” an article by David J. Hall in *Horizon Canada*, 7, no. 76, uses the same table.

10 The figures, taken from *Historical Statistics of Canada*, eds. M. C. Urquhart and K. A. H. Buckley (Toronto: Macmillan, 1965) are 1881—47,991; 1882—112,458; 1883—133,624; 1884—103,824; 1885—79,169.

11 D. N. Sprague, *Canada and the Métis, 1869–1888* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1988).

12 The Wallace farm was on the border of the two districts. These tables were prepared by Bruce Stadfeld at Brandon University from Canadian census data. The “Irish” were mostly Irish Protestants. The First Nations population is not included.

INTRODUCTION

that the first great increase in the province's population took place—from 12,000 in 1870¹³ to 66,000 in 1881 to 109,000 in 1886.¹⁴

ETHNIC ORIGINS OF THE POPULATION, 1885–1886, PERCENTAGES

	MANITOBA	ELTON	RUSSELL	SHELL RIVER
<i>English</i>	27.3	28.3	32.2	35.8
<i>Scottish</i>	27.0	32.0	41.1	28.2
<i>Irish</i>	22.3	34.6	24.9	34.9
Total of 3	76.6	94.9	98.2	98.9
<i>French</i>	7.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<i>German</i>	11.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Icelanders</i>	2.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
<i>Other</i>	2.0	3.0	1.8	1.1

Other statistics show the almost totally Anglo-Protestant nature of the Shell River district during the period the Wallace family was pioneering there, even compared to the rest of Manitoba. For instance, in 1885 the four largest religious denominations in the province were Presbyterian (26.1%), Anglican (21.4%), Methodist (17%), and Roman Catholic (13.5%). Roman Catholics made up only 0.7% of the population of the Shell River district, and the Presbyterians (47.8%), Anglicans (36%), and Methodists (9.8%)—93.6% in total.

Thus the region of the prairies to which the Wallaces came in 1882 was not a welter of different races and languages—the traditional image of the west during the settlement era; on the contrary, it was almost totally homogeneous in ethnicity and language, and was to remain so throughout this early period—it was some years before William Wallace noted the arrival of the first Ukrainian settler. It was not that all the

13 Or 19,000, taking the same area in 1870 as in 1881 and 1886.

14 The figures, which include the English- and French-speaking Metis population, are from Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), 202. By 1886, 20,000 people, nearly 20% of the population, lived in Winnipeg.

settlers in the district were overseas immigrants, for the majority of them had been born in Canada: two-thirds came from other provinces and almost all the rest from the British Isles—the figures for 1885–1886 are Canada (62.2%), England (14.4%), Ireland (10.5%), Scotland (10%), other (2.8%). But they all spoke the same language, had the same racial and cultural background, and went to the same three churches. Their economic position also fell within a fairly narrow range; some had hardly any money at all, and had a very difficult time establishing themselves, and there was the occasional magnate—Col. Boulton¹⁵ was the local example, though he was deeply in debt most of the time. But most of the settlers seem to have been in the same situation as the Wallaces—enough money to make a success of things, provided they applied a good deal of hard work and had a reasonable amount of luck.

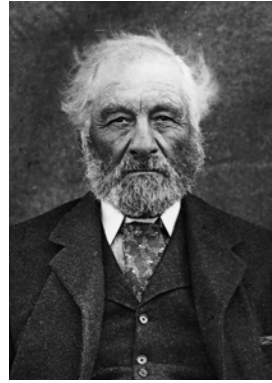
One thing that was not homogeneous in the Shell River district was the gender balance. Though the population of Manitoba in 1885–1886 was 55% male and 45% female, the figures for Shell River were 62% and 38%, and most of the females were either married or children. There were very few women of marriageable age in the district, and William Wallace expressed keen interest every time a new one arrived. But since neither he nor his brother, Andrew, seem to have been particularly enterprising in this respect, they ended their days as did many other pioneers—as old bachelors living with a housekeeper—in this case Maggie, their widowed sister.

The pioneering careers of the Wallaces and the hundreds of thousands of other immigrants who came to the prairies in those years were governed by the Dominion Lands Policy, based on the public land system of the United States, and first enunciated in the Dominion Lands Act of 1872.¹⁶

15 D'Arcy Boulton was born in 1841 in Cobourg, Ontario and served in the Royal Canadian Regiment from 1857 to 1867. After participating in the Red River Resistance he settled in western Manitoba, and was one of the first residents of Russell and Shellmouth. During the 1885 rebellion he raised "Boulton's Scouts," a force of mounted irregulars, from the Russell district. He was appointed to the Senate in 1889, but never received the government plums he felt he deserved, nor was he very successful in business. He died in Shellmouth in 1899.

16 Statutes of Canada, 35 Vic., c.23. There are many descriptions of the Dominion Lands Policy; this material is based on John L. Tyman, "Patterns of Western Land Settlement," *Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba Transactions*, Series III, no. 28 (1971–72), and James. M Richtik, "The Policy Framework for Settling the Canadian West, 1870–1880," *Agricultural History*, no. 4 (October 1975).

INTRODUCTION



LEFT TO RIGHT: William Wallace, c. 1930; Andrew Wallace, c. 1905; Peter Wallace, c. 1905. Photo of William courtesy of Emilie Busch and Brandon University. Photos of Andrew and Peter courtesy of Earl Morrison and Brandon University.

Under this act, any head of family, or a single man twenty-one years of age, could claim a quarter section (160 acres) of public land. The settler would gain title to the land “upon proof, to the satisfaction of the Land Officer that he ... resided upon or cultivated the land for the three years next after the filing of the affidavit for entry.” This meant that the homesteaders could not speculate on their land; they had to live on their land and work it, then satisfy a government official that they had fulfilled the conditions of the law before they could gain title to it. These regulations were changed from time to time. In 1874 the age limit was lowered to eighteen; Andrew Wallace was quick to claim a quarter section as soon as he reached that age, and the regulations requiring residence on the land were relaxed somewhat in 1884. Another feature of the land policy was the pre-emption, which enabled a person who entered for a quarter section to obtain an interim entry for an adjoining unclaimed quarter section, with the right of purchasing it when he got his farm established; the Wallaces took advantage of this provision as well.

Why the Wallaces left Scotland is not known, since William Wallace was very much a man who looked to the future rather than the past, and his letters say almost nothing about his life in the old country; in fact, we know very little about their lives before the family came to Canada. Very likely, however, the reason was like that of the hundreds of thousands of other Britons of their class who emigrated to the colonies in that period—it was simply to

improve their fortunes; a parallel case is that of Turner Bone, a civil engineer from Glasgow who came to Canada in 1882, a year after the Wallaces, and found work with the C.P.R. His choice seemed fairly straightforward:

As my apprenticeship was nearing an end, I was giving serious thought to the question of my future. Finally, I made up my mind to try my fortune in Canada. One of the other apprentices in the office ... who had already finished his apprenticeship, was of the same mind; so we agreed to go together to Canada, and made our preparations accordingly.¹⁷

Why the Wallaces chose Canada over the United States, where so many immigrants were flooding in the 1880s, is clear enough—they were proud Britons who had little use for the United States and Yankee ways, a disdain which a short stay in New England on their way west did little to reverse.

The Wallaces came to Manitoba in a period when many in Canada hoped that it and the rest of the prairies might become the “Britain of the West.”¹⁸ Canadian expansionists of the 1870s and 1880s, men such as George Grant, Presbyterian clergyman and ardent patriot, felt that mere growth in Western Canada was not enough. Canada should be more than just a huge country, a North American version of Russia; Canada’s western empire needed a strong moral as well as a physical foundation. “A country is great,” wrote Grant, “not from the number but the quality of its people.”¹⁹ Canada was developing the west to “build up a nation on the British plan”²⁰:

17 P. Turner Bone, *When The Steel Went Through: Reminiscences of a Railroad Pioneer* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1947), 14.

18 The phrase is from Doug Owram, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856–1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980). See especially chapter 6, “The Character of Empire: The Britain of the West.”

19 National Archives of Canada, Grant Papers, vol. 24, “Thanksgiving and Retrospect,” 227, quoted in Owram, 125.

20 Thomas Cross, “Canada and the Empire,” *Rose-Belford’s Canadian Monthly*, vii (Sept. 1881), quoted in Owram, 126.

The British Empire was thought to represent man's highest achievement in the development of governmental and social institutions. The North West, promising great economic wealth, seemed to give Canada a unique opportunity to implant firmly these noble institutions in a rising world power. ... The vast territory of the West offered a canvas large enough to be appropriate for the moral grandeur of British institutions.²¹

Eventually Canada would not only become a partner of the mother country, but might someday replace it as the carrier of civilization's torch. For this to happen it was essential that the prairies, where Canada's future lay, be made as British as possible. To that end, British immigration should be encouraged, and the Britons who settled there should also be encouraged to preserve a close connection with their former homes:

Canadians also felt that British institutions were the most reliable in terms of both social welfare and social stability ... The stability of Canada and thus its ability to inherit the mantle of Great Britain depended to a large extent on its ability to develop and maintain a social fabric as strong as that of the mother country ... If Canada was to achieve its destiny within the Empire it would have to seize the opportunity offered by the North West in such a way as to ensure that its benefits lasted beyond the frontier period. The very success of Canada's historical mission depended on it developing a society of sufficient strength and stability to survive the transition of the North West from frontier to mature community.²²

This historical mission would not be based on urban centres like Winnipeg, but on the economic and social strengths of the individual farmers. The ideal people for such a mission were the British, particularly British tenant farmers and farm labourers. Such men,

²¹ Owsram, *Promise of Eden*, 126.

²² Owsram, *Promise of Eden*, 129.

with their wives and children, would cement the strength of British institutions on the prairies, would avoid the lawlessness and disorder which seemed always to be a feature of the American frontier.

People like the Wallaces were exactly what was wanted—ambitious and energetic people with a background in agriculture. They had the “right stuff” for the 1880s—hard workers with a thoroughly British outlook and a disdain for American ways.

The corollary of strengthening British institutions in the west was weakening non-British ones, a policy first applied to the Metis and then to others, particularly during the suppression of Roman Catholic schools in Manitoba after 1890. The British tone of William Wallace’s letters, and his impatience with things that were not British, is a clear precursor of the notorious Manitoba Schools Question that so bedevilled national unity in the 1890s.

The exact route taken by the Wallaces from the eastern seaboard to Manitoba is not known, since a crucial letter from Winnipeg is missing from the collection. Since they landed at Halifax and then travelled to Boston it is likely that they followed the route of the majority of travellers in that period—by train from the east through Chicago, Minneapolis, and down the Red River valley to Winnipeg, then west over the new C.P.R. or, in their case, since snow had blocked the trains, on foot to the Brandon district.²³ Their homestead, part of section 19, township 11, range 19, was railway land, purchased from the C.P.R.

The Wallaces arrived at the beginning of the western Manitoba land boom of 1881, which coincided with the beginning of the serious push to build the railway through to the west coast.²⁴ A land office was opened in Brandon that year, and when it was realized that the railway was about to arrive there was a wave of land speculation, particularly in town building lots:

Nearly everyone had speculative dealings in land—hotel-keepers, shopmen, clerks, even the barber—and wished

23 The city of Brandon was born when the C.P.R. arrived on the west bank of the Assiniboine in 1881. The Wallaces got to the district shortly before the railway did.

24 A detailed history of settlement in this period is John L. Tyman, *By Section Township and Range: Studies in Prairie Settlement* (Brandon: Assiniboine Historical Society, 1972).

either to buy or sell. Some worked their farms by hired labour ... Every hotel-bar was placarded with advertisements and crowded with people crazy to sell town-lots. It mattered nothing to these people if these lots were at the bottom of the Assiniboine, or in the middle of a pond, or even if they had no existence at all; so long as they were eagerly bought by persons willing to give enormous prices for the prospect—usually a good one—of selling them again at a handsome profit. Inspecting them was an altogether superfluous accompaniment either of sale or purchase.²⁵

On March 21, 1881, a few weeks before the Wallaces arrived in Brandon, the boundaries of the province were extended to include western Manitoba, and in that year and the next, settlers began to arrive in the province in substantial numbers—over 44,000 in 1882 alone. Despite the end of the boom that year, settlers continued to come to the province, so that by 1891 its population, including Indigenous people, had passed 150,000.

Although the Wallaces shunned speculative ventures, they did take a considerable chance when in 1882 they sold their land near Brandon and set out to the northwest, heading for the Qu'Appelle district. Assuming that the railway would follow to their new home (local boosters assured them that it would) was a real gamble. Because it was extremely difficult to reach anything more than a purely local market without ready access to a railroad, it was vital to be within reasonable hauling distance of one. Here the Wallaces lost their gamble; in 1882 they settled six miles southeast of Shellmouth expecting a railway to go through that town within a year. But fulfillment of this hope was to be long delayed. At the beginning of their life near Shellmouth they had to go to Moosomin for rail service, a distance of over seventy miles. In 1886 the railway reached Birtle, forty miles to the southeast, and a year or so later a line was built from Binscarth to Russell, twelve miles southeast of the Wallaces' farm. But the railway did not reach Shellmouth until 1909, 27 years after the family settled in the district. Despite the fact that

25 Robert M. Christy, *Manitoba Described* (London: Wyman, 1885), quoted in Tyman, 42.

they farmed for five years (1882–87) with a railroad no closer than forty miles, they did manage to sell most of what they produced, much of it locally, though at discouragingly low prices—but it was not until the railroad came to Russell that they saw a degree of prosperity.

The Wallaces, arriving in the Shell River district in 1882, were one of the first pioneer families in the part of the province to the north and west of Brandon, an area that included Neepawa, Minnedosa, Birtle, and Russell. Since the most important period in the taking up of Manitoba lands was 1881–1882, the years in which the Canadian Pacific Railway crossed the province, the Wallace papers are an invaluable record of that crucial era in the province's history.

This, then, is the record of a vital period in the history of Manitoba—an era of growth in which, as Gerald Friesen points out, a new provincial and regional consciousness was taking shape:

... it resulted in the establishment of a stable community and reasonable prosperity. This was a grain-growing province, but its farmers had sufficient animals and gardens to sustain their families in difficult times ... 'The greatness of the break made by the newcomers had created a strong sense of identity ... and the strange new land became familiar quickly because of its distance from the old homes. ... With a speed which was often amusing the new settler of yesterday became the Manitoban of the morrow. But under these more brilliant stars and amid these wider horizons the farmsteads continued the rural life of Ontario to which the British settlers were assimilated.'²⁶

What distinguished this family from the thousands of others that came to Canada in this era was that the elder son, William Wallace, was an unusually assiduous writer of letters, with a fine eye for descriptive detail. The men had left a sister, Maggie, back in Scotland, and every three or four weeks Willie Wallace wrote her a letter describing his life in Manitoba. These letters began in March 1881 aboard the ship taking the Wallaces to Canada, and ended

26 Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 218–219.

early in 1904, when Maggie and her husband left Britain to join the family in Canada. Maggie carefully saved the letters, bringing them to Canada with her. William Wallace, like many other pioneers, had what Heather Robertson calls an “intuitive historical sense.”²⁷ He knew instinctively that he was engaged not just in making a living, but in something of lasting importance—an extraordinary human event that would one day be important to later generations—and he preserved his letters, giving them to a university shortly before his death.

Neither William, nor Andrew, nor Maggie Wallace had children, and there are no other relatives in Canada, so it has proved impossible to obtain information on the family’s history in Scotland other than what is alluded to in the letters. Nothing is known, for instance, of Mrs. Wallace, except that her last name was Stevenson, her people were farmers, and there was an uncle, Hugh Stevenson, presumably her brother, who was a prominent Presbyterian clergyman. For some reason William does not once mention her in all his letters, but judging from reminiscences of people who knew the family in Canada it seems likely that she had died a few years before they emigrated. On his application for a homestead patent, Peter Wallace stated that he had been “farming since boyhood.”²⁸ At the time the family emigrated, William was a clerk, Andrew was in or just out of school, and Maggie was training to be a teacher.

The history of the Wallace family shows many of the themes that ran through the experiences of thousands of other pioneers. One was the element of sheer chance that determined much of their lives. Though recent studies have shown that in many instances the choice of location depended on contact with people already in the region,²⁹ this does not seem to have been true of the Wallace family. They came to the Brandon district in the spring of 1881 for reasons which the letters do not make clear, perhaps because it was on the edge of settlement and they had heard or read that good

27 Heather Robertson, *Salt of the Earth: The Story of the Homesteaders in Western Canada* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1974), 7.

28 A copy of the application, dated 25 April 1886, is in the Wallace Papers in the Brandon University Archives.

29 D. M. Loveridge, “The Settlement of the Rural Municipality of Sifton 1881–1920” (master’s thesis, University of Manitoba, 1977), 190–205.



LEFT TO RIGHT: John and Maggie (Wallace) Bond, Andrew Wallace, c. 1905.
Photo courtesy of Brandon University.

land was to be had there. But for some reason, possibly the quality of their land, they found it not to their liking. So in the next year, 1882, they struck northwest for the Qu'Appelle district. Reaching the Assiniboine north of present day Russell, they found the river in flood. Rather than wait weeks for the water level to fall, they explored their surroundings, and decided that the country in the Shellmouth district suited them. There William Wallace stayed for the next sixty-one years. Such considerations swayed many decisions in that era.

Another theme was the alternation between optimism and despair that runs through the letters. William Wallace was by nature an optimist, and when things were going well, he bubbled with enthusiasm about the future of the country. But then came drought, or low prices, or blizzards, and he was plunged into gloom. A soft spring day, a well-timed shower, or a glorious sunset, and he was again ebullient about his prospects.

A third theme is that of physical effort. The Wallaces worked hard at farming, and made few serious mistakes—the worst one was building a new house in a location where they had not tried to dig a well. When the house was built and water not forthcoming, they had to dismantle the house and move it. They ploughed, sowed, reaped,

cut logs for their house, built the house, burnt lime for plaster, cut trees for fence posts, milked cows, made butter, baked, cooked, repaired their clothes. Besides this William Wallace had time for civic duties, music, theatricals, and lengthy letter-writing.

William Wallace's letters demonstrate that it was easier to be a pioneer if one had some money and settled on good land. In his studies of pioneering in the Abernethy district of Saskatchewan, which began about the same time as at Shellmouth, Lyle Dick effectively disproved the old myth that the major factor in success as a homesteader was perseverance.³⁰ More important factors were the quality of the land, general economic conditions, and previous experience in farming (98% of the British nationals and 96% of the non-British nationals reporting their previous vocations on the homestead application forms in the region Dick studied said they had been farmers).³¹ Those who came first were also able to profit tremendously by a rise in the price of land: acquiring their lands virtually for free, they saw the value of a quarter section rise to several thousand dollars in twenty years or so, a capital gain that could be used for expansion or farm improvements, or, as in the Wallaces' case, for a comfortable retirement. The most important factor, though, was accessibility to a railroad. In three adjacent townships studied by Dick, the cancellation rate of homestead entries was 51% for the one closest to the railroad, 57% for the one next farther away, and 75% for the farthest one. It is clear that "the risks of homestead failure increased with distance from the railway, particularly beyond twenty to twenty-two miles."³² The Wallaces were probably lucky that the railway arrived in Russell when it did. They felt that the railroads were extortionists, but at the same time they were anxious to have a

30 Lyle Dick, "Factors Affecting Prairie Settlement: A Case Study of Abernethy, Saskatchewan in the 1880s," Canadian Historical Association, *Historical Papers* (1985). The greatest number of homestead entries in the Abernethy district occurred in 1882. No comparable study has been made of the Shell River district. See also his "Estimates of Farm-Making Costs in Saskatchewan, 1882-1914," *Prairie Forum* 6, no.2 (1981), and Lewis H. Thomas, "A History of Agriculture on the Prairies to 1914," *Prairie Forum* 1, no. 1 (1976).

31 In the three townships in the Abernethy district studied by Dick, 59% of all homestead entries were not "proved up."

32 Dick, "Factors Affecting Prairie Settlement," 20.



Shellmouth Amateur Dramatic Society, 1914. William Wallace is seated to the right of the bearded man with the cane. Photo courtesy of Isabel Joy and Brandon University.

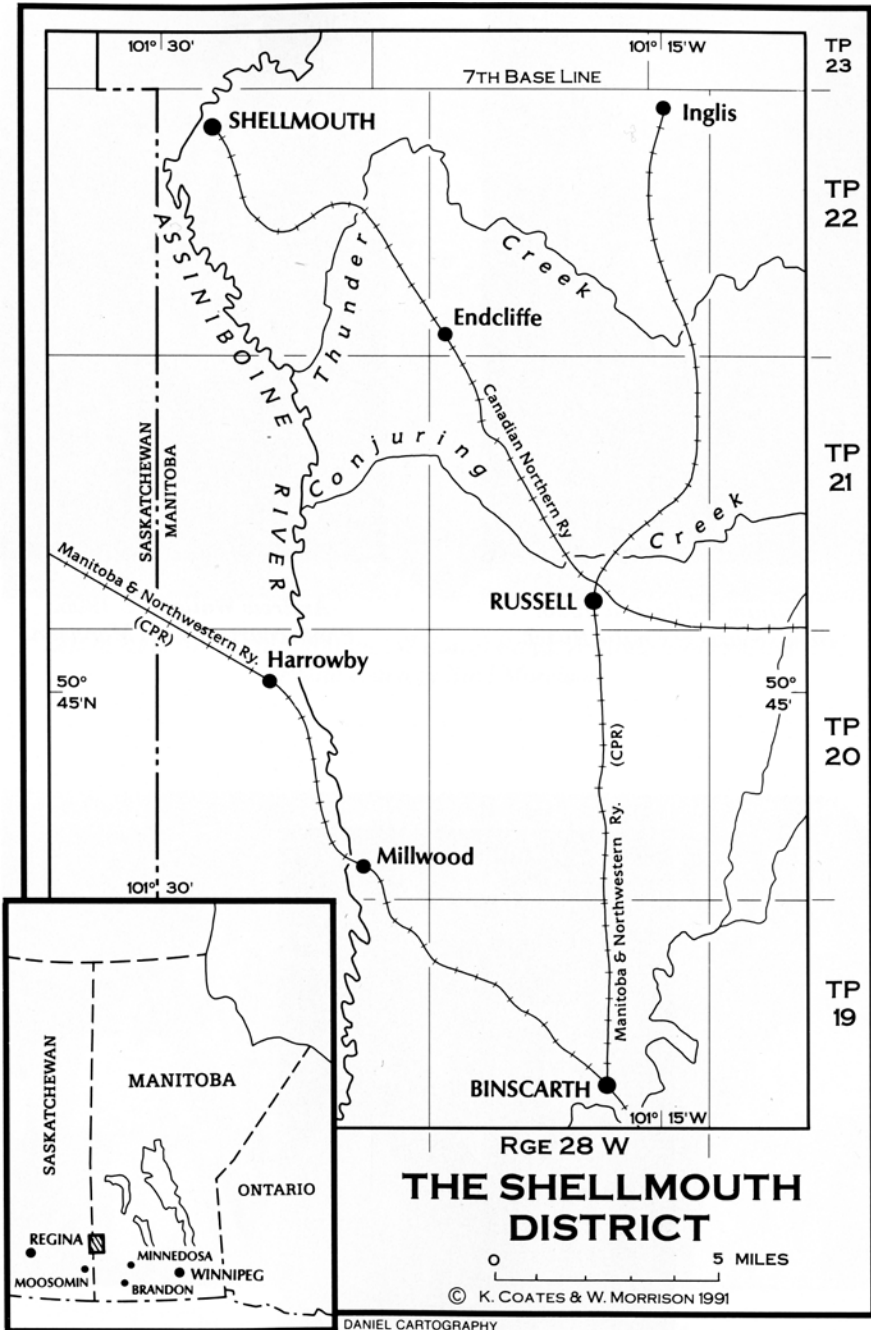
railroad nearby. Next to William's desire for his sister Maggie to join him, longing for a railroad is the most prevalent theme in the letters.

Dick's work establishes "a statistical relationship between early arrival, acquisition of good, cheap, accessible land and long term success." Nonetheless, there was also something to be said for hard work. The Wallaces had a neighbour or two of the remittance man sort, and they did not last long.³³

Though it is not known how much money they brought with them to Canada, the Wallace family was able to make an initial purchase of land near Brandon, and then to sell that land and use the proceeds to help get them started near Shellmouth. They were also able to buy oxen, horses, a wagon, a binder, and some comforts. Though they were perennially short of money—one of the main themes of the letters—and had to be helped by periodic small loans from Maggie, they were never really poor, and they were able to weather the difficulties of the early years of settlement.

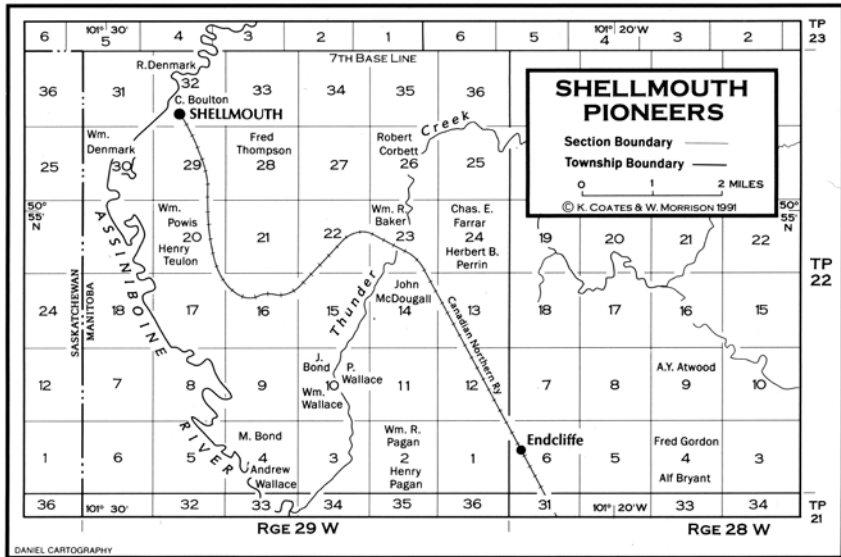
33 The remittance man is described in Patrick Dunae, *Gentlemen Immigrants: From the British Public School to the Canadian Frontier* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1981).

INTRODUCTION



The Shellmouth District. Map by Daniel Cartography, courtesy of Brandon University.

INTRODUCTION



Shellmouth Pioneers. Map by Daniel Cartography, courtesy of Brandon University.

It did not take long for immigrants to Manitoba to discover the painful inequities of the Canadian economic and political system, particularly as they learned how the national protective tariff and transportation systems worked from the producers' end. Their protests, which started over railways and tariffs, led settlers south of Brandon to form a Farmers' Protective Union in 1883. The gathering farm anger, which focused on the Canadian Pacific Railway's monopoly, the need for provincial control over land and resources, and the elimination of the hated tariff, among other issues, was slowed by the introduction of partisan politics, particularly the attempt by western Liberals to co-opt the movement. The Wallaces, like so many of their neighbours, were highly critical of the government. They resented being taxed for the maintenance of officials in Ottawa, they complained of the lack of a post office, but most of all they had the typical love-hate relationship with the railroad. Like many Manitobans, William Wallace was so infuriated by the Macdonald government in the early 1880s that he talked openly of secession of the west and the formation of a new country. Though this came to nothing—an upsurge of patriotism during the 1885 Rebellion dampened it—such outbursts show that “western alienation” has a long history, beginning as soon as the west was settled. W. L. Morton, in fact, claimed that the rise of the Farmers'

Protective Union was Manitoba's counterpart to the 1885 rising of First Nations and the Metis.³⁴

The letters of William Wallace are thus not only a fascinating social document, but a valuable record of the formation of a regional consciousness and identity in rural Manitoba, a consciousness that owes much to hostility to the federal government and to the difficulties of the early 1880s. This identity did not of course remain static—its exclusively British nature began to change as early as the 1890s with the arrival of Ukrainian and other European migrants and the departure of the less successful pioneers—but it remained distinctively regional, particularly in its suspicion of government and its ambivalent attitude towards railroads.

William Wallace was a steady man who shunned the crazes of his day. He witnessed the real estate boom of 1881, but correctly predicted that many who participated in it would regret doing so. When traces of gold were discovered in the Shellmouth district he declined to become a prospector. His philosophy was one of hard work and slow but steady progress towards prosperity—he thus was scornful of neighbours who spent what he considered to be excessive time in sports and games.

But he was also a man who enjoyed life. Despite the long hours of labour, there was also much recreation in the early years in western Manitoba. Going to town for the mail and supplies was a holiday, and the letters give evidence of the tremendous amount of visiting between neighbours that went on in the early days.

Shellmouth, just at the beginning of settlement when the Wallaces arrived in the spring of 1882, was, though newborn, by no means without cultural amenities. Because many of the earliest pioneers had, like the Wallaces, been well educated in Britain, there were from the beginning concerts, plays, and other performances, in which William took a large part. These served not only to alleviate hardship and loneliness, but also to emphasize that a British country was being founded on the prairies—an evening of recitations and Gilbert and Sullivan songs in Shellmouth had symbolic as well as entertainment value. William Wallace was a great reader, with a hunger for news of

34 See K. S. Coates, "Western Manitoba and the 1885 Rebellion," *Manitoba History*, 19 (Autumn 1990), 32–41.

the world, and thus appeals for books, newspapers, and magazines occur in many of his letters. His love of music was particularly strong, and one of his earliest purchases in Shellmouth—and the only extravagance of these early years—was a parlour organ, for which he paid the large sum of fourteen pounds sterling.

Residents of Shellmouth still alive in the late 1980s who remembered William Wallace only as a middle-aged and old man expressed surprise that in his youth he was a hard-working farmer, for his manner after he retired from farming at the age of fifty suggested a man of urban rather than rural origins. But as a young man he and his brother worked as hard as any pioneer. Not all of the Wallaces' neighbours were successful. Many failed through ineptitude, inexperience, or bad luck, and there was a sizeable turnover of population in the early years. But many others, including the Wallaces, succeeded and established themselves as prosperous citizens of the new land.

Because an edition of the complete letters would have necessitated a volume four times the length of this one, it was decided to publish only those written in the first five years of the Wallaces' life in Canada. These give a picture of the earliest, and in many ways the most interesting, years of pioneering in the Brandon and Shellmouth regions. The letters in this volume begin with the transatlantic voyage in 1881, and end early in 1886 with the aftermath of the Riel Rebellion. Nothing that pertains to Canada has been omitted from the text; the material that has been left out, indicated by ellipses, comprises in almost every case answers to Maggie's letters about relatives or events in the homeland, which have no relevance to Canada or Manitoba, and which would only burden the text with repetitious family details.

Because William Wallace was a good speller and a competent writer, virtually no changes have been made in the text of his letters. The only exception is that the originals of the letters are lacking in punctuation. Even periods are missing in many cases, and the letters flow in a stream of consciousness that makes them difficult to read. Virtually all the punctuation has been added by the editors, who have tried to use it as sparingly as possible. In the cases where words are illegible, the editors have either guessed at the meaning or left them out—in either case the guesses and omissions have been indicated by the use of square brackets. Other than this, nothing has

INTRODUCTION

been added; all the words, with the exception of a few postscripts from Andrew, are those of William Wallace.

*Ken S. Coates, Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School
of Public Policy, University of Saskatchewan*

*Bill Morrison, Emeritus Professor of History,
University of Northern British Columbia*

I88I

S.S. Prussia[n]

22 March 1881

My Dear Maggie,

I was very sorry that I did not get meeting you as I proposed from Milngavie. Since leaving Glasgow we have had a very pleasant time of it, although the voyage has been what sailors style a rather rough one, quite worthy of the time of year it was undertaken. I could not think of keeping a journal but will just now write what I recollect.

After we had a last look for sometime at you and the other friends, we proceeded down the river very pleasantly although slowly ... We came to anchor at Greenock and waited there till about 4 o'clock on the purser with the ship's papers. On his coming aboard we sailed down the Firth of Clyde, the sea as smooth as glass. One saw the coast very indistinctly owing to a foggy haze. We did not see Arran, although we saw Holy Isle quite distinctly. When dusk came Pladd's light beamed forth brilliantly and it was kept [to the] right until it dropped down in the horizon. Then we picked up the Campbelltown light and shortly afterwards the Mull of Kintyre. By this time it was getting cold and we determined to go to bed. So taking a last look at Scotland in the form of the red light of Kintyre and the indistinct outline of Ailsa Craig we went below. You saw our berths; Papa took the single one near the window, Andrew the low one opposite, and I the top one for my own. My mind was puffed up with nautical valour, but alas, we got into our bunks after a great deal of merriment, considering the peculiarity of our surroundings.

We were just getting on with our first snooze when a rap comes to the cabin door and the pale, brown-whiskered visage of the Second Steward was inserted. "Are you feeling yourself comfortable?" he said. "Yes," the others said. I ventured out a very "where is a vomiter?" With that he exposed to view a large mongrelled looking specimen

of a spittoon with [?] attached. I ventured to ask him if it would be required. He said we would know that best ourselves, the steamer would likely be pitching a little in the morning, and [he] put in a quiet smile when Papa remarked that he felt it a little already. However, gentle sleep fixed our thoughts and eyelids.

When the awakening came, alas, I don't know how long I had been feeling uncomfortable, but I at last realized that a queer feeling was about my forehead and a queerer one about my grist mill. . . . The boat was swinging in a desperate manner—everything betokened a great storm. Up I determined to get, so getting one foot on to the basin stand I, after difficulty getting the notion of what I styled these confounded ticky bed clothes, got on to the cabin floor. And if I did not make the place lively for a bit, no one ever did—I was like a cat on a hot plate. Of course the others, though they were sick as I was, had to show their courage by pestering me with any number of ridiculous questions. But I at last silenced them and myself with that same vomiter, and after that, with some degree of comfort, proceeded to thoroughly complete my toilet. And when I got to the open air I felt all right. The others rose after me, and, notwithstanding their sickly attempts to laugh at me, were as bad if not worse than I was.

When I got on deck the scene was very grand—big peaking white crested waves all round as far as the eye could see and no land in sight, the steamer rolling about among them like a “tee totum.”¹ But the 3rd mate assured us this was nothing, it was quite tolerable, and I have since learned to believe him.

Since writing the above when crossing the banks of Newfoundland we have called at Halifax. I trust you will be enabled to read it. The steamer was pitching a good deal and the saloon table was shaking very much with the working of the engine. Just now the sea is quieter and I am writing on top of the bunk bedclothes so [as] to legibly resume the story.

We had passed Tory Island on Sunday morning about four o'clock; we had not therefore the pleasure of seeing Ireland. The sea gradually became more stormy all day, and we just had to sit and hang on. My only difficulty was going below for meals, but this was

1 A teetotum is a child's four-sided top, or any top spun with the fingers.

all managed to do regularly. My breakfast was the only one I gave to the fishes and it did not trouble me in the slightest degree. I got two or three bad tumbles; one of them I did seawards and had my legs through the rail. I slightly skinned my shins and learnt to more desperately hang on the ropes they had run all along the decks to grasp by.

Next day the sun was shining very brightly and it dried up the decks and made it more pleasant. Our only employment was sitting away astern and watching the steamer's nose slapping at the waves deluging her front with great quantities of water and raising volumes of spray. The only vessel we saw on the voyage to Halifax passed. It was generally supposed to be the "Waldensian," but she could not be made out. On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday we very seldom got on deck it was so wet and stormy, the two latter days especially. She rolled and pitched about at an awful rate, shipping great quantities of water. When at tea on Thursday, the sea came in and deluged everything, bringing the meal to an abrupt conclusion. It had not been so very stormy in the morning when we arose, so we ventured to our breakfast by way of the deck. We had not far proceeded when a huge wave took a thundering slap at her. Papa was first and I last on the lee side of the engine room. Andrew, being about the centre, escaped with a soaked cap and collar, but Papa and I, being each nearer the ends, caught it. I was thoroughly soaked, every bit of me, to the skin. My only consolation was that it being salt water would soon dry out and would not give me the cold. So I took my breakfast as comforted as I could.

Soon after dinner, when the process of drying was nearly completed, something tempted me to go up on deck again. I crept along the safe and dry side of the funnel to what I considered a safe standing point. I had not been many minutes there when again the thundering noise was heard. I saw the whole cloud of water coming over the bow but did not move, as I expected the roll would throw it off, but it didn't. Along it came at what must have [been] a depth of three feet of water, lifting me quite off my feet. Had I not had a good catch of rope I should most assuredly have been swept overboard. If I was wet before, I was drowned now. I went below sad in mind and soaked in body. A talkative Yankee standing in the companion way told me to "say nothin' but come in and wipe your nose."

On Monday the gale was exchanged for a thick Newfoundland fog that delayed us very much and kept the steam whistle constantly a-booming. Tuesday was very much clearer, and everything was got ready for steaming into Halifax at nightfall, but down came the fog again and brought the steamer to a dead stand. I remained out of bed until about 10 o'clock to get my first view of the New World, but then had to turn in disappointed, as the fog showed no signs of lifting during the night. I understand they fired two guns or small cannons but none of us heard them, so you may judge how we slept.

Early in the morning, about two o'clock, I gradually awakened to the fact that the engines were again going, and the port light was again letting in a bright light. I got up quickly, and the first bit of America I saw was a queer lantern-looking lighthouse; but it was too cold and early to rise, so I got back to my old quarters and for two hours listened to the interesting work of porting a steamer.

I got up about 6 o'clock and had a pleasantly surprised look at Halifax. Learnt Russia was at her old tricks, shivered a bit and then determined on a walk before breakfast round the town. It was an exceedingly bright frosty morning and everything was gilded with a bright sun that would have made our place look pretty. The houses are principally built of wood with shingle fronts and slates, that is, thin square bits of hard wood all painted white or cream colour. Some of them are very nice and tasteful. On the opposite side of the bay is a town called Dartmouth, and its white-painted, straggled-looking houses with the green waters of the bay in the foreground and dark, pine-covered hill in the background made a particularly fine appearance. The bay narrows away to a point almost and then again opens into what is called the New Bedford Basin, capable of holding all the vessels of the British navy; but I will stop the description as I am not doing it justice. I will continue the story when I am more comfortable than sitting on my knees.

We expect to be at Boston tonight (Thursday) and will land tomorrow forenoon. We are all in splendid health and capital spirits. I did not write from Halifax as the Boston post is quite as early. I do not expect to be able to write you again until we get to Winnipeg. Do not criticise this letter too much; glean the sense and be thankful. Andrew will write a post script. We will call for your eagerly longed-for letter at Winnipeg post office. We all trust you are

being reconciled to our absence. Every now and then I have a look at our watches and consider what Maggie will be doing this morning. When sitting on the deck cold and hungry for breakfast we came to the conclusion that you would be [?] your midday apology. I was exceedingly sorry that I did not again get writing Uncle Hugh. You might do so at a leisure time. Enclose the photographs—tell him I got the Bible and one of the books. The other I could not get but expect to be more fortunate at Boston, and let him know what you learn from this letter. By the bye, Papa wishes you to call at Higgins the Jeweller, pay him [?] and in return get a pin he intended for Andrew—bring it with you when you come.

We are now opposite the Bay of Fundy and expect to be anchored near Boston about 8 o'clock tonight. . . .

Your most affectionate brother
Willie

[postscript from Andrew]

I suppose by the time this reaches you, you will be getting very anxious to know how we liked our journey. As Willie has written nearly all the details I will make this a very short letter. After having taken our last look at you and the rest, we proceeded very slowly down to Greenoch, where we had to lie about four hours waiting for the Purser. After he came aboard we steamed down the Firth and at about 9 o'clock we made up our minds to go to bed. Shortly after we had turned in, the second steward came and stuck a vomiter on the side of my bed right at my nose, the same as if I was the only one that was going to be sick. In the morning when I awoke and felt awfully uncomfortable, and when Willie commenced to vomit I had to follow his good example. After that I felt quite well and was troubled no more with sickness.

For the first two or three days I enjoyed myself nicely, but then novelty of the thing wore away, and time hung very heavily on my hands. Learning that there was a small library aboard I was not long in making use of it. Yesterday morning we arrived at Halifax and I had a walk through the town. The roads were in a frightful condition and I did not think very much of the town at all. Shortly after two o'clock we sailed for Boston. The policemen at Halifax were the funniest looking objects you ever saw and I would not be the least frightened of them. After we left Halifax it was reported that there

ON THE FRONTIER

was a large number of whales about, although I did not see any. As this is all I have got to say at present I will close with love from all.

I am
Your most affectionate brother,
Andrew

P.S. I neglected to describe the policemen. They were awfully white-faced, wore full cheesecutters, white fronts, tailed coats and waddled about with small batons in their hands.

[post card to Maggie]

Minnedosa, NWT
29 April 1881

Today bought Railway Land Section 19, Township 11, Range 17. Address letters to Post Office Grand Valley, North West Terr. Write all news. Will move to land and begin before end of week. Land is 36 miles from here, eight from Grand Valley City, and 4 to 6 from Railway to be running this year. Will write fully when settled next week. All well and happy. Will receive your first letter in less than fortnight.

WSW

Springcreek Farm
Grand Valley
3 May 1881

Dear Maggie,

You must excuse the long time that has elapsed since I wrote you last. We have been so very busy getting the farm made comfortable that it is only now I have the opportunity of breaking the silence. I presume you have now received my post card and know that we have got fixed.

Since writing you at Winnipeg² we have seen and experienced a great many interesting things that would, I am sure, interest you very much. I do not know whether in the short time at my disposal I would do them justice, but I will try.

Until the morning we started west we were not sure if we would team all the way from Winnipeg, but owing to the rail track having been snowed up for some time and the consequent scarcity of cars we determined to hitch up and start. You would have laughed had you seen Andrew and I each with our yoke of oxen stepping it over the streets of Winnipeg with the waggon. We did not very well understand the cattle, and certainly they showed that we to them were incomprehensible. I was bad at leading them but very much worse at driving, keeping them on the straight. They went tolerably, but turning corners was the beginning of the fun. When near the loading point I have an uncomfortable recollection of being jammed hard in between the brutes and the corner of a stable and seeing Andrew and his yoke turning a corner with a rapidity that would have done any Epsom course credit. But we did at last get ready for starting.

Bryant³ with his waggon took the lead after a bit. He had his four oxen attached and was accompanied by a hired man we called [?]. Our waggon followed and behind it was our cow commonly called "Maggie." Immediately behind was a waggon belonging to two young seamen who accompanied us on the steamer from Glasgow. Such is a description of the train—now for its experience.

Snow was over and around all things, except here and there patches on the trail, and, where snow was wanting, mud—dirty, soft, sticky mud that defies a brush was in abundance. We got over the first nine miles well enough but after that we had hard work. The snow was very deep sometimes, in fact almost all the remaining distance I was wading along side the oxen almost up to the knees. Before the remaining six miles were over I was ready to drop down with fatigue. I never welcomed anything so much as the sight of our sleeping place for the night. I was actually asleep twice when

² This letter is not among the Wallace papers.

³ The Bryant family came over on the same ship, and later settled in the Shellmouth district near the Wallaces.

unyoking. Never before had I such a relish for my supper or enjoyed the night's rest, and since that time I have never had [the same] satisfaction of either food or bed.

The deep snow broke up the continuity of the train. Bryant arrived a short time before us, and Shaw and Walker did not turn up till late in the evening without their waggon, which they had been forced to leave five miles back. Both of them had their feet badly frozen. They were not able to go any farther, and Shaw will not likely be able to work for a year.

Next morning we started from Headingly and got along very pleasantly all day, arriving in the evening at Houses.⁴ We passed on the way a stopping place called Jerusalem owned by the only Jew in the country. We met him in the evening; a comical genius he was with his "tousands and tousands" and unceasing praise of "Lundeen" as being the place to make money.

Our next stage was Poplar Point. We again had hard driving getting there. The snow was very deep and the waggon was often off the trail right away into the snow up to the axles. The sun was shining very powerfully; the effects of it are still to be seen on Andrew. He got a terrible burning; his face was swollen beyond recognition up till a week ago. Now he is more like what he was, but still the lower part is speckled with hard scabs. The skin has twice completely come off my own, and for a time it was very sore.

This stopping place was a miserable hole, everything dirt and pork grease, but it is all over now. I think anybody who experiences some of the western sloppery with pleasure would enjoy a horsetail in their soup. Next day we arrived at Portage la Prairie, having accomplished the distance of 60 miles in 3 and a half days. Very good time considering the state of the roads. But time will not permit of my further continuing the story.

I will just shortly tell you how we are now situated. We have bought a quarter section, 160 acres of Railway land that we mean to make our centre, our home. It is splendid land with every advantage. A creek or stream of splendid water runs on one side. On the banks of it is a spring of water that is said never to freeze. We are sure to have a railway station within four miles. Grand Valley (Florence

4 That is, stopping houses.

City I understand is soon to be its name) is sure to be one of the great western cities and is about seven miles from here. We will have the advantage of church services there and possibly nearer during the summer. We already have got up a nice proud house of one apartment. It will be thoroughly finished in a day or two.

Our animals are getting along very well. The cow will be calving in a day or so and then we shall have abundance of milk. The beast is a regular petted nuisance—her nose must be into everything. I expect that any amount of thrashing will not keep her outside the premises when she is loose at the grass. We have also got a nice dog called Jess, about three months old. She is shy like a ducking spaniel. We already have abundance of friendly neighbours.

After we have done with the spring work I may possibly go farther west and take up homestead and pre-emption rights for Papa and myself; so with 500 acres we should do very well for time. Tomorrow I purpose going to the Valley for paper to cover the inside of our house and will at the same time post you this letter, and next day we will likely begin to the ploughing. Now you must excuse my stopping this letter. It is getting late and things are not just yet comfortably fixed up, but soon you will get a more complete epistle. I really wish to hear from you. I suppose you will have quite a budget of surprising news, particularly about Uncle Hugh. I trust—we all trust—that all the friends are well and prospering. We all unite in sending our kindest love to Cousins Henry, Agnes, and yourself.

Your most affectionate brother
Willie.

P.S. Do not address letters to Spring Creek Farm. The people about here do not understand that kind of nonsense. Just address to Post Office, Grand Valley, N.W.T. We will likely have a post office within a mile of us in a day or two. I may receive your first letter tomorrow.

Grand Valley
19 May 1881

My Dear Maggie,

I with the others have just finished my evening repast and I daresay you would just between ourselves like to know something about it. Try and picture to yourself a rolling prairie and at a particular position of it, a stream or creek of running water . . . with here and there deep ponds of water. Not far from these imagine a house, size 12 ft. by 12 ft., built of wood and rather comfortable-looking. Outside of it, numerous farming implements, and not far off, cattle grazing and two oxen ploughing. Along with them, two young men often times sadly troubled and perplexed with their work and mosquitoes, and very much relieved when their work is over. Quickly they unyoke, hobble the oxen, trot down to the creek, wash their hands, and return to the aforementioned house where you may, if you can in your imagination, follow them.

A large-looking stove in the centre of the floor is the first thing to catch the attention. On the right hand a long high table occupies nearly the whole length of the interior. Underneath, three chests are ensconced, bearing the marks of a long journey; above, two shelves covered with numerous useful articles. On the left hand side are barrels built over with some bags, and right in front are three beds, two pretty high up and one underneath. The division is marked by two boards on which soon a timepiece will be prominent and before which a table is fixed, on which is spread the business of the evening. This is approached by the two young men in an eager manner, and the tea party, numbering three, seat themselves in the meantime on boxes, casks, or what they may most conveniently group.

The fare consists of tea well sugared and whitened with deliciously rich cream, bacon, stewed evaporated apples, and scones. Occasionally a stray mosquito darts about in a meditative humming manner and diverts the appetite, but that is pleasure in comparison to being in the midst of the thousands outside. Shut your eyes and if possible picture this in your mind and you will have an idea of what Spring Creek farm is like. I have not depicted the inhabitants; that however is the easiest done of all—three individuals of the