

SECOND PROMISED LAND

A photograph of a highway under a cloudy sky. A green highway sign on the right side of the road reads "Alberta 3457 KM". In the distance, a red truck is driving away on the road. The overall scene is a landscape of a major Canadian highway.

Migration to Alberta
and the Transformation
of Canadian Society

HARRY H. HILLER

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Second Promised Land

Migration to Alberta and the
Transformation of Canadian Society

HARRY H. HILLER

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To my extended family

On both the maternal and paternal side

Who taught me the meaning and significance of migration for Canada

Through their own experiences and through my own observations

and

To my mother and my immediate family

Who have provided love, joy, and belonging

and

To my wife Edna

Who shares my life with grace and beauty

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Contents

Preface	ix
1 Migration to Alberta in Perspective	3
2 The Old West and the New West	20
3 The Two Waves of In-migration	58
4 The Role of Energy Hydrocarbons	89
5 Migration as Voluntaristic Behavior	118
6 The Migrant and the Migration Process	132
7 Migration as Negotiating Place	171
8 The Context of Out-migration	214
9 The Migrant Encounters the Destination	254
10 Social Capital and Adjustment at the Destination	276
11 Women and Migration	300
12 The Internet and Migration	316
13 The Three Island Thesis: Folk Culture and the Myth of Return	333
14 The Effect of Migration on Origin Communities	352
15 Reassessing Migration	391
16 Conclusion	413
Appendix: Methodology and Tables	430
Notes	463
References	481
Index	509

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Preface

One of the tasks of sociologists is to analyze and interpret social change as it occurs. Sometimes things happen so fast that it is unclear how momentous something is until it is over.

Such was my previous experience in Alberta. The late 1970s and early 1980s were heady times in the province. The construction of high-rise office buildings were transforming the downtowns of Calgary and Edmonton. The demand for housing was unparalleled and people were arriving by the thousands to take advantage of the new opportunities. Optimism was everywhere and shrewd investors were making big money just on the basis of rising prices due to demand. There was a feeling in the air that the West, and Alberta in particular, was finally having its day in the sun. I remember attending a conference entitled “Power Shift West,” which examined the possibilities that, for the first time, a new phoenix might be rising in the Canadian West and that the structure of Canada might be in the process of revision. But no one who was in Alberta at that time could ever forget how the National Energy Policy played a pivotal role in bringing this new-found growth and expectations about the future to a halt. Investment in property had caused many people to overextend themselves with financing that could not be sustained once the boom turned into a bust. Many people walked away from their homes and mortgages as property was devalued to less than existing mortgages. Office building construction was halted and many buildings remained in a state of partial completion for a long time. In-migration not only slowed to a trickle but was surpassed by out-migration, meaning that the bloom had fallen off the “wild rose” (the provincial flower). As a sociologist living in Alberta I watched all this happen, and, after it was over, I lamented the fact that it was gone, never to be recovered, and that an important piece of

Canadian history had been lost (only to be recovered, perhaps, through post-event reconstruction years later).

In the late 1990s, anyone living in Alberta could not help but notice that the province was undergoing a similar kind of change. The first tip to a local resident involved seeing cars with out-of-province licence plates everywhere one went. When talking with people in the community, whether new neighbours, clerks in the store, fellow employees, or people in a wide variety of service professions, newcomers to the province were constantly encountered. For many Alberta residents, there was a clear sense of *déjà vu*. This looked like the wave previously experienced happening all over again, and I was determined not to let it happen without some attempt to research and chronicle it.

I am very grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for its timely financial support of this project known as the Alberta In-Migration Study. The only problem is that there was no clear end to the in-migration or the boom at the time of writing that would be equivalent to what occurred in 1981–82, when the economy went into a steep decline. Instead, the expansion of the oil sands in northern Alberta, beginning around 2004, intensified the economic development to the point where labour shortages became a major issue. While the economic growth in Alberta had been intense but more gradual and manageable up until that time, and house prices and construction costs were more or less under control, 2005 marked a new time period when the economy had become overheated. House prices soared and availability of housing and office space became a major problem. Too much construction activity, undertaken to meet the needs of expansion, caused costs to soar, and, at the time of writing, the boom was almost out of control, with no end in sight. Just prior to publication, the unexpected recession that struck the United States and the world in 2008 created new uncertainties whose outcome is unknown. Nevertheless, the study had to have defined boundaries for purposes of data collection. A lull in the in-migration growth was observable in 2003, prior to the boom-like conditions of the next few years so the primary period of investigation became 1996 to 2002. The rationale I developed to justify this time frame is discussed later. It needs to be understood, then, that this study provides a snapshot of migration to Alberta at a particular point in time. At other times things may have been quite different. In fact, the desperate need for labour after 2005 both changed the appeal of Alberta for unsponsored migrants (due to the problems of an overheated economy) and forced employers to create numerous incentives to encourage migration to Alberta, which was in a vastly different situation from what it was a few years earlier.

There are many aspects to understanding periods of rapid economic growth. From a sociological perspective, one of the most intriguing elements of this growth has been the migration of people to Alberta. Migration is almost always motivated by expectations that the destination holds more promise than the place of current residence; thus, the destination serves as a type of “promised land.” The idea of a “promised land” involves not only heightened expectations and anticipation but also the rather sudden movement of large numbers of people into a new area. The title of this book reflects the fact that Alberta has been a rapid migration destination more than once. It is possible to refer to the first rush of settlers who arrived around the turn of the twentieth century and the following two decades as those seeking a promised land (Berton 1984; Francis and Kitzan 2007). Immigrants from Europe and the United States were part of that migration but so also were residents of eastern Canada who moved into the thinly populated territory of the West that eastern interests were seeking to integrate into the new Canadian nation. Alberta was just part of the western interior undergoing rapid settlement at that time and so was not the only province to receive a strong migration flow. From this perspective, it is possible to understand what occurred in Alberta during the first part of the twentieth century as the first movement of in-migration, while what occurred towards the end of that century may be understood as the second movement of in-migration.

It is also possible to understand Alberta as a second promised land if we divide the more recent migration into two waves; 1975 to 1982 and the post-1996 period. In these two migration flows, Alberta became a promised land once again largely because a specific natural resource (energy hydrocarbons) fuelled expectations of a positive migration outcome. What was particularly noteworthy about these two migration surges was that most of the migrants were movers from within Canada (or domestic migrants), for whom relocation was much less cumbersome than was the case with international migrants. Consequently, the migration seemed to serve as an important reflection of significant macro (structural) and micro (individual) issues occurring within Canadian society. What was it that propelled people to leave their place of residence in an advanced capitalist society in search of something better elsewhere within their own nation-state? This study, then, seeks to place migration to Alberta within a national framework, and it focuses specifically on the second migration wave of the contemporary period.

Words cannot adequately express the impact that this research has had on me personally. It was impossible to interact with in-migrants, to hear their stories, and to listen to people who have been affected by this

migration, particularly in the communities from which these migrants came, without being personally moved. Our research team met with people in their homes, in coffee shops, in hotel meeting rooms, and many other places. We met entire families, individual representatives of families, and single persons, some for whom the move was successful and some for whom it was very difficult. I saw people living with minimal furniture, people who spent much of their income on telephone bills back home, and people who experienced both feelings of elation and sadness when recounting their migration experiences. Many interviewees in Alberta had an intense personal interest in this research, and this paved the way for people back in their region of origin to welcome me warmly when I did research there. The wonderful home-cooked meals and warm hospitality in places like Grand Le Pierre, Newfoundland; Sydney and St Peter's, Nova Scotia; and Kinkora, Prince Edward Island; will always be a fond memory. I will never forget driving across the Canso Causeway into Cape Breton at Port Hawkesbury (thousands of kilometres from Alberta) only to be greeted by a big sign in front of a Canadian Tire store wishing the managers well on their move to Calgary ("Good Luck Bob and Judy in Calgary"). The first talkshow on this topic in which I participated was in St John's, Newfoundland, and the flood of calls that were received was overwhelming. These two experiences made it clear to me that migration to Alberta was indeed a major grassroots issue all over the country. And these intensely human interchanges with people who experienced the full effects of migration in deeply personal ways made me aware that migration was much more than numbers and statistics regarding how many were moving and their demographic characteristics. Data collection was anything but a dry and tedious task; rather, it was an emotional encounter with other human beings, and this encounter gave me a greater appreciation of the diversity of people and regional cultures in Canadian society and helped me to avoid understanding migration in a purely analytical way. Furthermore, it became clear to me that this migration really was not just about Alberta (the view from Alberta) but also about the regions and social contexts from which people had come.

One of the intriguing things about this research was that, because the expanding economy of Alberta and its role as a magnet destination was a significant public issue in Canada, input was received in many ways beyond the formal sample of respondents. A very interesting symbiotic relationship with the media emerged at an early stage in that they were interested in discussing the topic long before there were any study results to be contemplated. Media encounters almost always resulted in

numerous other contributions from the general public. Audiences would often call our toll-free number with corroboratory or corrective comments reflecting their own experiences and often give me many new ideas. Questions from the media often caused me to think of this phenomenon in new ways, and having to articulate my own observations and analyses in public forums assisted greatly in the progression of my thinking. Another interesting informal input to the study came from my own interactions with people in the community who were migrants but whom I encountered in service positions or elsewhere in the community in my daily routines. This type of interaction provided continuous feedback into my thinking and, again, enlarged the input beyond the formal sample.

A large number of people and organizations helped to make this study possible. The base funding was provided by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada. Along the way, other support was provided by the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Calgary, which awarded me a Faculty of Social Science Research Fellowship for this project. Part of the analysis and writing for the book was also conducted while I was a Sproul Fellow at the University of California, Berkeley, and I am thankful for the hospitality of Thomas Barnes and Rita Ross. Many colleagues made suggestions from time to time, but I would specifically like to recognize the assistance of Herb Emery and Nathan Hiller. Some of the conclusions presented here have been developed in more detail and for a specialist audience in professional journals, in particular the *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology*, *New Media and Society*, *Prairie Forum*, and the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*.

Throughout this study, I have had a number of research assistants, including Ralph Fidel, Allison Millar, Linda DiLuzio, Letishia Knuttila, Serena Wall, Colleen Will, Pui Hong, and Tracy Simmons. Three people who deserve particular commendation served as research assistants and office manager successively over the course of this work: Tara Franz, Kendall McCaig, and Christina Leung. Kendall McCaig was with the project the longest and over the most critical period and played a key role in bringing all of the data together to facilitate its completion. I am especially grateful for her capable and enthusiastic support but thank all the others as well. My thanks to Joanne Richardson, whose work as copy editor resulted in a much more polished manuscript. And the timely work of my cartographer Shawn Muallen is also gratefully acknowledged. I am forever grateful to my family for their support over the years as this project unfolded.

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Migration to Alberta in Perspective

“If I don’t move to Alberta, my children will so I might as well move now.” These were the words of a migrant from Atlantic Canada who moved to Alberta because of the perception that the dynamics of Canadian society were shifting westward. While such a viewpoint might be considered extreme, it struck at a truth that often lurked beneath the surface. How is it that a hinterland region could emerge from its minor status in a national system to become a major player and a magnet migration destination? And would this development lead to a reconfiguration of Canadian society?

As one of the largest countries in the world, Canada possesses a huge territory in which the railroad was originally conceived as the tie that would bind a spatially challenged nation together. It was the railroad that played an especially vital role in settling the western part of the country and linking it with the centres of finance and industry in central Canada. The railroad supported an unbalanced yet symbiotic relationship linking east and west, in which western Canada served a useful role as a hinterland within the national hierarchy of power and control. This study, in contrast to the role of the railroad in the early development of the region, moves forward almost one hundred years to discover that the highway, and also to some degree the airplane, has replaced the railroad and contributed to the restructuring of Canada, primarily through the redistribution of its people. While the highway itself is not my focus, the automobile is symbolic of the migration of people who made their own choices about relocating to another region of Canada. Most of these migrants moved independently with U-hauls, half-ton trucks and trailers, and packed cars to take advantage of what they considered to be better prospects in “the promised land” of Alberta. These migrants are sometimes referred to as “car people” in contrast to “boat people”

(who arrived from places like Vietnam), all of whom took great personal risks to start over again in a new place. The Trans-Canada Highway became a migration pipeline as people from other parts of Canada travelled to and from Alberta in response to unparalleled economic opportunity in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries.

To a considerable degree driven by energy hydrocarbons, Alberta represented an anomaly in the Canadian context. Its political life, its economy, and its worldview appeared to be different from those of the rest of Canada, and migration to Alberta, coupled with the province's sudden ascendance into national (if not international) prominence, was surprising and disturbing both to Albertans and to Canadians in other regions. The critical story, though, is not just oil prices and capital flows but ordinary Canadians relocating in response to changing economic environments both at home and in Alberta. In important ways, the emergence of a new Alberta and the migration flows that it created threatened to change the Canadian status quo in important ways. *Second Promised Land* seeks to make a contribution to understanding that transformation.

What is this place called Alberta? On the one hand, it is just one of ten provinces in Canada. It was not made a province until 1905 (along with Saskatchewan), when settlement began in earnest, and, in that sense, its history within Confederation has been shorter than that of all other provinces (except Newfoundland, which was a late addition in 1949). With a comparatively small population and little economic or political power, the province possessed a hinterland mentality, or a sense of colonial inferiority, that was shaped by its frontier experience. But, on the other hand, and perhaps even because of this background, Alberta has possessed a somewhat renegade attitude. It was the first of the western provinces to mount a challenge to the "eastern" establishment through the successive elections of third parties – the United Farmer's of Alberta (1921) and Social Credit (1935). While some thought this political experimentation was merely the result of a province in transition from its beginnings to maturity, much later in the twentieth century Alberta also became the base for new political innovations such as the Reform Party and the Canadian Alliance, which again challenged the national status quo. Ultimately, in the 1990s, the phrase "The West Wants In" was replaced by "The Alberta Advantage," which became the edgy slogan suggesting that times were changing and that Alberta no longer had the same sense of outsider status as it had had previously. This unsettled position within Confederation has played a large part in creating the impression that Alberta is, indeed,

different from other Canadian provinces and possesses a unique “state of mind” (Sharpe, Gibbins, Marsh, and Edwards 2005).

The Alberta of the first half of the twentieth century certainly was very different from the Alberta of the last half of the century. The maturation and specialization of agriculture and food processing (e.g., Alberta became the focal point of the beef industry in Canada); the expansion of the province’s two major cities (Calgary and Edmonton) beyond their regional role, with growing international links and populations that were reaching towards one million inhabitants each; and, especially, the development of the energy industry in response to global demand and higher prices were all symbols of a province in continuing transition. By the turn of the century (2001), Alberta stood out from the other provinces in a number of ways. For the last three decades it had had the highest employment rate in Canada. It had the lowest percentage of residents who depended on government transfer payments (8.7 percent), and its social assistance rate (1.7 percent) was considerably below the national average (5.9 percent). Alberta had the lowest median age (thirty-five) among the provinces and the lowest percentage of those over sixty-five (10.4 percent). It had the most even sex ratio (99.9 males per 100 females) in the country and the highest proportion of the population that had been born elsewhere in Canada (27.6 percent). In the 2001 census, Alberta had the fastest growth rate in the country (10.3 percent since 1996) and the highest percentage of the population that, five years ago, had lived in another province (8.8 percent). Alberta was also distinctive in other ways. It had the lowest rate of unionization in Canada and the lowest percentage of its labour force working in public administration (4.6 percent). It had a higher percentage of its labour force engaged in construction (7.7%) and mining and oil and gas extraction (5.1%) than did any other province. As a challenge to previous stereotypes, Alberta (23.6 percent) was second only to British Columbia (35.9 percent) in terms of the percentage of its population that claimed to have no religion. Both these percentages are considerably higher than those in other provinces (e.g., Ontario 16 percent, Nova Scotia 11.6 percent).

The unique attributes of Alberta are not limited to those listed above, but there does seem to be evidence to support the notion that Alberta is different from other provinces in Canada. One of the key elements in the evolution of this difference has been migration – especially migration from within the country. It is not primarily the migration of the settlement period but, rather, the migration of more recent years that is central to this transformation of the changing role of Alberta within

Canada and the alteration of regional dynamics within Canadian society. The primary objective of *Second Promised Land* is to explore the nature and role of the internal migration that Alberta experienced around the turn of the twenty-first century and that has contributed to the evolution of Alberta as a unique place within Canadian society.

THE ROLE AND MEANING OF INTERNAL/DOMESTIC MIGRATION

This has been called the “age of migration” (Castles 2003). Millions of people are moving from one country to another at a rate unparalleled in human history and in a manner that is transforming the world order (Castles and Davidson 2000). Migration has also been declared “the single most powerful force” shaping Canadian society (Messamore 2004, 1). In all of these discussions, migration focuses on its international form, particularly immigration. In an attempt to monitor, evaluate, and adapt to these shifting currents, the multi-country Metropolis Project (http://canada.metropolis.net/index_e.html) was established in 1998 to assist receiving societies deal with the transformations that they were experiencing due to issues relating to migration policy and socio-economic and cultural integration.

Lost in the more high-profile shuffle of people from country to country has been the internal movement of population, which can also transform national societies by creating new growth poles or, conversely, regions of decline. Relocations within a country are perhaps considered more natural, as less threatening, than international relocations and are less likely to be viewed as connected with state policy. On the other hand, international migration usually sparks all kinds of national debate over appropriate policy, including size of flows and source of migration flows. Since residents of a particular country presumably have unfettered access to any part of that country to which they choose to move, internal movements of population are usually understood to be either a response to natural forces of labour demand and supply or just plain personal choice. Such a view is partially true, but it is also unquestionably naïve as there are a host of complex factors that lead people to seek an alternate location of residence. In fact, state policy and corporate decision making play a major role in population relocation, and amenities and opportunities affect personal choices made by migrants themselves. What differentiates internal migration from international migration is the fact that formal barriers are largely absent with regard to the former, thereby making primary migration (initial move to a new location), return migration

(moving back to the place of origin), onward migration (moving from one location to another), and hyper mobility (multiple moves) much easier and less available to monitoring.

It has been argued that Canada and the United States are “restless nations” in which migration is part of a life strategy (Weeks 1996, 246; Jasper 2000) more common among their residents than among those of other Western nations (Long 1988). Since both countries have so many immigrants, relocation might be a behaviour pattern that is repeatedly experienced as immigrants and their children seek the most appropriate place of residence within their new society. Internal migration might also be important for the native-born in search of a more suitable environment or perhaps as a means of “moving up,” with employee transfers and national job searches serving as mechanisms of upward mobility. Moving companies, relocation assistance firms, and moving rental equipment companies all reflect a thriving industry to accommodate a society constantly on the move. Believing in the possibilities of “fresh starts,” people also relocate because of perceptions of new opportunities elsewhere (Jasper 2000, 5, 246). An individualist ethos within our culture has provided legitimacy to family members who desire to strike out on their own, to make their own way, and to attain personal objectives through relocation. With family members scattered all over the continent, loyalty to place of birth or place of childhood development sometimes appears to be an out-dated concept. Congested airports and highways at important holidays attest to the fact that dispersed families need to come together from time to time, even if only briefly.

These perceptions of a country on the move have produced numerous analyses in which internal migration was thought to generate a particular kind of society, with disruptive and alienating effects. Vance Packard (1972) saw this kind of mobility as producing a “nation of strangers.” Moves that are more local may have slowed in recent years in both Canada and the United States, but interstate/interprovincial moves continue to be significant. Fischer (2002) examined residential mobility data in the United States from 1950 to 1999 and concluded that local moves had actually declined, while rates for longer-distance moves remained more or less constant at about 7 percent.¹ Schachter (2004) notes that, in comparison to other types of moves, interstate migration in the United States is increasing slightly. In Canada, relocations have also been declining, largely as the result of an aging population, but about 13 percent of the population (3.5 million people) changed municipalities and 3.5 percent of the population (one million people) relocated across provincial borders from 1996 to 2001. In both

countries, internal migration involves higher volumes than international migration, and in that sense it is numerically more significant (Vachon and Vaillancourt 1999, 101). The question of why internal migration occurs is intriguing because it sheds light on changes and trends within a national society. This is particularly so with longer-distance migration. The volume, direction, and destination of migration are indicators of societal change that cannot be ignored.

MIGRATION AS NORMAL OR DEVIANT?

In the debate about the consequences of migration, there is often lack of clarity regarding how to interpret it (Jackson 1969, 3; Jansen 1970, 52–3). What is the natural condition for human life? Is it to be sedentary or is it to be mobile? If a static society is normal, then any movement can be considered deviant. If the normal thing is for people to stay in their community or region of origin (Beaujot and Kerr 2004, 140), then any migration away from that location is not only non-normative behaviour but reflects a problem. From this perspective, the problem is with the potential individual migrant who chooses to leave and therefore deviates from the expected pattern. But the problem may also be with the community or region itself, where conditions may force the resident to consider other options.

Analysts are keenly aware that migration always involves some kind of disruption to existing patterns and that this demands evaluation. Measuring the economic costs and consequences of migration may be a matter of statistical calculation, but assessing the social costs and consequences of migration is much more difficult. At the root of negative evaluations of migration is the assumption that it tears people from long-standing social ties in the community of origin and places them in largely alien territory. This makes migration almost a form of anomic behaviour. Migration can also be viewed as a form of dissent in that it implies a rejection of a community of origin, which, for one reason or another, is no longer considered adequate. Because the migrant has no guarantee of the outcome of the migration, relocation is also risk-taking behaviour. All of these interpretations imply a social problems perspective in which there is an implicit assumption that staying in your own community is what should be considered normal.

On the other hand, humans have been migrating since the beginning of time. Migration for food and water, to avoid enemies or persecution, or for trade has a long-standing history. Most of these migrations occurred in groups as whole communities often moved together. What

appears to be more recent are relocations of individuals or isolated nuclear family units. While this form of migration often has more social supports than it appears to, self-interest has clearly become a more prominent motivating element in migration than group interest. Thus, in a world of heightened individualism, and in a world of constant change, the idea of a static society indeed seems to be a myth, and migration cannot be interpreted as abnormal. While there may still be some barriers to international migration, domestic migration has become typical behaviour as people seek more suitable locations for their material and social interests at varying stages of the lifecycle. Single young adults may relocate for reasons that are very different from seniors, and moving for work may represent a very different reason for relocation than moving in search of amenities or for climate preferences. While migration flows to particular destinations might involve large numbers of people, these moves are primarily the result of individual choices rather than the relocation of entire groups of people.

Short-distance relocations are typically rather frequent. Often referred to as residential mobility, this type of relocation is often highly symbolic of a status shift. It might be a rite of passage such as changing houses upon leaving the parental home, buying a more elaborate home reflecting one's socio-economic mobility, or making larger or smaller accommodations at different stages of one's lifecycle. Relocations, then, might be considered normal adaptations to changing circumstances. However, staying within a general regional area, regardless of how it is defined, is not normally considered migration. Longer-distance moves, defined as relocations between larger jurisdictional entities such as provinces/states, are much less typical but have been facilitated by new developments in communication and transportation that make migration much less foreboding and permanent. When a potential migrant no longer feels satisfied with life in her/his community of origin, short-distance moves may do little to change the situation and a longer-distance move within a nation-state may be deemed preferable.

In contrast to international migration, in most industrial/post-industrial societies domestic migration can be considered normal – and, sometimes, even expected – behaviour. For example, when labour pools are considered to be national in scope, unemployment in one region may be expected to be a cause of migration to another region. There are usually fewer formal constraints to moving within a national territory and, conversely, there are also forces supporting continuity. Practical constraints may include factors of distance and cost, family obligations, or skill levels; however, the portability of national programs such as

health care, pensions, or employment assistance support domestic migration, which, unlike international migration, does not require advance government approval. Furthermore, once migration has begun, it is possible to relocate internally from destination to origin at any time (return migration), to go back and forth between the place of origin and destination either occasionally or repeatedly (circular migration), or even to move on to new destinations (onward migration). Citizenship guarantees the right of free access, which supports mobility that may occur at any time. In a society with a “high mobility ethic,” or where migration is viewed as part of a “life strategy,” internal migration is considered normative adaptive behaviour. If this migration is the result of individual decisions, the question that needs to be answered is: what leads some people to move while others remain where they are? Furthermore, how do people come to the decision to relocate and how do they choose where to relocate?

The decisions about long-distance migration may reflect personal choices, but they do not occur in a vacuum. They occur within specific socio-economic contexts, which shape and constrain choices. The macro question, then, is also important. Why is it that some regions experience considerable out-migration while other regions experience repeated waves of in-migration? What is it about the way a national society is structured that contributes to uneven migration flows? From this perspective, migration flows serve as a barometer for measuring important tensions, contradictions, or inequalities within a society. The political economy of migration serves as an important contextual backdrop for understanding the movement of people. Migration is not so much natural or normal as it is a response to the way a society is structured, which gives advantages to some regions over other regions. It is imperative, then, that we understand the context of migration because this is what reveals important dynamics within nation-states.

In Canada, the most typical migration-defining boundary (MDB) is the province. With the exception of the three maritime provinces on the East Coast, which are small and clustered together, and the City of Ottawa, which is located on the Quebec/Ontario border, the provinces are large enough and their populations separated enough so that movement between them serves as a meaningful unit of analysis of long-distance moves that may be identified as internal migration.

THEMATIC CONTOURS OF INTERNAL MIGRATION

The two most widely recognized experiences of internal migration on the North American continent are the westward shift of the population

through the settlement of the West and the rural-urban migration of the agricultural population. While the settlement of the West involved some immigration from abroad, the fact that it occurred from east to west across the country also gave it the character of an internal movement as residents of the east were part of the migration stream. In any case, long distances were involved, which meant movement across political (state/province) boundaries into weakly populated areas. Rural-urban migration, on the other hand, occurred later and reached its apex in the post-Second World War period as agriculture went through a massive transformation and urban opportunities beckoned. This migration may or may not have crossed state/province boundaries as masses of people who were largely native-born moved to the cities. One of the significant movements of people in the United States from about 1890 to the 1970s involved millions of Afro-Americans who moved from the South into the industrialized North in what is often referred to as the Great Migration (Lemann 1991). Cities like Detroit, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh were significantly transformed by this migration and the economic activity that supported it. Muller and Espenshade (1985, 23) argue that the most intensive internal migration in the history of the United States was the movement of three million people to California from 1941 to 1945. The State of California had received a disproportionate share of defence contracts at that time, which supported a migration that increased its population by one-third.² More recently, other migration shifts have taken place from the frost belt/rust belt to the sunbelt in the American South and Southwest. The urbanization of the population to the largest cities has also continued producing urban sprawl and creating urban regions (rather than just single cities). Each of these shifts has resulted in important changes within American society.

Canada, like the United States, was also settled from east to west as a result of both internal and international migration (Whitely 1932). In the United States, the geographic centre of the population has been moving steadily westward from Maryland in 1790 to St Louis, Missouri, by 2000 (United States 2003, 20). This shift is also evident in Canada, although natural westward expansion was blocked by the Canadian Shield until the late 1800s, when settlement of the interior plains began to take place in earnest. The rapid influx of people into the western interior had a mixed effect in that it initially created a burgeoning population in the region, but after thirty to forty years of growth, rural depopulation occurred as the result of the Depression and changing agricultural practices. This rural-urban shift occurred everywhere but was particularly dramatic on the agricultural plains. Alberta and

British Columbia were the primary beneficiaries of this shift in the postwar period in the western region, and the strong industrial economy of Ontario ensured that that province and its cities were also major recipients of this migration. From 1951 to 2001, Ontario's share of the national population increased from 34 percent to 38 percent, while the share of the national population in all provinces east of Ontario as well as in Manitoba and Saskatchewan declined. In contrast, the share of the national population in Alberta increased from 7 percent to 10 percent and in British Columbia from 8 percent to 13 percent. While there has been a shift westward in terms of the increasing share of the Canadian population living in the two most westerly provinces, this has not occurred at the expense of Ontario (at least until recently), which has retained its dominant position so that it (along with Quebec) preserved its role as both a geographic centre and the fulcrum of the national society.

The rural-urban shift is not just a shift from rural areas to the closest cities but also a shift to the provinces with the biggest cities, which then also includes urban-to-urban migration. The dramatic growth of the City of Toronto, which became Canada's largest city, is of special interest. Toronto has always served as a magnet for internal migrants but, by the turn of the twenty-first century, its growth had been stimulated more by international migration. Toronto, with 44 percent of its population foreign-born by 2001, had truly become "a world in a city" (Anisef and Lanphier 2003), possessing the second highest foreign-born population (Miami had the highest) of any city in the world. By 2006, it had the highest percentage of foreign-born population of any city in the world. Canada's largest cities (including Vancouver and Montreal) have been particularly attractive to immigrants, which has created a significant cultural gulf between them and non-immigrant receiving areas. While it is readily acknowledged that international migration is changing Canadian society, internal migration continues to have a huge impact and its role ought not to be minimized. Sending provinces are deeply affected by the loss of population, which affects the structure of local communities and represents a deficit of generational cohorts of young adults. Receiving provinces replenish and strengthen their labour pool, which facilitates further economic expansion and forces adjustment to rapid growth. These domestic shifts in population foster and reflect regional differences and inequalities and, indeed, often intensify such disparities even further. Internal migration, then, plays an important role in transforming Canadian society.

THREE SPECIFIC INTERNAL MIGRATION FLOWS CHANGING CANADIAN SOCIETY

In addition to the two broad forms of internal migration that have already been mentioned, three more specific migration flows of some significance can be identified. The first is the development of a stronger population base on the West Coast, which has always been accomplished through a combination of internal migration and international migration. The ocean-going ports of British Columbia made its cities very accessible to immigrants, and its relatively mild climate also made it attractive to internal migrants. As the Pacific Rim has grown in importance with regard to Canada's national interests, and as trade with Asia has become more significant, the Lower Mainland (i.e., the Vancouver metropolitan region) in particular has become an important growth pole in the Canadian economy and has supported more internal migration. Later I show that, in recent years, immigration has become more important to this region's growth than internal migration; however, overall, internal migration has been and continues to be important to this region's increasing significance within the national fabric.

The second internal movement of population within Canada of some significance is the out-migration from Quebec, which produced net internal migration losses for that province. Since the mid-1970s, anglophones in particular have increasingly migrated out of Quebec, and the number of anglophones moving into the province has withered (Newbold 1996a; Lo and Teixeira 1998). Internal migration, therefore, has had the effect of solidifying Quebec as a francophone province. In conjunction with low fertility, it has also contributed to Quebec's shrinking share of the national population, from 29 percent in 1951 to 24 percent in 2001. These demographic changes symbolize a shifting role and position for Quebec within Canadian society.

The third and more recent form of internal migration that has affected Canadian society has been the movement of people to the western landlocked province of Alberta. In contrast to the other provinces of the western interior (Saskatchewan and Manitoba), which built their economies on agriculture and then began to experience out-migration, this province has had a very different trajectory.

Migration to Alberta was initially significant because of its role in the peopling of the province, particularly from 1890 to 1911. From 1901 to 1905 alone, 40,000 homesteads were granted in Alberta, which required settlement on a farm site and breaking the land for a minimum

three-year period in order to establish ownership (Alberta Agriculture 1997, 6). The years from 1912 to 1914 were optimistic boom years for the province. A promotional pamphlet described “the Great Alberta,” the “Empire of Fulfillment,” “the land where opportunities are unlimited.” It went on to predict that Edmonton “must inevitably become the largest city in Canada,” to describe Calgary as “the city of business and bustle by the Bow,” and Medicine Hat as potentially “the Minneapolis of Canada (Collins 1994, 2–3). Alberta was described as the “wonder child of Canada,” where populations of 5 million or even 20 million were expected. Regarding the population of Calgary,

In 1900 it stood at 5,000, a decade later at over 40,000, and after 1910 newcomers were pouring in at the rate of 1,000 a month. By the end of 1912 it was edging 75,000 people and promoters talked of a half-million by the 1930's. Every day, carpenters, bricklayers and surveyors stepped off the train with families in tow. Meanwhile, land speculation was the city's biggest industry ... 358 real estate agents against 166 grocery stores, 17 banks, and 27 hardware stores. (Hutchinson 1994, 88)

Its growth from 5,000 to 75,000 people in twelve years supported endless optimism about the future of Calgary and created a sense of boom times that was soon shattered by the war years and the tough economic times that followed. As with other frontiers, the buoyancy and expectations of new life in Alberta was limited by its agricultural economy, which underwent considerable change after the Depression. Growth was halted and even reversed in some areas, and growth in the cities was moderate at best.

The movement of people into the western Canadian interior was part of the federal government's broader policy objective to “claim the West” in what was known as the National Policy. Other than this initial settlement period, and until the 1970s, Alberta's growth was slow and not always steady, and it depended considerably on rural-urban migration within the region. However, a new thrust of expansion and development within the province thanks to internal migration is most often associated with energy hydrocarbons. From the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, Alberta once again felt like a frontier because of the rush of people into the province, which was then followed by an out-migration in a classic boom-and-bust cycle that earned the province considerable notoriety. No other province, or even similar American states like Oklahoma and Texas, experienced such volatility (Mansell and Percy

1990). Because economic booms are stimulants to internal migration, the influx of people to the province during the good times resulted in considerable national attention, but so did its reversal in the mid-1980s, when many left the province. Even though Alberta still experienced net growth and its economy matured greatly, the fact that the growth was predicated on an oil boom helped to perpetuate frontier-like images of risk-takers and wealth-seekers in search of black gold. These images were considerably overdrawn and even unfamiliar to most Albertans, but the overheated economy and significant recession were a reality with which all had to cope. On the other hand, this boom marked the dawn of a new era for the province, which may have only been the beginning of the transformation of its national role. It was ironic, though, that the images of Alberta that were originally created during its settlement period – that is, as one of the Prairie provinces in a region often described as barren, harsh, inhospitable, isolated, and prone to economic depression (e.g., Britnell 1939; Francis 1989a) – should, by the latter part of the same century, become so radically different.

By the last decade of the twentieth century, Alberta had become a different place. In spite of the boom-and-bust cycle of the late-1970s and early 1980s, a recovery occurred that built on the energy industry but that began to be shaped around Alberta's commitment to free enterprise principles. This ideology clearly differentiated the province from neighbouring provinces at that time and was expected to be a tool to attract more inward investment supporting economic diversification. Around 1996, a second wave of in-migration entered into an economy that clearly benefited from rising energy prices but that also showed strength in other sectors, such as logistics and transportation as well as business services. The growth of Calgary was particularly dramatic, and the transfer of the head offices of several prominent corporations to the city (in addition to those already there) was viewed as a symbol of a new era, in which Alberta as a destination of choice intensified. How a province could shift from being a hinterland of agricultural migrants to being a magnet for highly educated internal migrants is a phenomenon worthy of explanation and analysis and is the subject of this book.³

ALBERTA IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Alberta is certainly not unique on the North American continent with regard to being a less well-known province/state that experienced dramatic growth and positive in-migration flows. The United States has seen significant regional fluctuations in that the once powerful

magnetic industrial northeast lost more people through internal migration from 1995 to 2000 than any other region (Franklin 2003). Most Midwestern states also experienced net losses through internal migration. In contrast, a whole new set of states became significant destinations. Nevada, for example, had the highest net internal migration rate of any state. Colorado, Arizona, North Carolina, and Georgia also had strong in-migration gains. Colorado, which topographically has the most in common with Alberta, grew from just over 2 million people in 1970 to over 4 million people in about thirty years, roughly doubling its population. Nevada grew from less than half a million in 1970 to over 2 million in 2000. Arizona grew from less than 2 million in 1970 to over 5 million in 2000. Similarly, Alberta grew from around 1.5 million in 1971 to around 3 million in 2001, roughly doubling the population in thirty years. Alberta, then, has a similar demographic trajectory to these other mountain states. Alberta also shares a similarity with these states in that at least some of the in-migration was from high-cost states/provinces and states/provinces with bigger, more diverse, and more densely populated cities.

However, Alberta differs significantly from these states in important ways. First of all, it is part of a country that has one-tenth the population of the United States, meaning that the potential size of migration flows is much bigger south of the border. On the other hand, the impact of a strong migration flow in Canada is likely to be much more significant, given the smaller total population and the smaller number of jurisdictions (i.e., ten provinces), half of whom have a population of less than 1 million people, than it is in the United States. Ontario is by far the province with the largest population, and it is the single most important migration magnet (i.e., migration of all types) in the country. In the United States, even though California has the largest population, there are far more options for migration than there are in Canada because there are many states with substantial populations (e.g., New York, Florida, Texas, etc.). Second, Ontario has had a stranglehold on both economic and population growth in Canada, and the emergence of a new alternative has a dramatic effect in that it apparently challenges this dominance. The historic supremacy of central Canada has been a fact of life for a long time, and the emergence of an upstart and ascendant province “on the Prairies” has huge implications for the status quo. Most provinces have been losing more population than they have been gaining through internal migration, which makes the case of Alberta stand out all the more. East/west distances across Canada are huge, and any movement across the Canadian Shield is much more

cumbersome than is long-distance migration in the United States, which is supported by many interstate highways. Any migration, especially from the Atlantic provinces, that skips over Ontario overcomes a major hurdle that truly breaks traditional migration patterns. Third, migration to Alberta is less likely to be based on climatic factors such as those occurring in the American South, and there are no intervening variables such as massive illegal migration from Mexico to compound population growth. In short, while migration to Alberta is not new, any large-scale movement to this province breaks traditional patterns and expectations and potentially transforms the society in significant ways. It is important, then, to examine more carefully what has been happening in Alberta.

STUDY TIMELINES

At the time of writing, Alberta's economy became overheated. No longer was it traditional means of oil extraction that was driving the economy but, rather, beginning in 2003, the new investments made in the oil sands, which had a dramatic effect on the tone of growth, fuelling what could be called hyper-growth. By 2005, the incremental growth that Alberta had experienced reached a new feverish pace, in which job creation exceeded the rate of migration. "Boom-time" was the only term to describe what was happening. Statistics Canada declared that Alberta was in the midst of "the strongest period of economic growth ever recorded by any province in Canada's history," with the tightest labour market in North America (Cross and Bowlby 2006). Migration flows became distorted by employer-induced migration through elaborate recruitment strategies and pay and benefit incentives. Special arrangements were made to foster greater international migration. Home prices, which had been affordable in comparison to other major centres in Canada, suddenly increased exponentially. In fact, in one year's time, home prices in Calgary increased by 50 percent (Toneguzzi 2006). Infrastructure deficits such as in roads, road interchanges, schools, and hospital beds became much more obvious, and the province appeared to be in a state of partially controlled crisis. Oil sands expansion in northern Alberta was the catalyst of this growth, primarily because oil sands construction and investment were much more long term and on a grander scale than conventional oil extraction, which had been declining. This suggested that the period of strong economic growth was likely to be sustained much longer than had been thought. Servicing an expanding population (e.g., the need for teachers, medical

personnel, etc.) was, in itself, also contributing to exponential economic growth. At the same time, considerable apprehension emerged about the future in light of what appeared to be unsustainable growth as rising costs, infrastructural deficits, and labour shortages produced an increasing sense of crisis. At the very least, the uncontrolled pace of growth increasingly came to be viewed as having deleterious effects and, in particular, as producing a widening gap between the rich and the poor due to income inequity, which especially affected independent migrants (as opposed to corporate transfers). It remains to be seen where this boom is going and how long it will last before an economic correction occurs.

The characteristics of a boom are much different from those of an expanding economy. Booms create anxiety and fear caused by factors such as suddenness, uncontrollability, and extremes. On the other hand, expanding economies are more easily processed and absorbed because the growth is slower and more incremental. The focus of *Second Promised Land* is on the period from 1996 to 2002, which encompasses the years of economic expansion that occurred before growth took on a different character and appeared to spiral out of control. By 2006, net interprovincial migration to Alberta reached an unprecedented peak. In some ways, this growth should be included in this analysis. However, since, at the time of writing, the trajectory of this growth was unknown, I made an arbitrary decision not to include it. My rationale is that the existence of severe labour shortages and an overheated economy results in a very different kind of migration. This migration is more directly employer-driven, involving significant recruitment outside the province involving employer inducements and other incentives to relocate, and these were not present to the same degree at the time I conducted this study. Furthermore, boom conditions resulted in much more apprehension regarding moving to Alberta as people now had to consider the reality of rising costs. Such conditions also affected the ability of migrants to remain in the province and increased the likelihood that others would want to leave. In short, an overheated economy changed the dynamics of migration in significant ways from what I had observed earlier. For this reason, my analysis distinguishes between an expanding economy and a boom-time economy. The data upon which the Alberta In-Migration Study was based are rooted in an expanding economy. The dynamics of boom conditions, on the other hand, are much more explosive and precarious and, perhaps, are a subject unto itself. Once the boom conditions ease, we will be in a better position to assess the full cycle.

I do not focus on in-migration, the theme of this book, to celebrate it; rather, I do so because the movement of people to Alberta provides macro-level evidence of how societies are continuously being restructured. Much of the micro-level data that are presented provide evidence pertaining to how individuals make decisions and to how they navigate changes within their own communities. The movement of people from one region to another is not just about the redistribution of labour; indeed, I show that migration is more complex than purely economic forces would indicate. But it does demonstrate how capital investment and global economic forces contribute to the transformation of a nation. This study was undertaken not merely to analyze losers and winners in the interregional migration shuffle but also to understand how societies experience change through migrations from within. In short, the thesis of *Second Promised Land* is that migration to Alberta must be understood as part of a broader reconfiguration of Canadian society.

The Old West and the New West

Something new has been stirring in the Canadian West. The old notion was that the West was divided in two: the Prairie West (including the three “Prairie provinces” of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta) and the Coastal West (British Columbia). What both regions had in common through the first half of the nineteenth century was that they were recently settled, with relatively small populations, and that they were hinterlands to central Canada. The National Policy of 1879 clearly conceived of the West as a hinterland that would benefit central Canada (Fowke 1957). As Hall (1977, 84) has pointed out, there was no vision of the Prairie West, in particular, as anything other than an agriculturally based society that, though it may have a West Coast port, was intricately tied to the industries of central Canada. If Morton (1973) is correct in positing that, initially, it was migration from Ontario that settled the western interior and gave it its institutions, it soon became clear that later immigration and the experiences of living on the frontier were producing a society that was both tied to Ontario and, due to its own process of society-building, resistant to it. The question is whether in the process of society-building a New West has been created – one that is radically different and in which the Prairie West has been transformed, with new divisions having been created as the sense of agricultural unity has disappeared. As we will see, it is primarily what has happened in Alberta that has created a new dynamic both in western Canada and in Canada as a whole.

The distinctiveness of the Prairie West as a region is part history and part myth. Much of the imagery is built from similar settlement patterns at a particular point in time (Gray 1979) and the politics of a wheat economy. Prior to the rush of migration for settlement, the region was known as the Northwest. Here fur trading shaped the econ-

omy, which was located in the more northerly regions (Fort Edmonton was its hub) and along the major rivers. The term "Prairies" came to represent a new stage in the evolution of the western interior, in which farming and land ownership became the magnet for migration. In contrast to the more northern character of the fur economy, agriculture was thought to be more appropriate to the plains because they required less clearing of trees – an endeavour that had been painstaking and difficult in Ontario. The decision to run the new transcontinental railroad line (the Canadian Pacific Railway, which was completed in 1885) through the southern part of the region then ensured that the early agrarian settlement would occur on the plains. The railway shifted both economic activity and population southward, which enhanced Calgary's role since it was located on the rail line (Palmer 1990, 50–1). Thus emerged the conception of the West as "the Prairies," which were associated with the attempt to profit from agriculture on arid, bleak, windswept, and treeless terrain while fighting the demons of pestilence and erosion (especially in those early years). This led many to reconsider their decision to build their long-term future on the land.¹

The question, of course, is whether this imagery any longer describes the reality of the region's inhabitants. If it is no longer appropriate, then the idea of the Prairie West being "a cultural region" (Thompson 1998, ix) with a common set of myths about what it is and what its goals are is questionable. Allen (1973) argues that a region is a mental construct and that most of the constructs of the Prairie region have not been born there but, rather, have been imposed from without. If that is so, then it is time that this region be examined to determine whether or not these constructs are appropriate. As a land-locked region with no easy access to the Canadian population in the St Lawrence Lowlands or on the West Coast, the Prairie region is also unique in that its settlement reaches much farther north than does settlement in other regions of Canada, whose populations are huddled near the American border. Perhaps this fact more than any other has given birth to the conception of the Prairie West as homogeneous and distinct.

It is true that there is a similarity among the three Prairie provinces; this is because the Laurentian Shield to the east and the Rocky Mountains to the west serve both as barriers and as boundaries, resulting in a rough similarity of climate that contrasts sharply with that of the St Lawrence Lowlands and the West Coast. Further, the period of settlement at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries was roughly similar within the Prairie region and was rooted in the wheat economy. Thus, "Prairie provinces" became a convenient way to

refer to one of the sections of Canada, and this way of looking at the region has endured in regional myths as well as aggregated statistics. For example, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba are often lumped together in data presentations at the national level, with the result that Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia are contrasted with the Atlantic provinces and the Prairie provinces. This always eventuates in misleading conclusions because, whatever similarities the three provinces may have had in the past, these have been radically altered, particularly by the ascendance of Alberta. Besides, the region is far more complex than the imagery conjured by the phrase “Prairie provinces” suggests.

There are a number of reasons, then, why we might want to challenge this characterization of the region as a homogeneous unit. One is that the wheat economy no longer represents the region the way it once did as other agricultural pursuits and natural resources are now playing more dominant roles. Second, a fertile belt known as “parkland,” not “prairie,” is now where crop-based agriculture is the most productive. Third, due to rural depopulation and urbanization, most people who live in the region no longer live “on the prairies.” Saskatchewan may have retained more of its rural character than the other two provinces, but Manitoba’s population is overwhelmingly urban and is located in Winnipeg. Fourth, Alberta’s population has grown much faster than has that of the other two provinces, to the point where the province now has a larger population (over 2 million more residents) than the other two provinces combined, and its two major cities (Edmonton and Calgary) are unsurpassed in size within the region. Even the eastern half of Alberta, which is the most prairie-like, has been radically depopulated. The southern rural portion has been transformed by feedlots, meatpacking, and commercial agrifood production and processing (e.g., potatoes, corn). Fifth, growth that is occurring in northern cities such as Grand Prairie and Fort McMurray is in heavily wooded areas (not prairies), where lumbering and hydrocarbons form the basis of the economy. Even Red Deer (halfway between Edmonton and Calgary) is in the greenbelt area and not really on the prairies. All of this suggests that the old concept of “the Prairies” as an agricultural-based region is no longer adequate.

The term “Prairies” is misleading: a more appropriate designation for the area incorporating the three western provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta would be “the western interior.”² “Prairies” no longer define what these three provinces are all about, perhaps with the exception of Saskatchewan, which is closest to being a “true” Prairie province, though only in the sense that living and working on the

land or in smaller cities is more typical there than in the other provinces. When Winnipeg served as the gateway to the entire region, which was seen as a newly settled area of agriculturalists, it made sense to refer to it as the Prairies. However, the emergence of Edmonton and Calgary as the dominant cities of the region symbolizes a transformation that the imagery associated with “the Prairies” no longer accurately captures. Whatever homogeneity the Prairie image may have conveyed can no longer hide the diversity and change occurring in the region. The concept of the Prairies is dated and no longer expresses the realities of the region. Above all, it no longer applies to Alberta.

THE EVOLUTION OF REGIONAL TRANSFORMATION

In 1901, only 419,000 people lived in the Prairie West, and over 60 percent of these people lived in one province – Manitoba (Dawson and Yonge 1940, 28). From 1901 to 1911, the regional population increased dramatically (by over 300 percent) to 1,328,000. Saskatchewan was the primary beneficiary of this growth, and, for the next forty years, it was the most populated province in the entire West and the third most populous province in Canada. It was not until 1951 that Alberta and British Columbia surpassed Saskatchewan in population size. Thus, until that time, Saskatchewan played a key role in defining the West (Britnell 1939). Winnipeg, on the other hand, was the administrative and service centre for the West. From 1951 to 1971, British Columbia’s population grew by 92 percent to 2.2 million, Alberta’s grew by 77 percent to 1.7 million, while Saskatchewan’s and Manitoba’s grew by 12 percent and 29 percent, respectively, to around 1 million people each. In short, 1951 marks the beginning of the great divide between the Old West and the New West. If, in the West, the first half of the twentieth century was marked by provincial populations of less than 1 million each, and all provinces were of roughly the same size by mid-century, the second half saw much stronger growth in Alberta and British Columbia than anywhere else. In fact, whereas Manitoba and Saskatchewan grew by only 44 percent and 18 percent, respectively, in the fifty years from 1951 to 2001, Alberta grew by 217 percent and British Columbia grew by 335 percent. By 2001, British Columbia (3.9 million) and Alberta (3 million) had almost four-fifths (77 percent) of the West’s 9 million people. Thus, in one century, growing from a combined population of just over half a million people, the balance of power in the West had shifted to the Far West and the Mountain West.

While in the Old West the Prairie West could be clearly distinguished from the Coastal West (British Columbia), in the New West the westward shift of population included both British Columbia and Alberta as growth poles. The Continental Divide notwithstanding, Alberta then joined British Columbia as part of the strategic change in the West, but, at the same time, it was also part of the western interior; this is distinct from British Columbia, which has been referred to as “a geographic region apart” (Resnick 2000, 4).³ Thus, we include British Columbia in our discussions of the West but not in our discussions of the Western Interior.

ASSESSING THE CONCEPT OF “THE PRAIRIES”

It is instructive to examine the so-called “Prairie West” to determine its continued usefulness as a concept.⁴ Traditionally, as we have noted, it has included the three provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, which are isolated by the eastern barrier of the Canadian Shield and the western barrier of the Rockies, making the region geographically discrete. It was from the southern part of each province, known as the grasslands, that the region received its stereotype as flatlands with howling winds and little moisture. This was where settlement initially occurred since this was where the Canadian Pacific Railway ran through the territory, facilitating settlement and development through spur lines to adjacent areas. Labelled contradictorily as both a barren wasteland and a “garden of Eden,” “agrarian paradise,” or “promised land” (Warkentin 1973; Owram 1980; Francis 1992), climate and topography provided a trying context for this region, where high expectations and the harsh realities of settlement clashed (Burnet 1951). This is the origin of the myth that the Prairies form a natural physiographic area consisting of dryland grain farming – a description that is most characteristic of the area between Portage La Prairie, Manitoba, and Drumheller, Alberta (Stabler and Olfert 2002). According to this myth, the topography of the region consists of a few trees and short grass, with extreme temperatures in summer and winter, farmers struggling to survive under tough conditions of drought and/or poor market prices, and grain elevators (the sentinels of the Prairies) acting like beacons for small farming communities spread throughout the area. Among the many issues encountered here is the fact that many settlers knew little about farming and even less about dryland farming.⁵ It was no surprise that many farmers gave up and moved elsewhere. And, if

they did not, their adult children, for whom there was not enough income, did.

The grasslands served a major role in defining the region as they were part of the Great Plains extending south from Canada to the Texas Panhandle. Sometimes referred to as “the Great American Desert,” the Canadian portion was, at one point, called the Palliser Triangle. This was due to a report written by Captain John Palliser, who declared that the region was unsuited for agriculture. In addition to the three Canadian provinces, this “desert” included all or parts of ten states from the Missouri River in the east to the Rocky Mountains in the west. All of North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas are part of the Great Plains, in addition to the eastern parts of Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, New Mexico, and parts of Texas and Oklahoma. While there is considerable variation within the region, it is generally known as a treeless area with lots of sunshine and semi-arid conditions, and it is firmly held that, under the right conditions, it would support a crop economy. Part of the area is conducive to the growing of corn and soybeans, but most of it supports a wheat economy. At one time, custom combiners would start in Kansas, where the wheat matured earlier, and then work their way north into the Dakotas and the Prairie provinces, combining for farmers as they followed the crop cycle. In other words, the wheat economy defined the region (Fowke 1957, 282).

The Great Plains region is the least densely populated area on the continent. States that have retained agriculture as their dominant industry have experienced little growth. All states and provinces that are part of the plains region generally have weak economies and constantly lose people to other regions and/or bigger cities. There is no city in the entire Great Plains region that is now as big as either Edmonton or Calgary (assuming these two cities even belong to that region). The only exception is metropolitan Oklahoma City (which is about the same size as Calgary or Edmonton) and places at the boundaries of the region, such as Denver or Dallas-Fort Worth. The plains side of Colorado has experienced little growth, but the urban centres in the foothills (e.g., Denver, Colorado Springs) are experiencing explosive growth. It is therefore interesting that Alberta, which is at least partially a part of the Great Plains region, located at its northern extremities, should have experienced the growth that it has.

The agrarian foundation of plains life in the Canadian western interior is indisputable. Eighty percent of Canada’s total arable land is located in this region which is significant in view of the fact that only 7

percent of Canada's land surface is suitable for agriculture. The average Prairie farm is now at least three times larger than farms located elsewhere in the country, and 50 percent of all farms in Canada are located in this region. Ontario and Quebec have 40 percent of all farms in the country but only 13 percent of all farmland, which indicates that the size of farms there is much smaller than are those in the Prairies (*National Atlas of Canada*). The Canadian plains were originally settled on the assumption that crop farming would be the major source of income, with wheat as the dominant crop (this was often referred to as a wheat monoculture) along with some oats and barley. With the exception of some ranching in southern Alberta, livestock was not a primary source of income, and cattle were primarily raised for home consumption. After the Second World War, growing grains as livestock feed (particularly barley) became more important as livestock became an important exportable commodity. By 1958, cattle had become the single largest source of income for farmers in Alberta, replacing wheat (Minister of Industry 2004, 247–56). Diversification into new crops such as canola, sunflower seed, mustard seed, peas, and beans was motivated by new export markets.

Even though these three western interior provinces have 80 percent of the farmed land in the country, there are vast differences between them. Saskatchewan has 39.1 percent of all agricultural land in Canada, followed by Alberta with 30.9 percent, and Manitoba with 11.4 percent. About one-sixth of the Province of Manitoba (14.5 percent) is covered with water and much of the rest consists of the forest-covered escarpment of the Cambrian Shield. The province's fertile belt is primarily in the south and on the western borders, such as the Swan River Valley, most of which is devoted to crops rather than to pasture. Saskatchewan also has the majority of its land devoted to crops and a much lower percentage devoted to pasture. Alberta is distinct in that the proportion of land devoted to crops is almost equal to the proportion devoted to pasture, and this is reflected in the fact that about 40 percent of all of Canada's beef cattle industry is located in that province, with Saskatchewan next at about 18 percent. The northern part of all three interior provinces is boreal forest (see the map in figure 1). Even here Alberta is distinctive in that it has more territory available for settlement than any other province, primarily because people are able to engage in agriculture in the Peace River country to the north. In contrast, 90 percent of British Columbia is actually Crown land, much of which is licensed for forestry and mining, and agriculture is more limited (Friesen 1999, 75).

Saskatchewan, sometimes referred to as the breadbasket of the world, is the province with the highest wheat production. Its reliance on

The Western Interior

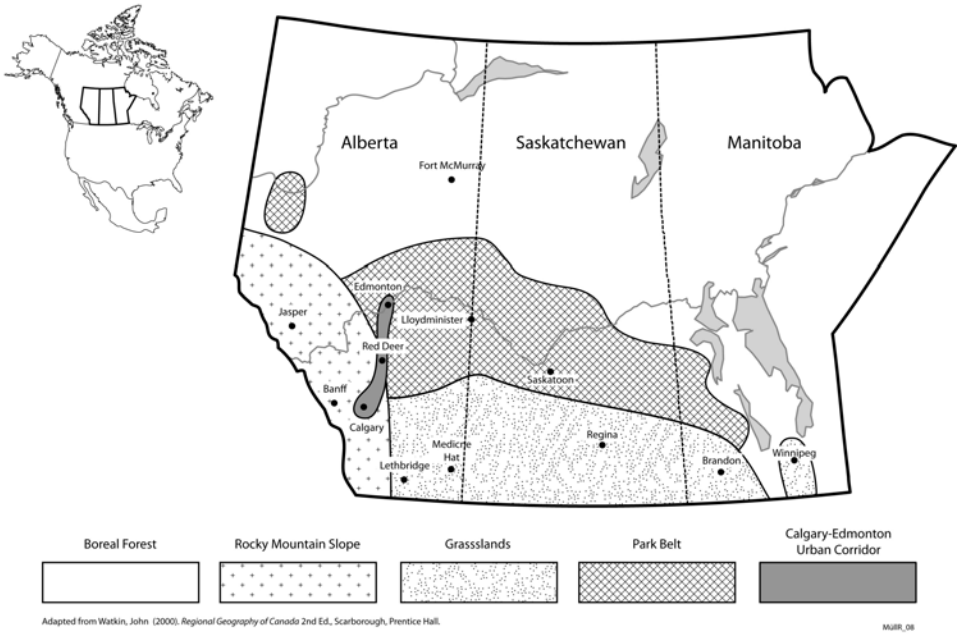


Figure 1

SOURCE: Adapted from John Warkentin. *A Regional Geography of Canada*, 2nd ed. (Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 2000).

wheat as a cash crop contrasts considerably with Alberta and Manitoba, both of which have much more mixed farming. Even as early as 1921, Manitoba field crops were less than 50 percent wheat, and Alberta had even more mixed farming, with the large production of barley, canola, vegetables, dairying, and livestock (Proudfoot 1972, 59–62). Thus as farms grew in size due to the mechanization of agriculture, Saskatchewan was affected more dramatically than were the other two provinces, and this resulted in less demand for labour, which, in turn, resulted in a smaller population. In contrast, the population growth poles were located in the other two provinces as Winnipeg, Edmonton, and Calgary became the three largest cities of the region.

If the imagery of the Prairies is based on the grasslands and the wheat economy, it is important to know that this economy and its environment no longer best represents the region and its residents. Figure 1 shows that Saskatchewan has the largest grasslands area of the three provinces,⁶ but only about 12 percent of the population of the western interior lives or works in areas that have these topographical characteristics. Considerably different from the grasslands in the south and the

forests in the north is a Parkland belt that is transitional between the two topographies. Here one finds a sedimentary basin of fertile soil, rolling hills, and clusters of trees, where there is mixed farming and more crop diversity. Whereas the grasslands had no river to tie the region together, the parkland area is structured around the Saskatchewan River. Almost 40 percent of the population of the western interior is found here, including centres such as Red Deer, Edmonton, Lloydminster, Saskatoon, and Yorkton. This is not the arid, shortgrass prairie but, rather, a fertile belt that supports diverse agricultural activity.⁷ Well over half of Alberta's agricultural production occurs in this parkland area rather than on the prairie (Ironsides 1984, 101). A fourth topographical area within the western interior is known as the Rocky Mountain Slopes. This encompasses the foothills and the mountains themselves, including not only the mountain communities of Banff and Jasper but also the Crowsnest Pass, Canmore, Calgary, and the area up to Lethbridge. Here about 25 percent of the population of the western interior region is located. This area, which is significantly different from the grasslands, is known for Chinook winds, coal, two-thirds of all irrigated crop production in Canada, feedlots, and tourism and recreation. Clearly, the region and its landscape is much more diverse than the term "Prairies" suggests.

The Dominion Lands Act had assumed that farm size of one-quarter section was the ideal, and yet that size seldom provided enough land to keep a farm economically viable (Voisey 1988, 128). Even at that, the thinness of the population on large and isolated homesteads made the region particularly difficult to govern (Bantjes 2005). Saskatchewan's demographic strength in the first half of the twentieth century was due to the fact that most of its population were farmers. However, the evolution of farming has truly transformed the region. If the concept of the Prairies or the plains is based on the physiography of the grasslands, that image no longer reflects the reality of life for most people in the western interior. Most people in the region no longer live on "the Prairies" but, rather, on parkland or the mountain slopes. Furthermore, most people in the region are not engaged in agriculture and now live in cities. Over 60 percent of the population of Manitoba now live in Winnipeg, a city of almost 700,000, and 63 percent of the population of Alberta live in Calgary and Edmonton, each with a population of 1 million. Only about 6 percent of the populations of Manitoba and Alberta live on farms or are engaged in agriculture. The level of urbanization is the lowest in Saskatchewan, which has smaller cities and a larger rural population (13 percent) than the other two western interior provinces, although even this low number represents a dramatic change from earlier years.

In 1941, there were almost 300,000 farms on the Canadian plains, but this number declined to 210,000 by 1961 and 125,000 by 2001. Rural depopulation was the natural result of the need for larger farms to ensure efficiency and sustainability, especially with the close of the pioneer era. Saskatchewan had almost as many farms as Manitoba and Alberta together, but after 1941, the decline in the number of farms was much sharper in that province than in the other two (table 14). Between 1941 and 1971, the number of farms in Saskatchewan dropped from 139,000 to 77,000, and by 2001 it had dropped to 51,000. At the same time, the size of farms increased from 175 hectares (432 acres) in 1941 to 342 hectares (845 acres) in 1971 to 519 hectares (1,283 acres) in 2001. By 2001, the number of farms in Saskatchewan and Manitoba had shrunk from their peak by about 175 percent, whereas the number of farms in Alberta had only shrunk by 85 percent, with the result that Alberta had more farms than either of the other two provinces. Saskatchewan had fewer farms, but they were now the largest in Canada by a considerable margin. With this kind of change, it is no wonder that the rural depopulation of Saskatchewan has been so dramatic and so continuous. The transformation of the old Prairie region is demonstrated yet again by the fact that the average size of farms in the western interior was now 424 hectares (1,048 acres), whereas the average size of farms elsewhere in Canada was only 109 hectares (269 acres).

Hilda, Alberta: Rural Settlement and Rural Depopulation

The hamlet of Hilda, Alberta, serves as a useful illustration of the growth and decline of a particular concept of the western interior. The rush of settlers into the region suggested that agriculture would be an anchor to a particular way of life that would dominate the area and support flourishing towns. However, changes that were never anticipated by these settlers eventually led to the collapse of the robust patterns that were initially established.

Located in the southeastern part of the province 80 kilometres northeast of Medicine Hat, and close to the Saskatchewan border, the Hilda area was originally home to indigenous peoples whose nomadic way of life meant that they had no permanent settlements. In the late nineteenth century ranchers moved into the area, but it was not until the early twentieth century that intense settlement whose purpose was the farming of what was essentially shortgrass virgin land began to occur. This was truly “the Prairies,” and the railway played a key role in opening them up. Settlers were required to work hard and live frugally, albeit with the promise of future rewards.

Homesteading and land ownership were particular attractions for the settlers, many of whom were German immigrants who had migrated from Russia. The years between 1910 and 1913 saw the largest influx of people, so that by 1921 the region in which Hilda was located (Improvement District #1) had grown to almost 10,000 people, and the immediate Hilda area itself had 1,400 residents. In 1923, the coming of the railroad to the town helped to support further growth so that at its peak, Hilda had six grain elevators and twenty-two businesses. These included lumber yards, implement dealers, general stores, a shoe repair, hardware stores, a lawyer, a blacksmith, a tailor, a watch repair, a bank, a hotel, and, ultimately, gas stations. It also had seven churches and a number of schools.

The community weathered the tough years of drought from 1917 to 1919, but the Depression of the 1930s began to take its toll and the process of rural depopulation began. The region was at its peak by the 1930s, but slowly the community lost its vitality as young people left and the process of farm consolidation began. Businesses in the community remained reasonably strong until the 1950s, and then they too began to collapse. The construction of Highway 41 to Medicine Hat shortened the travel time to larger centres, and local businesses could not compete. By 1951, Improvement District #1 had only 5,000 people left from the previous 10,000. Hilda itself only had sixty-five residents by 1986, and the area only had about two persons per 2.59 square kilometres (1 square mile). Whereas the Hilda area had once had 1,400 inhabitants, there were only about 200 by the turn of the millennium. There were virtually no businesses left, no schools, and only two churches.

Homesteading provided the incentive for thousands of people to flock into the Prairie region as agriculturalists, but it was only a short-term settlement for many, and it lasted, at most, for one generation. A combination of factors pertaining to changes in farming methods, economics, new agricultural technologies, and new urban opportunities meant that the dreams of many for a strong rural western interior would be significantly altered. Much of the imagery of the “Prairie West” is based on the early years of rural settlement and vitality; however, this imagery has undergone a considerable metamorphosis.

Source: Based on material from the Southeast Alberta Regional Planning Commission, Regional Population Study (1980) and Welcome to Hilda, 3rd ed. (2000).

I have already shown that the emphasis on the geographical characteristics of the region is misleading because it focuses on one particular physiographic trait – the shortgrass prairie, even though, within the region, there are significant differences in everything from topography to precipitation, temperatures, vegetation, humidity, and minerals (Card 1960:1). These differences have played an enormous role in changing settlement patterns and developing economies. For example, places close to the mountains are deemed to be more preferable for habitation than are flatlands, while locations devoted to mineral extraction have drawn larger labour pools than have agricultural places. These examples show that the region consists of created space (i.e., space constructed by human decisions) as well as geographic space. Calgary, for instance, was created as a result of the Canadian Pacific Railway's decision to have a terminus there; Winnipeg's location on a railroad line resulted in its becoming a centre of investment in manufacturing and regional distribution. Later technologies (e.g., air travel) and new ports and shipping possibilities (e.g., through the Panama Canal) took much of this dynamic away from Winnipeg. While oil is found in all of the western provinces, investment and administration of the oil industry are sited in Alberta, and this has had a particularly profound effect on that province. Furthermore, the timing of oil's discovery and the changing demands for it have also played a role in creating differences within the region. Clearly, there is considerable variation within the region not only as the result of natural factors but also as the result of investment, political decisions, and international factors.

The western interior region has undergone a major transformation. Almost 60 percent of the population of the region now lives in one province – Alberta. Throughout the region, urbanization has transformed what was once an orientation to rural agricultural grasslands. In other words, the concept of “the Prairies” no longer reflects the dominant way of life in this region.

THE NATURE AND STRUCTURE OF THE OLD WEST

Much of the Old West needs to be understood as rooted in the pioneer economy and as adjusting to its aftermath. In pioneer areas, people were sometimes referred to as “sodbusters” (van Herk 2001) and often settled without the right skills or backgrounds to enhance the likelihood of success. Voisey (1988, 33–52) has demonstrated that one of the major attractions of migration to the Canadian West was the prospect

of land appreciation, which encouraged speculation. The assumption was that as a community matured, land values would rise and produce economic gain regardless of whether farming was a success. Voisey discovered townships in which half of the original settlers were gone in less than ten years, and only one-quarter of these settlers were left twenty-five years later. Transiency and mobility were much more typical than is often thought, suggesting that the optimism that was part of this settlement period was clearly countered by flux and change amidst challenges and difficulties. Thus, the promise of the West was experienced by people in different ways, and perseverance and abandonment were countervailing forces among the settlers.

McGinnis (1977) viewed 1936 as the apogee of the pioneer economy that had held for thirty years but then began to crumble. For example, in Alberta, since 1900, 14.6 million hectares (36 million acres) of land had been occupied for the first time, 1,216 grain elevators were built (an average of forty per year), and 105,550 rural dwelling units were constructed. By 1936, 63 percent of the population of Alberta was considered rural, and 52 percent of the labour force was actively engaged in agriculture. In the next fifteen years, there was a massive exodus from farms and villages (over 150,000 persons left), and the number of people employed in agriculture declined by 27 percent. Rather than view these agriculturalists as independent farmers (as Macpherson [1953] does), McGinnis notes that they were either marginal undercapitalized farmers or farm labourers who sought any means possible to supplement their meagre incomes as pioneers searching for cash. Farms were often too small and crops unpredictable. If families did not leave the farm, then their children certainly did in the form of surplus labour. Thus, while a large labour pool was needed in the initial settling of the land, the consolidation of farm size was largely the result of the inability of farmers to sustain themselves, with many having to leave. The Depression merely served as the catalyst to provoke an exodus whose root cause lay in an overexpansion of the agricultural sector (Burnet 1951).

As has been stated, Winnipeg was the gateway city to the Old West. In comparison to other cities in the western interior, Winnipeg was transversed by both transcontinental railway lines and, before amalgamation, as many as twenty-four railway lines serviced it (Friesen 1984, 275). Symbolic of its critical function as “bull’s eye of the Dominion” were the Grain Exchange, the Grain Grower’s Guide, the financial district (with its imposing stone structures), warehousing (particularly with regard to hardware companies like Ashdowns and Mar-

shall Wells), catalogue goods (as represented by Eaton's), railroad marshalling yards with thousands of cars, and the arts and entertainment district. The intersection of "Portage and Main" was a locational coordinate well known to every westerner and represented big-city prestige in the form of banking, finance, investment, and wholesaling. The sense of Winnipeg's being a big city was reflected in the clashes between workers and large organizations that produced the Winnipeg General Strike in 1919 as well as in the prophets of the social gospel, such as William Woodsworth, who advocated a society in which the poor and disadvantaged should have an opportunity to succeed. Winnipeg may have begun as a hinterland city, but it grew to become the "Chicago of the North," with large mansion-like dwellings as well as acute poverty (especially among immigrants in the North End), suggesting an urban centre with typical urban problems. Winnipeg became the third largest city in Canada, and, by 1951, its population was larger than all Prairie cities combined.

Vancouver, because of its internodal capabilities as the terminus for the railroad and as a Pacific port, challenged Winnipeg's role. The opening of the Panama Canal in 1914 allowed Vancouver to be another outlet for Prairie wheat, with the result that it was no longer necessary to depend entirely on moving eastward from Winnipeg to Port Arthur and Fort William (now Thunder Bay) through the Great Lakes to the Atlantic. British Columbia was unique not only in having much more racial diversity than other provinces in Canada but also in having a working class even more strident than that of Winnipeg. Mining, forestry, and shipping were tasks that involved people working for large organizations in a situation in which profits were unpredictable and union solidarity was strong. Between Vancouver and Winnipeg, and particularly east of the Continental Divide, however, the West remained primarily a rural-oriented society in that residents either lived on the land or provided services for the rural economy.

TRANSITION FROM THE OLD WEST TO THE NEW WEST

The years between 1951 and 1971 form the transitional period between the Old West and the New West. Whereas agriculture had once defined the western interior and most people were engaged in it, the rural non-farm population and the urban population began to grow more rapidly during this period as people moved off of marginal farm operations (Hay 1992). In 1941, almost 60 percent of Saskatchewan's population and 48 percent of Alberta's population were farm-based;

however, by 2001, that number dropped to 13 percent and 6 percent, respectively. The farm population in Saskatchewan in 1941 was just over half a million, but that number dropped to fewer than 125,000 by 2001. In short, the agricultural transformation in Saskatchewan had a much more devastating impact on that province than the agricultural transformation in Alberta had on that province. Whereas, in 1931, two-thirds of the population of the Prairie West had been agriculturalists, by 1951 that number had dropped to less than 40 percent. On the other hand, the rural non-farm and urban population increased substantially. Whereas, in 1941, Winnipeg had a larger population than all of the other major urban centres in the region combined, by 1971, Edmonton had almost caught up with it, and Calgary was not far behind.

Because the Homestead Act had required that people settle on the land in order to own it, the Old West was characterized by a whole series of small towns strung together along railroad lines, with a grain elevator, a few stores, a school, and a church or two (Mackintosh 1934). There were 2,423 such villages strung across the region in 1930, two-thirds of which had fewer than ten stores (Zimmerman and Moneo 1971, 3, 28). Improvements in transportation (e.g., the automobile and highways) lessened dependence on the railroad and allowed some communities to play more of a retail function. By 1966, there were 11 Prairie cities, 164 trading communities, and 1,401 dependent villages in the region. Small communities had difficulty surviving and retail centres grew by servicing the farm community. Thus emerged small farm cities like Brooks, Stettler, Dauphin, Altona, Estevan, Kindersley, and Melfort, which consolidated smaller communities into larger ones. As farms became larger and schools were consolidated, and as transportation improvements continued to make longer trips possible, even these communities faced pressure from the increasingly dominant bigger cities. Many places that had once served as “hometowns” centred on schools and local businesses had become minimum convenience centres as busing took children to schools in larger centres that also had better shopping and other service facilities. Nowhere is this more noticeable than in Saskatchewan, where many places that had served as partial or complete shopping centres had lost that function. Whereas there were 271 minimum convenience centres in 1961, that number had climbed to 500 in 1995 as many communities lost their structural stability (Stabler and Olfert 1996). One of the indicators of this transformation was the abandonment of rail lines, which was the result of replacing grain elevators with centralized grain terminals owned by large inte-

grated companies like Agricore. This process began in the 1970s and reached a crescendo in the 1990s with the abolishment of the Crow freight rates. Not only had rail service been discontinued in many rural areas, but railroad tracks were being removed leaving no trace of the earlier era.

The transition from the Old West to the New West took place over a number of years and was related to several important changes. To begin with, 1951 marks the first year that the size of the urban population surpassed that of the rural population. Thus began the continuing process of the region's becoming overwhelmingly urban (Lamont and Proudfoot 1975). From 1951 to 1971, the growth of Alberta's two major cities outstripped the growth of other Prairie cities, and this growth occurred primarily as the result of rural-urban migration from within the region. Between 1941 and 1971, the number of occupied farms declined by 41 percent, while the amount of land dedicated to farming increased by 11 percent (Gibbins 1980, 78-9), suggesting that farming was now becoming a highly capitalized business rather than a traditional way of life. Crop diversification was also increasing, and cattle production had become more prominent. Rural depopulation was encouraged not only as the result of the mechanization of agriculture, or because farms needed to become larger in order to be economically viable, but also as a response to the employment and educational opportunities of urban life (Weir 1972, 97-8). From 1941 to 1956, 79 percent of the 7,237 townships in the Prairie region lost population (Weir 1972, 96). And, of the population that remained in the rural areas by the end of the century, only about one-quarter of it was still engaged in farming as off-farm employment had become increasingly common (Stabler and Olfert 2002). Gibbins (1980, 93) argues that, by the 1970s, the sense of a distinct and homogeneous Prairie culture consisting of agrarians had been largely eroded.

Another factor in this transition to a New West was the crystallization of distinct provincial identities.⁸ In spite of the fact that the Prairie experience may have bred a particular personality type consisting of courageous pragmatists and individualists devoted to hard work (Lautt 1973, 128-30), each province developed a very different political history. Born in the tough times of crop failures, market fluctuations, and the Depression, Alberta and Saskatchewan, in particular, developed their own traditions both of protest and of internal cooperation (Brym 1978). In Alberta, the emergence of governments led by the United Farmers of Alberta in 1921 and Social Credit in 1935 began a tradition of protest and alienation from central Canada. This tradition

galvanized support against external control by using the provincial state as an instrument of power within a context of free enterprise. Using a somewhat different model, the people of Saskatchewan elected a Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) government in 1944, which expressed their alienation through a unique form of cooperation known as agrarian socialism (Lipset 1968). By the fiftieth anniversary of both provinces in 1955, each had already made its distinct political mark on the Canadian landscape through their respective divergent ideologies. The political dimensions of British Columbia and Manitoba were different yet again, suggesting that a New West was emerging in which political traditions and cultures demonstrated considerable variability in spite of whatever else they may have held in common (Wiseman 1996). Thus, while the Old West was divided into two regions, the Prairies and the Coast (“the West and the Far West” [British Columbia sometimes being referred to as “the West beyond the West”]), where wheat contended with lumbering and fishing, and Winnipeg and Vancouver were the major cities, the New West was becoming much more complex and was defined by increasingly unique provincial political cultures, all of which detracted from a sense of regional commonality.

A third factor in this transitional phase was the shift to new industries. If in the Old West the goal was to settle the West as an agricultural community, the transitional years sought to stabilize that community through various government supports such as the Canadian Wheat Board. But the New West experienced a shift away from agriculture as the focus moved to new nodes of employment based on resources and services. Nickel mining in Manitoba and potash mining in Saskatchewan are two examples of a new employment generator. The discovery of vast deposits of hydrocarbons in Alberta in the late 1940s started a process of development that slowly began to transform that province. Alberta also began to build on advantages that it had already developed in the manufacturing sector – advantages that Saskatchewan did not have (Emery and Kneebone 2005). The 1950s and 1960s, then, were stabilizing yet momentum-building transitional years, especially for Alberta, and they set the stage for a restructured West within Canadian society.

THE NEW WEST

Natural resources played the most critical role in reconfiguring the West. More specifically, the discovery of oil in Leduc in 1947 eventually completely reorganized the regional economy (Barr 1972) and gave

Alberta a strategic advantage over the rest of the West. While Leduc may have been the symbolic beginning of the oil boom, the full impact of that development did not begin until the 1970s, when the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)-induced energy crisis led to a dramatic increase in oil prices. Thus, if the 1950s and 1960s were transitional years between the Old West and the New West, the latter begins in the 1970s, when Alberta took the momentum.

In Alberta, at the political level, the emergence of the New West is most distinctly linked to the election of Peter Lougheed's Progressive Conservative Party in 1971. Social Credit, which had been in power since 1935, had stood for a rural-based Alberta, and it came to power representing the interests of agriculturalists in a fight against eastern domination and big business. The long-standing premier Ernest Manning had led the province through the early years of the oil era but had now retired, and his party was struggling to find its way with voters who were now overwhelmingly urban. The election of the Lougheed government represented the rise of a new urban-educated voter who was middle class and whose goals resonated with the dreams of new elites who saw the possibilities for a different kind of Alberta. Lougheed's policies sought to capture more of the resource royalties for province-building, aimed to enlarge the petrochemical industry to capture more of the forward-processing opportunities from oil and gas, and also wanted to support the building of local capital pools and local entrepreneurship.

THE DEMOGRAPHIC BASIS OF THE NEW WEST

After the initial settlement period (1901-1931), during which Alberta's population grew tenfold in thirty years, from 73,000 to 732,000, the province experienced a net migration loss from 1931 to 1941 as the impact of the Depression, drought, and poor cash prices for grain led many to leave their agricultural way of life and seek new residential alternatives. However, in comparison to the other provinces in the western interior, which continued to lose population through out-migration in subsequent years, Alberta recovered somewhat. And, particularly after the Second World War, its cities became a popular destination for those leaving the land throughout the region. Therefore, while, in 1931, Manitoba had a similar population (700,000) to Alberta's (732,000), and Saskatchewan's was even bigger (922,000), by the 1950s, Alberta's population began to grow at a different pace from

that of the other western provinces. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Manitoba had the largest population of all the western provinces. However, it was surpassed by Saskatchewan, whose population remained the largest of the western provinces until 1941, after which a decline set in followed by slow growth for the rest of the century. By the turn of the twenty-first century, Manitoba's population was just over 1 million (1.1 million), while Saskatchewan's population was just under 1 million. In comparison to Manitoba and Saskatchewan, the population of Alberta continued to grow, particularly after 1951, to over 3 million by the end of the century.

British Columbia's population size was similar to that of the other western provinces until 1951, after which it grew at an even more brisk pace than theirs. The westward shift of population became clear. Manitoba's and then Saskatchewan's population dominance at the beginning of the twentieth century was completely reversed by the end of the century, when British Columbia had the highest population (4 million) followed by Alberta (3 million). At the end of century the Canadian West was a very different place from what it was at the beginning of the century as the population balance shifted from the two eastern provinces to the two western provinces. Manitoba's and Saskatchewan's share of the West's population declined after 1951, while Alberta's and British Columbia's increased (see figure 2).

The primary reason for the growth differential among the four western provinces as the Old West shifted to the New West was that, by the 1930s, migration no longer served as a positive determining factor in the growth of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. From 1941 onwards, both of these provinces consistently experienced population losses through out-migration. A relatively high birth rate contributed to population growth, but this did not stop the leakage due to out-migration. Winnipeg experienced some population growth in the postwar years through immigration; however, generally speaking, Manitoba and Saskatchewan lost population in the domestic migration trade. In contrast, Alberta and British Columbia became major recipients of interprovincial migration, especially from Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

If Saskatchewan and Manitoba experienced little population growth, what accounts for the growth rates of Alberta and British Columbia? Three dimensions of population growth are relevant to this analysis: (1) growth by births minus deaths, which provides a rate of natural increase; (2) growth by interprovincial migration, including that between in-migrants and out-migrants, yielding a net interprovincial migration rate; and (3) growth through international migration.