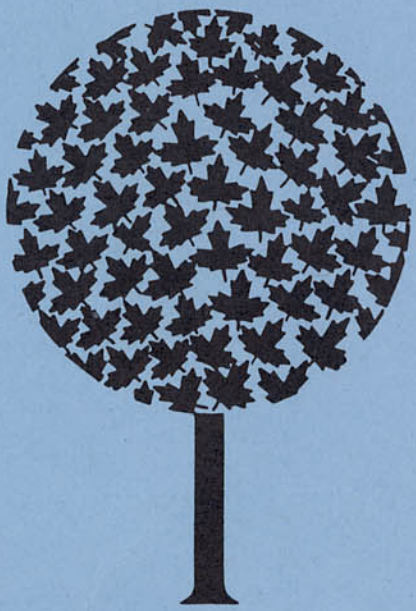
PRAIRIE URBAN DEVELOPMENT 1870 — 1930

Alan F.J. Artibise

THE CANADIAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION



HISTORICAL BOOKLET No. 34

PRAIRIE URBAN DEVELOPMENT 1870 — 1930

Alan F.J. Artibise

Department of History
University of Victoria

ISBN 0-88798-221-2 *Historical Booklets*
ISSN 0068-886X *Historical Booklets* (Print)
ISSN 1715-8621 *Historical Booklets* (Online)

THE CANADIAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION BOOKLETS
No. 34
OTTAWA, 1981

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

ALAN F.J. ARTIBISE is an Associate Professor of History at the University of Victoria. A graduate of the Universities of Manitoba and British Columbia, Dr. Artibise has taught at Cariboo College in Kamloops, B.C. and, in 1975-76, was Western Canadian Historian at the National Museum of Man in Ottawa. He is the author of several books and numerous articles on Winnipeg, including *Winnipeg in Maps/Winnipeg par les cartes, 1816-1972* (Ottawa, 1975); *Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, 1874-1914* (Montreal, 1975); *Winnipeg: An Illustrated History* (Toronto, 1977); and *Gateway City: Documents on the City of Winnipeg* (Winnipeg, 1979). He has co-edited (with Gilbert A. Stelter) *The Canadian City: Essays in Urban History* (Toronto, 1977), and *The Usable Urban Past: Planning and Politics in the Modern Canadian City* (Toronto, 1979); and edited *Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development* (forthcoming, 1981). Professor Artibise is editor of the *Urban History Review/Revue d'histoire urbaine* and general editor of the *History of Canadian Cities Series.* He is also on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Urban History* and the *Historical Atlas of Canada.*

CANADIAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION BOOKLET
OTTAWA, 1980.

PRAIRIE URBAN DEVELOPMENT
1870 - 1930

Introduction: The Urban Dimension of Prairie History

The field of Canadian urban history has grown dramatically in the last decade. The reasons for this phenomenon are numerous and have been examined in some detail by several scholars. But while there has been considerable growth, the field of urban history is still undeveloped. There are many gaps in our knowledge of different regions, time periods, and themes. These gaps are especially evident in the west and the need for an assessment of the urban dimension of prairie history is obvious. Recent reviews of western Canadian history indicate that urban studies has not yet achieved a place of equality beside such areas as political, ethnic, native, or labour history. One of The main reasons for this is that, unlike these areas of study, the writing of urban history most often begins with a local situation and local history; unfortunately, it rarely attracts the attention of professional scholars. Many of the studies of western towns and cities are primarily accounts of local events with the emphasis on the greatness and uniqueness of community achievements. Often written to commemorate an anniversary, these pleasant volumes usually do not go beyond the chronicling of events. The authors rarely ask meaningful questions about the process of urbanization, content through elaborate accounts of the first settlers to establish ties with a glorious past. This is not to say that these volumes are not useful in the search for historical understanding; they are. The "antiquarian" writers base their work on the assumption that specific towns and cities have distinct personalities, and this is a tradition that still has value. As well, these studies serve as valuable sources in their own right. They provide an outline of past events and a place to begin study. Any professional historian interested in a given community has a marked advantage if he finds one or more accounts prepared by the local anniversary committee or by other groups or individuals.

For all its value, however, most antiquarian local history remains parochial and in an age when the purpose of history is no longer to glorify the past but to enable a society to understand itself, new approaches are necessary. A more sophisticated methodology must be adopted, one that includes more interpretation and analysis of historical events, exploration into the causes and processes of social change, the study of the relationship among the several dimensions of human experience (political, economic, social, demographic, and spatial), and the use of the relevant tools and

concepts developed by the social sciences. In addition, the urban historian has to be concerned with the historical process of urbanization, a process which envelopes an enormous range of places, not only within one country, but across the face of the globe. The challenge is to relate this complex process to the specific experience of particular places; to use the particularity of place to illustrate the generalities of the process and vice versa. Urban historians must take a town or city and explain its present condition in terms of the historical forces that have put it there, thus providing a measure of understanding of the way in which people attempt to order their lives and to participate in the decisions that give a particular place a style, form, and direction. In this way local history ceases to be parochial and becomes part of a larger story.

In western Canadian terms, the study of urban development serves many purposes. It not only broadens our understanding of the general process of urbanization, but it deepens our understanding of the complexities of regional development. The urban frontier was one of the vital elements in Canada's western expansion. Towns and cities introduced a dynamic and aggressive element into the west and played a key role in transforming a sparsely settled fur-trading expanse into a settled and well-integrated region. In this process, the interdependent relationship of city and countryside was clearly evident. The rapidity and degree of prairie urbanization was closely tied to agricultural and transportation technology, for the very existence of towns and cities depended upon the ability of the rural population to produce a surplus beyond its immediate needs and to move the product to markets. But it was the urban centres that were the driving forces behind many of the dramatic changes that occurred on the prairies in the six decades following confederation.

The Pre-Urban Era

The process of prairie urban development in the years before 1930 can best be outlined by examining it in four distinguishable phases. The first was a pre-urban stage that lasted for almost two centuries, ending only in the early 1870s when a series of political decisions — Confederation, the sale of Rupert's Land by the Hudson's Bay Company to the Dominion of Canada, and the creation of the Province of Manitoba — opened a new era in western Canadian history. Prior to these dramatic events, the prairie west had no urban centres. The economic base of the region was the H.B.C. fur trade; any agriculture that was practised was at the subsistence level. The only commercial centres were scattered H.B.C. posts managed by a few traders and these could scarcely claim urban stature. In this pre-railway age, settlement was associated with rivers and the various population concentrations were linked only by boat or the Red River carts that plied prairie fur trade trails.

Five settlements that began in this pre-urban age, however, were destined to become towns and cities in the post-1870 period. At the eastern terminus of the Carleton Trail were located the Red River Colony and Fort Garry. The former had been begun by Lord Selkirk in 1811-1812; the latter was established by the H.B.C. in 1835. Neither of these settlements can be regarded as the basis for urban growth for the lack of immigration and efficient linkages with the outside world resulted in very slow development. It was not until the 1860s that events occurred which soon led to the establishment of a distinct urban centre. During this decade a small commercial centre named Winnipeg emerged near Upper Fort Garry to compete with the Company in servicing incoming plains traders and supplying the needs of the Red River Colony. By 1870, Winnipeg, consisted of a few frame structures and some 100 inhabitants and offered a number of services, several hotels and specialized retail outlets.

Across the Red River from Winnipeg was the St. Boniface mission. It had been established in 1818 by two Quebec priests and it soon became one of the most urbane communities on the prairies. Catholic missionaries from central Canada erected a chapel and a school in 1818 and by 1827 the latter was well established and on its way to becoming the College of St. Boniface. By 1870, the population of this settlement was approaching 800 — far exceeding that of Winnipeg.

To the west, along the banks of the Assiniboine River, was Portage la Prairie, established as a mission in 1853. An H.B.C. trading post was erected at the site in 1856 but neither mission nor fort attracted a concentration of settlement. Although all trade for the western area passed through Portage, the settlement was in most respects an offshoot of the settlement at Fort Garry. To the west and north of Portage another mission and H.B.C. post were located in close proximity; both Prince Albert Mission and Fort Albert were established in 1866. By 1870, there were approximately 100 inhabitants dispersed along the banks of the North Saskatchewan River but no service centre nucleus had yet developed. At the western terminus of the Carleton Trail and also on the banks of the North Saskatchewan River was Edmonton House, one of the H.B.C.'s most important entrepôts. This fort acted as a collection centre for furs for the Saskatchewan District and the distribution centre for goods from Winnipeg. The population of Edmonton House was approximately 150 by Confederation, although this size belied its administrative and distributive importance.

By 1870, then, the prairie west contained only a few settlements. The entire population of the region was about 70,000 and virtually none of these people could be counted as urban dwellers. Change was in the air, however, and during the next three decades the fur trading economy with its few small posts was replaced by a commercial agricultural economy organized by and around numerous villages, towns, and cities.

The Formative Years, 1871-1901

Between 1871 and 1901, the population of the prairies jumped from 70,000 to more than 400,000, and almost twenty per cent lived in urban centres with populations exceeding 1,000 (Appendix, Table I). By this date, too, the region had three incorporated cities, twenty-five towns, and fifty-seven villages. More than eighteen of these centres had populations exceeding 1,000, six had populations exceeding 5,000, and one had a population in excess of 40,000 (Appendix, Tables II, III, IV).

The reasons for this substantial growth in the number of urban centres are complex and cannot be adequately analysed here. It can be noted, however, that while such factors as the state of agricultural and transportation technology, federal policy toward the west, and general economic conditions were of substantial significance, so too, were the actions of prairie urban residents. Acting as individuals or as groups, people had a crucial impact on the shape of the prairie urban system and on the growth rate of villages, towns and cities. If prairie leaders had held different beliefs and adopted different growth strategies than they did, prairie urban development would have followed patterns quite unlike those which are described here. In other words, prairie urban development cannot be explained entirely or satisfactorily in terms of the usual factors of site and situation. Only in a very limited sense do these impersonal factors explain growth, especially in the initial decades of urban development. The physical and economic environments are inert and unimportant until human effort is applied to them. Urban centres or regions do not grow in the organic sense of the word; they are, rather, the product of tens of thousands of individual and group decisions. These decisions are, in turn, a product of a particular cultural milieu and reflect the biases and knowledge of the actors.

Among the strongest biases of prairie urban residents was the belief that railroads were an essential ingredient for growth. The *Manitoba Free Press* stated this widely shared belief bluntly in December 1873: "The two great wants of this country are railroads and settlers. The former is necessary to secure the latter." Consequently, community leaders spared no effort in attempting to attract railways to their particular location, and for good reason. Virtually all the centres that sprang up or grew significantly in this second era of development were located on railway lines or in the path of projected lines (see Map I). The fact was that the 1870s were the beginning of a new era in which subsistence agriculture was replaced by the production of agricultural surplus for export. The development of commercial agriculture — indeed, the mere anticipation of it — brought about the rise of centres of distribution. The reciprocal relationship between town and country was clear. As Paul Voisey has noted:

The Prairie pioneer was no self-sufficient farmer but an agricultural industrialist engaged in commercial trading. He produced a large surplus of grain and was a heavy consumer of manufactured goods. He needed grain shipping depots, farm implements, hardware goods, wagons, harnesses, lumber and other supplies. He needed banking services to finance these investments. He needed consumer goods that he could not produce himself: clothing and staple foodstuffs. As a result, every rural community needed a town, both as a shipping point that gathered surplus grain, and as a distribution point that fanned manufactured goods back into the countryside.

To survive and to grow, incipient service centres needed capital, agricultural hinterlands, and transportation connections. The most important of these essentials for every aspiring metropolis was the railway. "Railways and continually improving transportation were as essential as rain and sun to progressive settlement on the Canadian prairie. Nearness to railways and projected railways was of first importance to the settler."

In the three decades following 1870, approximately 3,600 miles of rail were laid in the prairie west. The most dramatic growth of settlement occurred along the main line and branch lines of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and among these settlements none grew as rapidly as Winnipeg. The first railway reached Winnipeg in 1878, connecting the community with St. Paul and Chicago. By 1883, the C.P.R. stretched north of the Great Lakes to link Winnipeg with eastern Canada, and two years later the first transcontinental line was complete. Winnipeg was also a focal point for several branch lines in Manitoba and together these external and internal linkages contributed to its growth and dominance. By 1881, Winnipeg's population was 8,000 and during the next decade it more than tripled. Wholesaling was organized during these years and with the increase of towns and service centres in the prairie west Winnipeg merchants were soon establishing branch offices. Financial, retail and merchandising operations also increased in number. In 1881-1882, Winnipeg experienced a tremendous real estate boom and although it soon collapsed, real growth did take place and the initial physical infrastructure of an urban centre — railways, hotels, warehouses, offices, stores — had been acquired. By the early 1880s, Winnipeg was firmly established as the dominant western urban centre.

Elsewhere in Manitoba, new centres appeared and older centres grew, although nowhere was change as substantial as in Winnipeg. St. Boniface was incorporated as a town in 1883 but, given its proximity to Winnipeg, was to remain in that city's shadow in subsequent years. Portage la Prairie grew more rapidly and established itself as a secondary centre. Incorpo-

rated as a town in 1880 and situated on the main line of the C.P.R., Portage grew steadily in the early part of the decade and by 1901 was the third largest settlement in Manitoba. The second largest town was Brandon. Established by the C.P.R. in 1881 and incorporated as a city in 1882 (with a population of 3,000), this centre was evidence of the magic of railways. It was known to most westerners that the C.P.R. would establish a divisional point some 100 miles west of Winnipeg. But when speculators attempted to sell a proposed town site to the C.P.R. for what the company felt was an unreasonable sum, the company simply moved two miles west and created the instant town of Brandon. When other incipient centres tried to compete with the new boom town they were destined to fail since no one was going to buy lots in a town where the train did not stop. The C.P.R. thus became a significant prairie town builder and the Brandon story was repeated many times.

Two other Manitoba centres also learned of the power of the railway during these years, but with less pleasant results than Brandon. Emerson (the former site of Pembina) was surveyed in 1874 when it was believed that its intervening location between Winnipeg and out-of-province centres would guarantee its future. Its rail connection with Winnipeg and the anticipation of further branch line connections led to the incorporation of Emerson as a town in 1880 and by the spring of 1882 it had a population of 2,500 and was thriving as the supply base of southwestern Manitoba. But when a railway was constructed to Morris and Morden, by-passing Emerson, the town's growth halted and a long period of population decline set in. By 1886 Emerson was a dull place with empty warehouses and stores, and vacant homes. People had simply left to establish businesses in the new towns along the C.P.R.'s Pembina branch.

Selkirk's early history was similar, although its story is more dramatic since it had hoped to become the hub of railway operations in the west. Until 1880 it was the plan of the C.P.R. to cross the Red River at Selkirk, not at Winnipeg, placing the former community on the main line and excluding the latter. This anticipation caused a surge of growth in Selkirk until the Winnipeg business community marshalled their forces and succeeded in having the decision changed. Thus, when the C.P.R. crossed the Red River at Winnipeg, Selkirk had to be content with remaining the centre of steamboat, lumbering and fishing operations on Lake Winnipeg. It was, at best, a poor second prize. By 1901 Selkirk's population was barely 2,000.

The rise and growth of towns and cities in the rest of the prairie west in this era was also closely related to railways. The most dramatic growth occurred along the C.P.R. main line where the towns of Regina, Moose Jaw, Swift Current, Medicine Hat, and Calgary suddenly came to life. Few other western urban centres illustrated the power of the C.P.R. so well as

did Regina. It possessed no natural advantages as a townsite since it was situated on the treeless plain with only the meandering Pile of Bones (Wascana) Creek as a nearby source of water. As well, the site had not previously possessed any commercial importance; until 1882 the nearest settlement was the H.B.C. post on the Qu'Appelle Lakes, thirty-five miles to the northeast. Yet by 1883 Regina was incorporated as a town and by 1888 it claimed a population of 1,400.

The C.P.R.'s ability to control townsite selection and land sales on the prairies was well-known. The choice of Regina, however, was not unchallenged. In 1882, Edgar Dewdney, federally appointed Lieutenant-Governor of the North West Territories, was authorized to select a site for a new capital to replace Battleford on the now abandoned northern route of the C.P.R. Earlier, Dewdney and several colleagues had purchased several sections of the H.B.C. land adjacent to the route of the C.P.R. and, not surprisingly, it was alleged that he had been influenced by his investments and not by the merits of the site. The C.P.R., rarely outmanoeuvred in such matters, located its station two miles from the Dewdney property and since the railway station was always a focal point in a new settlement, its land sales soon outstripped its rivals. The Lieutenant-Governor retaliated by pressuring Ottawa to establish all public buildings on his land, but without much success. At the urging of the C.P.R., the customs office, post office, and dominion land office were all located near the station and it was here that the centre of the new city remained. The C.P.R. also struck back at Dewdney by situating its divisional point forty miles to the west at Moose Jaw and this move cancelled hopes for branch line construction out of Regina and dampened its chances for future growth. Some growth did take place, however, since by the end of 1882 Regina had a population of "around 800 or 900." There was little settlement in Regina's hinterland though and the town functioned mainly as an administrative centre and shipping point rather than as a service centre. By 1901 it was still a small town with a population of only 2,249.

The complicated manoeuvres of Dewdney and the C.P.R. spurred the rise of Moose Jaw, although unlike Regina, Moose Jaw possessed natural advantages. The site on the Moose Jaw Creek had long been used by the Indians for camping and it was situated on several well-used trails. Thus, in anticipation of the railway passing through the Moose Jaw region, prospective settlers and speculators located in the area in July, 1881. But it was the actual arrival of the C.P.R. the next year that changed Moose Jaw within a matter of months from an outpost on a lonely trail to a bustling prairie boom town of tents, shacks, and small stores. By 1884 Moose Jaw was incorporated as a town with a population of about 700. In the next fifteen years, however, Moose Jaw grew slowly; by 1901 it had a population of but 1,557. Like most other prairie communities, Moose

Jaw suffered from the slowness of settlement in the region in these years, but evidence exists to suggest that the town's citizens themselves did not always do all that they could to promote and develop their own community.

Swift Current and Medicine Hat were also in large part products of the C.P.R.; both were chosen as divisional points by the company and during the 1880s and 1890s the C.P.R. payroll sustained the hamlets. Swift Current's growth was painfully slow. By 1901, it had a population — according to the federal census — of a mere 121 and did not obtain village status until 1904. Medicine Hat developed slightly more rapidly; it became a village in 1894 and a town in 1898 and by 1901 had a population of 1,570. By turn of the century, however, both communities were still waiting for substantial development to take place.

In contrast to these communities, Calgary's growth was remarkable. For Calgary, at the junction of the Bow and Elbow Rivers, was chosen by the North West Mounted Police in 1875 and soon H.B.C. and other traders clustered under the protective wing of the law to form the settlement first known as the Elbow. In the next seven years, the community acted as a focal point linking the fur trade of the north with American distributing centres, and by 1881 it had a population of about 100. In the next two years, however, dramatic growth occurred with the approach and, in August 1883, the arrival of the C.P.R. line. The railroad changed Calgary from a police post to an urban centre as the power of the C.P.R. was again demonstrated. The company, rather than locating its station on or near the site of the fort, where a nucleus of permanently settled residents existed, chose a spot three quarters of a mile west of the fort. Despite objections, Calgary businessmen soon followed and many even moved their buildings nearer the station. By 1884, incorporation as a town was secured and Calgary's continued survival and growth seemed assured. In the next few years it quickly grew to become the dominant urban centre on the western plains.

The construction of the main line of the C.P.R. also spawned a number of other, smaller communities during these crucial years. But for most settlements off the main line the period was one of stagnation or decline. Only those that received branch lines, or had other sources of growth, experienced progress. South of Calgary, Lethbridge experienced slow but steady growth. Between 1882 and 1890 the various enterprises incorporated by Sir Alexander Galt established several collieries near Lethbridge and constructed two railways, one to the C.P.R. mainline near Medicine Hat, the other to the Great Northern railway at Great Falls, Montana. During peak periods the Galt companies employed as many as a thousand workers, creating a transient male-dominant population and a local economy entirely dependent upon the companies. The railways, however,

were subsidized by the federal government with nearly a million acres of land located south of Lethbridge and when the acreage proved too dry for agricultural settlement elaborate irrigation works were constructed, a project completed by 1900. Once irrigated, the lands attracted a large number of settlers and thereby transformed Lethbridge from a mere dormitory for the mines to a service centre for its agricultural hinterland. By 1901, shortly after the Crowsnest Pass Railway was built, the incorporated town of Lethbridge had a population of 2,072 -- the third largest centre in what was soon to become the province of Alberta.

To the north, Edmonton experienced virtually no growth in the 1880s. With the completion of the main line to Calgary, Edmonton lost much of its function as the depot for the northern fur trading posts. Future prospects brightened considerably in July, 1891, however, when the Calgary and Edmonton Railway reached a point across the river from Edmonton. But when the C. & E.R. announced that its northern terminus would remain across the river from Edmonton, the decision gave rise to the rival community of Strathcona. During the next decade the rivalry between the two incipient urban centres was constant. Although Edmonton's growth continued to surpass that of Strathcona, the prize of northern metropolitan status was still in some doubt by 1901.

Like Edmonton, other pre-railway settlements experienced difficult times in the 1880s and 1890s. In anticipation of being on the main route of the C.P.R. until 1881, immigrants moved into the northern prairies in considerable numbers. The re-routing of the line, however, slowed growth considerably and although a townsite was laid out around the Prince Albert Mission in 1882, incorporation as a town did not come until 1885. At the end of that year, with the Riel Rebellion over, Prince Albert settled into a dull existence as a frontier town 200 miles from the nearest railway. There were few signs of progress in the late 1880s although a Board of Trade was established in 1887; more numerous and conspicuous were the signs of decline, including a drop in population. Despair among the citizens of Prince Albert yielded to confidence only in 1889 when the first sod was turned on the Qu'Appelle, Long Lake and Saskatchewan Railroad. This colonization railway, incorporated in 1883, finally reached Prince Albert in September, 1890. In large part as a result of this linkage, Prince Albert was able to experience modest progress during the 1890s.

The construction of the Qu'Appelle, Long Lake and Saskatchewan Railway also had a significant impact on another prairie community. The site of Saskatoon was chosen in 1882 by the Temperance Colonization Society, which acquired a grant of some 500,000 acres in a block traversing the South Saskatchewan River. By August, 1883, a townsite had been laid out and settlers began to arrive. The provisioning of the settlers was at first carried out from Medicine Hat, via the South Saskatchewan River,

but the hopes of the society to develop a strong and rapidly growing community did not materialize. There were several reasons. Transportation problems existed from the outset; the South Saskatchewan River was difficult to navigate because of its shallow water and numerous shoals and, although railways got closer to the colony, they passed to the south and channeled prospective settlers away from Saskatoon. The colony was saved from probable extinction when the Qu'Appelle, Long Lake and Saskatchewan Railway, building its line from Regina to Prince Albert, passed through Saskatoon. But, though the railway was fundamental to Saskatoon's continued existence, it did not in the 1890s bring about rapid development. By 1901, the settlement still only had a population of about 100.

While Prince Albert and Saskatoon received second prize in the railway stakes of this era — branch lines rather than location on the main line — another community not only received no rail connection, it lost another prize as well. Battleford was established in 1874 as a camp for the survey parties working on the line of the proposed trans-continental railway. In 1875, surveyors and contractors located their permanent headquarters and supply depot near the mouth of the Battle River and threw up a collection of roughly constructed log huts with mudded walls and thatched roofs. This primitive work camp on the flats acquired status only in October, 1876, when the Canadian government chose it as the capital of the North West Territories. Within a year the lieutenant-governor's mansion, residences for the judiciary and court officials, and barracks for the N.W.M.P. were under construction. Battleford's future seemed assured and land values and construction boomed.

Two decisions soon changed this bright future to a bleak one. Battleford's status as capital of the territories and as mounted police post, its location on the route of the C.P.R. as surveyed by Sandford Flemming in the early 1870s, and its fertile countryside, attracted the settlers who arrived in the area in the 1870s and 1880s. There was thus great disappointment when the C.P.R. was built through the southern prairies instead of along the North Saskatchewan River. It was a long cart haul from the nearest point on the railway. Further, in order to facilitate governmental administration the capital of the territories was moved to a site on the railway. Although the selection of Regina was not confirmed until March 1883, instructions to ship government house furniture were received by local civil servants in October, 1882. Together, these two decisions drastically changed Battleford's immediate future and for two decades the town only survived; it did not prosper. Population grew slowly and it was only in 1899 that village status was secured.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the railways had opened the

prairie west to settlement and the basic outline of the region's urban pattern had emerged (see Map I). It was, however, an outline that still needed to be filled in; a process that occurred with great rapidity in the years after the turn of the century.

The Boom Years, 1901 - 1914

The period between 1900 and 1914 stands in sharp contrast with the previous era. The pre-1900 era was, at best, a period of slow progress. The subsequent era was one of dramatic growth and prosperity. After decades of hesitation, the prairie west suddenly began to realize the potential that so many Canadians had long believed it possessed. A number of important events in widely disparate areas occurred which, when taken together, propelled the prairie west forward. The problems of farming in a semi-arid region were, by 1900, largely solved and the future of prairie agriculture at last seemed assured. Under the direction of an expansive new federal government headed by Wilfrid Laurier, immigrants poured into the region in record numbers. Railways were built on an extensive scale; almost 7,000 miles of track were laid in the prairie west between 1901 and 1913, increasing the mileage in the region to well over 10,000. In addition to the construction of numerous locally and provincially sponsored lines, the C.P.R. constructed branch lines and two new trans-continental railways -- the Canadian Northern and the Grand Trunk Pacific -- rapidly found their way across the prairies. Capital for these and other projects was readily available at low interest rates. There were important political changes as well. The North West Territories received responsible government in 1897; in 1905 the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan were created; and in 1912 Manitoba's boundaries were extended.

The expansion and consolidation of prairie settlement was both aided by and reflected in the growth of villages, towns, and cities. The rapid urban growth of the period was apparent in four significant trends. First, a filling in process occurred as the prairie region quickly became dotted with hundreds of new urban centres (see Maps 2, 3, and 4). Most were fairly small service centres which were often founded before farmers arrived in the area or else developed simultaneously with the influx of rural pioneers. These communities usually began with a train station, a grain elevator, and a general store. As soon as settlers moved onto nearby homesteads, attracted both by available land and the urban centre itself, the general store was duplicated and then supplemented by more specialized businesses such as a lumber yard, hardware store, blacksmith shop, harness and wagon business, an implement dealer, and a bank. Rapid population growth soon led to the construction of a post office, schools and churches; the establishment of a newspaper and a Board of Trade; and,

sooner or later, to incorporation as a village, town, or city. Finally, other less essential services appeared: barber shops, pool halls, hotels and beer parlors, cafés, and real estate offices. This pattern of development was repeated again and again. Between the censuses of 1901 and 1916, the number of incorporated cities increased from three to seventeen; incorporated towns from twenty-five to 150; and incorporated villages from fifty-seven to 423.

In addition to the rise of new centres, communities already in existence by 1901 experienced substantial growth in the next decade. In Manitoba, Winnipeg strengthened its hold as the province's, and region's, chief metropolis. A medium-sized centre in 1901, it had become the country's third largest city by 1913 with a population of about 150,000 (Appendix, Table V). Brandon and St. Boniface also more than doubled their population in these years while other Manitoba towns and cities experienced rapid but less spectacular growth (Appendix, Table II). In Saskatchewan, Saskatoon emerged after 1901 to become a focal point for growth in the rich agricultural belt of central Saskatchewan. In rapid succession it was incorporated as a village, town, and city and by 1911 was the third largest centre in the province. Regina, as provincial capital, retained its dominant position as the chief city of the province while Moose Jaw, Prince Albert, and Yorkton expanded as sub-regional supply centres (Appendix, Table III). The changes in Alberta, however, were the most dramatic. In 1901, Calgary and Edmonton were the most populous places in what was soon to become the province of Alberta, but they were still small service centres, not all that different from many others in the western interior. By 1913, it was clear that they were to have no competition as the dominant centres of economic activity in the newly formed province. Calgary continued to have an edge over Edmonton, but the latter city's success in becoming the provincial capital in 1905 and in absorbing rival Strathcona in 1911, brought the northern metropolis added prominence in the years immediately before the Great War. Between Edmonton and Calgary, only Wetaskiwin and Red Deer reached city status during these years but their growth paled in comparison to the two major centres. South of Calgary, however, Lethbridge and Medicine Hat expanded their roles as service centres for Southern Alberta (Appendix, Table IV).

The growth that took place during this decade was, in part, a result of aggressive promotion on the part of civic leaders. Despite the early prominence of Winnipeg, the boosters of other prairie communities optimistically envisioned their village or town becoming the pre-eminent metropolis of the prairies. There was, as a result, virtually no cooperation among prairie communities in their dealings with the railways, eastern industry, the federal government, or almost any other "outside" force.

Each centre zealously competed with the others for economic advantage and prestige. Commenting on this phenomenon, one observer noted in 1915 that:

> [Western cities had not] quite reached that secure position in which a community can afford to say unpleasant things about itself .... If Edmonton discovers that it has unemployment, the cry is at once 'Come to Calgary!' 'Invest in Calgary industries!' 'Buy Calgary lots!' If Calgary finds it has slum conditions, Edmonton is ready to profit by the opportunity; Regina pounces with joy on any evil spoken of Saskatoon; and the drift of capital and labour may really be affected. Therefore in each city all citizens possessing property are in a conspiracy of silence, or rather unite in so hearty a chorus on the glories of their city and district that no other sound can be heard in the neighbourhood.

But while there was a noted lack of co-operation among prairie centres, there was a high degree of unity within each city among the boosters. To prairie townsmen, not to be a booster — not to be part of the team — showed both a lack of community spirit and a lack of business sense. Boosting was essential to progress and prosperity; good citizenship and boosting were synonymous. Successful boosting demanded both collaboration and trust in the pursuit of broad, common goals and priorities on which everyone in the community could agree. An active and positive attitude toward the community was expected and demanded of the "good citizen". As one pioneer Saskatoon merchant put it:

> All were imbued with an optimism that Saskatoon was destined to become an important centre. Newcomers in business were welcomed and encouraged; everyone pulled together to develop and boom the town; there were no petty jealousies of one another. In fact there had already come to life by [by 1904] what has rightly been called "the Saskatoon spirit".

The *Saskatoon Phoenix*, in a 1903 statement typical of all prairie newspapers during this period, warned residents that "knockers" would not be tolerated:

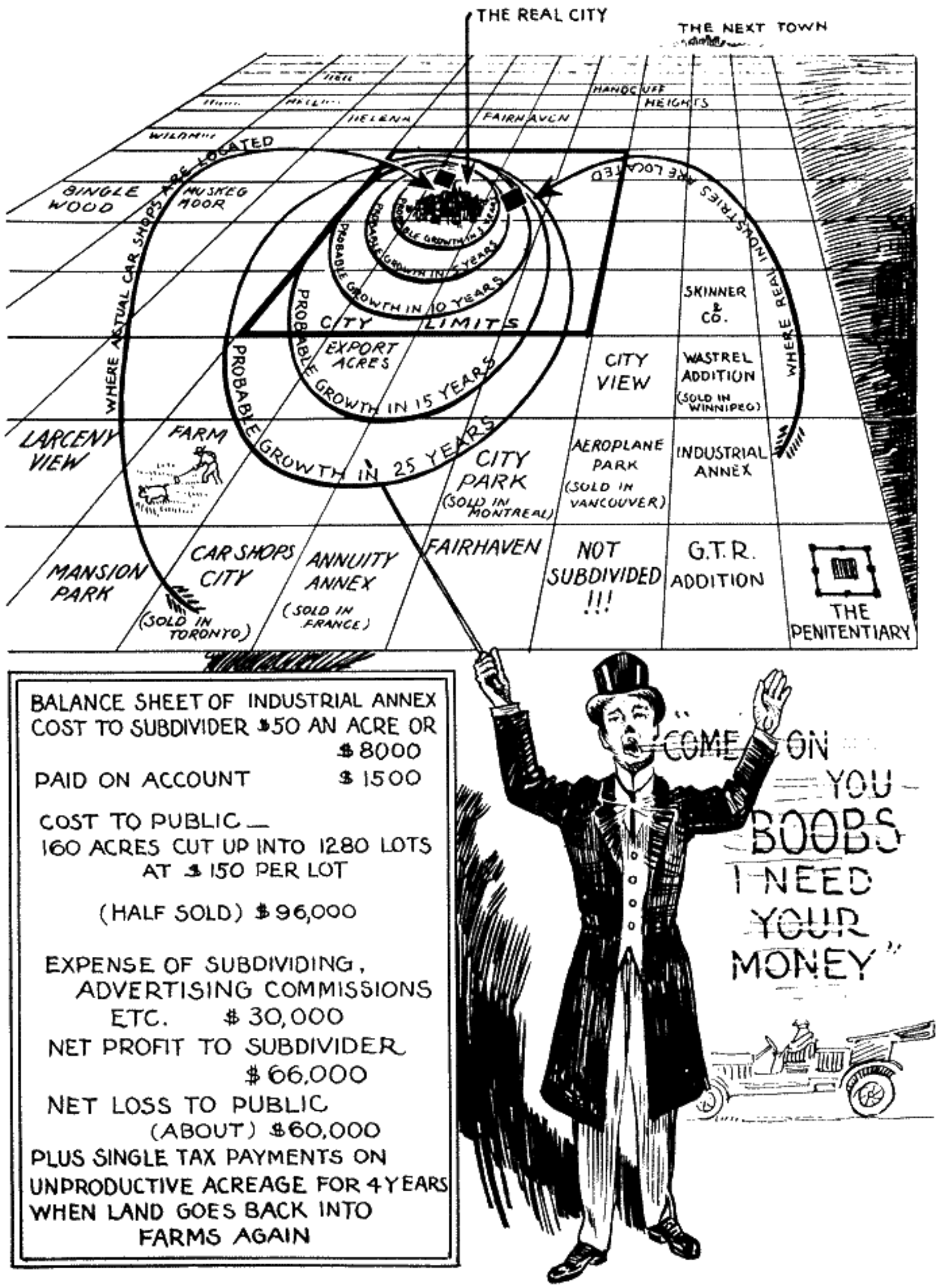
> Whenever you hear a person run down any enterprise in this town, just put him down for a fool, a fossil, or a malicious liar. Make no exception to this rule either because there is no exception. Paste this in your hat until you have it indelibly impressed on your memory, and whenever you hear a local citizen trying to injure a home institution by talking against it,

> just size him up accordingly, cut him cold, and don't be afraid to show it. A cool headed and successful businessman will push his town to the front at every opportunity, but a fool is always working the other way.

While substantial growth occurred in virtually all prairie centres between 1900 and the Great War, one of the most spectacular developments was the rise of the large prairie city. In 1900, with the exception of Winnipeg, it was not altogether clear which prairie towns would expand to become booming cities. By 1914, Regina, Calgary, Edmonton, and Saskatoon had joined Winnipeg as the region's dominant cities (Appendix, Table VI). The growth of these metropolitan centres was a response both to massive rural settlement and the rise of villages and towns, for just as farmers needed service centres, so in turn towns needed cities. Large cities performed a variety of specialized services. They acted as central shipping and distribution points and were the location of such key facilities as railway marshalling yards, round-houses, locomotive shops, grain terminals, stockyards, warehouses, and wholesale businesses. Cities also provided a complex set of professional and commercial services in the offices of engineers, architects, bankers, insurance and real estate agents, doctors, lawyers, and accountants. The cities were the main repositories of skilled and unskilled labourers, meeting the demands of farmers, railway contractors, bush camp operators, building contractors, and even village and town councils. The cities' functions included, as well, industrial activity. By 1911, Winnipeg was a major manufacturing centre and the other large centres increased their production tremendously to manufacture commodities for the prairie market. Finally, it was in the cities that the region's political and legal institutions (legislatures, court houses, government offices) and educational institutions (universities, trade schools, teacher's colleges) were located. In short, by 1914 the prairies had five fairly large and sophisticated cities. In a few short years, these communities had compressed a century or more of eastern urban growth and, together with demographic dominance, displayed considerable power over trade patterns, communications, and development processes in the region, and exercised growing political, social and cultural influence.

As important as these achievements were to the leaders of prairie cities, they did not satisfy their grand visions. In the years prior to 1914, all five cities also underwent vast spatial expansions. Spurred on by aggressive land developers and real estate agents, city councils brought huge areas of land within their municipal boundaries and this "land hunger" gave prairie cities a special status among Canada's urban centres. In 1921, four prairie cities -- Edmonton, Calgary, Saskatoon, and Regina -- had the lowest population density ratios of Canada's twenty largest urban areas (Appendix, Table VII).

EDMONTON IN 1912



SOURCE: Norman Harris, What's What in Western Real Estate - Edmonton, the City of the North, *Saturday Night*, Vol. 25, No. 40 (July 13th, 1912), p. 17.

The massive boundary extensions of these years were a product of the boom psychology of the period and provide perhaps the best example of the inflated notions of most community leaders. Large areas were added to the cities far in advance of population pressure; instead, the pressure came from local real estate interests. In every city vast chunks of agricultural land were subdivided and offered for sale. In Saskatoon, for example, there were only twenty-eight real estate firms in 1908; by 1912 there were 267 operating firms with land available for sale in no less than 107 subdivisions. Despite the fact that over 5,900 acres had just been added to the city in 1911, there were, in 1913, forty square miles of agricultural land outside the city limits subdivided for intended urban expansion. Had the real estate bubble not burst in 1913, Saskatoon probably would have expanded its boundaries still further. In Calgary, expansions were urged on by most of the city's two thousand real estate agents who, in 1912, operated out of 443 firms. And in Winnipeg in 1913 there was land for sale in no less than twenty subdivisions outside the city limits. The *Canadian Annual Review* of 1913 summed up the situation:

> Through the Western Provinces . . . everybody had been speculating in real estate, every village and town had been anticipating the days when it would be a city or important centre. Nearly everyone for a time had made money out of selling properties to others in their locality, to the visitor or investor from abroad, to the speculator in another city, to syndicates which further exploited the property or combination of properties as Subdivisions, to the American sharper who bought land for a trifle miles away from the centre of a town and flooded Eastern or English newspapers with flashy advertisements of "a choice residential centre" close to such and such a progressive town, or rising centre, or seat of future railway and industrial development . . . . The whole thing was ephemeral, a natural product of exotic progress, an outgrowth of Western enthusiasm.

While urban spatial expansion and land promotion during the pre-1914 period was based on highly inflated notions about future growth rates, civic leaders did have considerable evidence to support their beliefs since the fourth notable trend in this era was the rapid degree of urbanization. No other region of Canada experienced such vigorous urban growth during any one decade as did the prairie provinces between 1901 and 1911. In gross terms, urban growth in the prairie region jumped from 19.3 per cent of the total population in 1901 to 28.8 per cent in 1911, an increase of 9.5 per cent. While less than 100,000 persons lived in urban centres in 1901, almost 400,000 could be so classified by 1911. During this same period urban population growth in the Maritimes was

only 6.5 per cent (26.5 to 32.7); in Quebec, 7.7 per cent (38.2 to 45.9); in Ontario, 9.2 per cent (43.6 to 52.8); and in British Columbia, 4.5 per cent (46.4 to 50.9) (Appendix, Table VIII). Of course, the region's relative newness had much to do with this rapid rate of urbanization. Still, it did reflect that the prairie provinces were undergoing a massive period of change and that the area's urban centres were playing an integral part in the development of the region.

Decline and Consolidation, 1914-1930

1913 was a pivotal year in the history of prairie urban development. Before lay prosperity and rapid growth; after came several decades of relative stagnation and almost continual crisis. Although there were a few short years of prosperity in the 1920s, the period from 1913 to 1930 can be characterized as one of either uncertainty or modest growth for the region's urban centres. This trend was apparent in a number of areas. In national terms, the prairies switched from being the fastest to the slowest growing region in the country in terms of urban concentration. Between 1911 and 1931, the urban percentage of the prairie population increased by only 3.4 per cent, while the increase was 16.4 per cent in British Columbia, 12.5 per cent in Ontario, 13.8 per cent in Quebec, and 6.1 per cent in the Maritimes (Appendix, Table VIII).

This sharp decline took place within the context of general economic difficulties. A severe recession in 1913 was followed by the dislocation of war and a slow recovery; events that adversely affected the prairies' urban centres. The region's villages, towns, and cities were far from booming between 1913 and 1930. The recession that immediately preceded the Great War coincided with the slowing down of the great western agricultural expansion. The wheat economy — with its commercial and transportation infrastructure and its main institutions — was established and in place. Filling in and investment in powered farm machinery was carried on in the 1920s, but the scale and rate of expansion was at a much reduced level. As V.C. Fowke notes: "The investment boom which had characterized the early years of the twentieth century had exhausted itself by 1913, and serious economic difficulties faced Canada and the prairie provinces as a result." While the Great War created an artificial stimulus that temporarily averted the effects of contraction in the growth rate, the effects were felt in the years following the war. Economic distress characterized the early 1920s; distress caused by inflation, a sharp recession, and a prolonged drought.

In contrast to the early years of the decade, the later 1920s was a period of relative prosperity and expansion. Contemporary observers regarded the developments of three years as a continuation of the conditions that had been interrupted by the recession of 1913 and the war.

In terms of urban centres, there were several important developments that received impetus from the comparative prosperity of the period after 1924. The major mechanical revolution that took place on prairie farms, with horse driven machinery giving way to trucks, tractors, and harvester combines, increased the dependence of farmers on urban services and skills. It was in these years as well that the prairies' road system was developed, changing dramatically the relation of city and country. Similarly, the aeroplane was beginning to give larger cities additional transportation links. The prairies, it seemed, were again on the road to rapid expansion.

The similarities between the late 1920s and the pre-war boom, however, were more apparent than real. Although many individual activities were much the same as they had been before 1914, their collective significance was vastly different. V.C. Fowke has analyzed this period:

> Collectively the economic processes associated with the wheat frontier had been of a magnitude before 1914 sufficient to vitalize and integrate the entire Canadian economy and to diffuse this economic vitality throughout the North Atlantic trading area. In absolute quantities the immigration, occupation and improvement of land, and capital formation which were associated with the wheat economy in the latter half of the 1920s were smaller than before the war. In relative terms, however, the dimunition was greater still, for other frontiers [in northern Quebec and Ontario and in British Columbia] had meanwhile risen to prominence within the Dominion and the wheat frontier was no longer of unique importance. Possibilities for agricultural settlement in western Canada were no longer adequate to focus attention throughout the Dominion or to serve as the integrating force within the Canadian economy.

The impact these trends had on prairie urban centres was substantial. In general terms, the population of the region's cities grew by only 47.5 per cent between 1916 and 1931 (408,000 to 602,000), compared to an increase of 684.6 per cent between 1901 and 1916 (52,000 to 408,000). Towns grew by 30.5 per cent (121,000 to 158,000), compared to 278.0 per cent (32,000 to 121,000) in the earlier period. Villages increased by only 64.5 per cent (76,000 to 125,000), compared to an increase of 300 per cent (19,000 to 76,000) between 1901 and 1916. The number of new cities (2), towns (14), and villages (121) incorporated since 1916 was in sharp contrast to the rapid increase in numbers in the earlier era. In terms of the ranking of Canadian cities by size, several larger prairie cities dropped to lower positions, including Winnipeg, Brandon, Portage la Prairie, Regina, Moose Jaw and Yorkton.

While some of the region's cities declined in position relative to other Canadian cities, none of them suffered an absolute loss in population between 1911 and 1931. It was, rather, a period in which the larger centres gradually gained population. Some of the region's towns and villages, however, actually lost citizens (Appendix, Tables II, III, IV). These communities, and others that experienced very slow rates of growth, were ones where prosperity largely depended upon supplying a restricted agricultural hinterland that was floundering. In contrast, the region's larger cities, and especially such centres as Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary, Edmonton, and Saskatoon, had reached the point where their extra-provincial relations coupled with their intra-provincial services ensured slow but steady growth.

The growth of the region's cities between the peak of extensive expansion in 1913 and the major economic crisis of the depression was thus unremarkable. But there were important changes in the prairie urban system that deserve notice, even if they were changes of "degree" rather than of "kind". Most important was the decline in Winnipeg's metropolitan position as a result of several events, including the opening of the Panama Canal in 1914 (which allowed Vancouver to penetrate the western prairies); the diffusion of Winnipeg's commercial functions in the wheat economy with the formation of provincial wheat pools in the 1920s (dispersing control and income from Winnipeg head offices of the private grain trade); the erosion of the city's preferential freight rate structures (resulting in the gradual take-over by other prairie cities of some of the commercial and supply functions formerly centred on the city); and a decline in the importance of grain and an increase in such non-grain products as meat, butter and cheese (areas where Winnipeg's metropolitan position was challenged by other prairie cities). All these changes diminished Winnipeg's financial and commercial hinterland but they did not presage any major alterations in the basic prairie urban system. While there was a gradual westward shift in urban population, and while the role of other prairie cities in the region grew at the expense of Winnipeg, the urban structure in place by 1913 — with Winnipeg at its apex — maintained a high degree of stability through to and beyond 1930.

In spite of this stability, the onset of drought and depression in 1929-1930 marked the end of an era for prairie urban development. Although dramatic urban growth in the region had ended as early as 1913, contemporaries had continued to hope — indeed believe — throughout the 1910s and 1920s that prosperity would soon return. In particular, the short periods of prosperity in the 1920s were seen as the beginning of a new surge of growth. The depression, however, soon dimmed the hopes of even the most optimistic. By the mid-1930s, prairie urban centres were concentrating, for the first time in their history, on survival, not growth.

Bibliographical Note

Several useful articles have recently appeared that provide an introduction to both the literature and methods of urban historians. The best analysis is Gilbert A. Stelter, "A Sense of Time and Place: The Historian's Approach to Canada's Urban Past," in Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan F.J. Artibise, eds., *The Canadian City: Essays in Urban History* (Toronto, 1977), pp. 420-441. Other articles are: J.M.S. Careless, "Localism or Parochialism in Canadian History?" *B.C. Perspectives,* Vol. 2 (1972), pp. 4-14; J.T. Lemon, "The Study of the Urban Past: Approaches by Geographers," Canadian Historical Association, *Historical Papers 1973,* pp. 179-190; John C. Weaver, "Living In and Building Up the Canadian City: A Review of Studies on the Urban Past," *Plan Canada,* Vol. 15, No. 2 (September 1975), pp. 111-117; Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan F.J. Artibise, "Urban History Comes of Age: A Review of Current Research," *City Magazine,* Vol. 3, No. 1 (October 1977), pp. 22-36; and Gilbert A. Stelter, "Urban History in Canada," *The History and Social Science Teacher,* Vol. 14, No. 3 (Spring 1979), pp. 185-194. For a comprehensive bibliography, see Alan F.J. Artibise, "Canadian Urban Studies: A Select Bibliography," *Communique: Canadian Studies,* Vol. 3, No. 3 (April 1977), pp. 51-124.

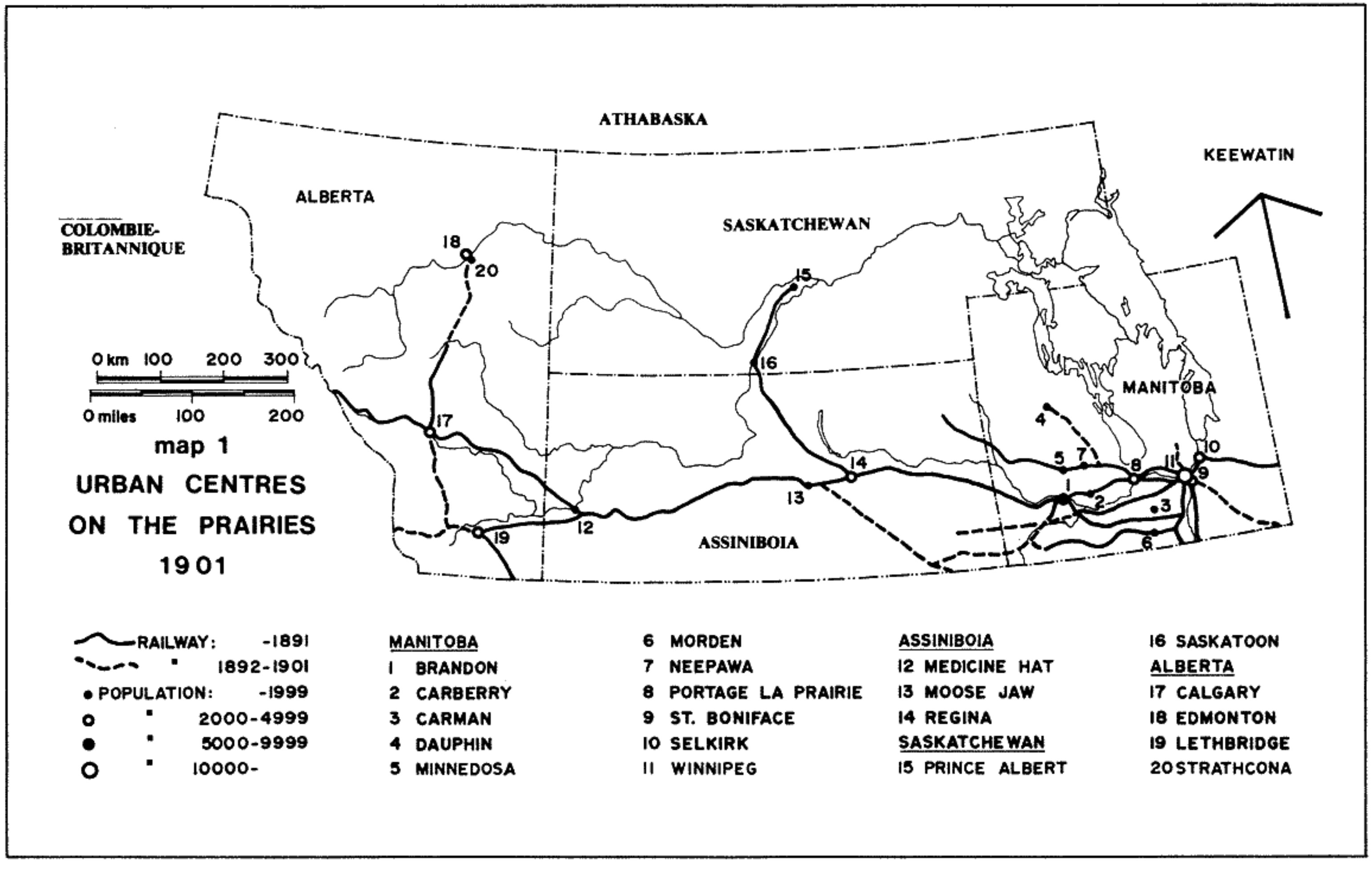
Although there is no comprehensive book-length study of prairie urban development, there are several good articles that discuss the region. They include: Paul Voisey, "The Urbanization of the Canadian Prairies, 1871-1916," *Histoire Sociale/Social History,* Vol. VIII, No. 15 (May 1975), pp. 77-101; J.M.S. Careless, "Aspects of Urban Life in the West, 1870-1914," in Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan F.J. Artibise, eds., *The Canadian City: Essays in Urban History* (Toronto, 1977); K. Lenz, "Large Urban Places in the Prairie Province — Their Development and Location," in R.L. Gentilcore, ed., *Canada's Changing Geography* (Toronto, 1967); L.D. McCann, "Urban Growth in Western Canada, 1881-1961," *The Albertan Geographer,* No. 5 (1969), pp. 65-74; and Alan F.J. Artibise, "Patterns of Prairie Urban Development, 1871-1951," in D.J. Bercuson and P.A. Buckner, eds., *The Great Chatauqua: Aspects of Western and Maritime History* (forthcoming, 1981). Two useful collections of articles, which also contain material on British Columbia, are A.R. McCormack and Ian MacPherson, eds., *Cities in the West: Papers of the Western Canada Urban History Conference* (Ottawa, 1975), and Alan F.J. Artibise, ed., *Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development* (forthcoming, 1981). There are also several articles on the prairies in Alan F.J. Artibise and Gilbert A. Stelter, eds., *The Usable Urban Past: Planning and Politics in the Modern Canadian City* (Toronto, 1979). Finally, issues of the *Urban History Review* include articles on prairie towns and cities.

Prairie urban development cannot be studied in isolation. Important studies to consult are: K.H. Norrie, "The Rate of Settlement of the Canadian Prairies, 1870-1911," *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. XXXV (June 1975), pp. 410-427; W.A. Mackintosh, *Prairie Settlement: The Geographical Setting* (Toronto, 1934); and V.C. Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy* (Toronto, 1957).

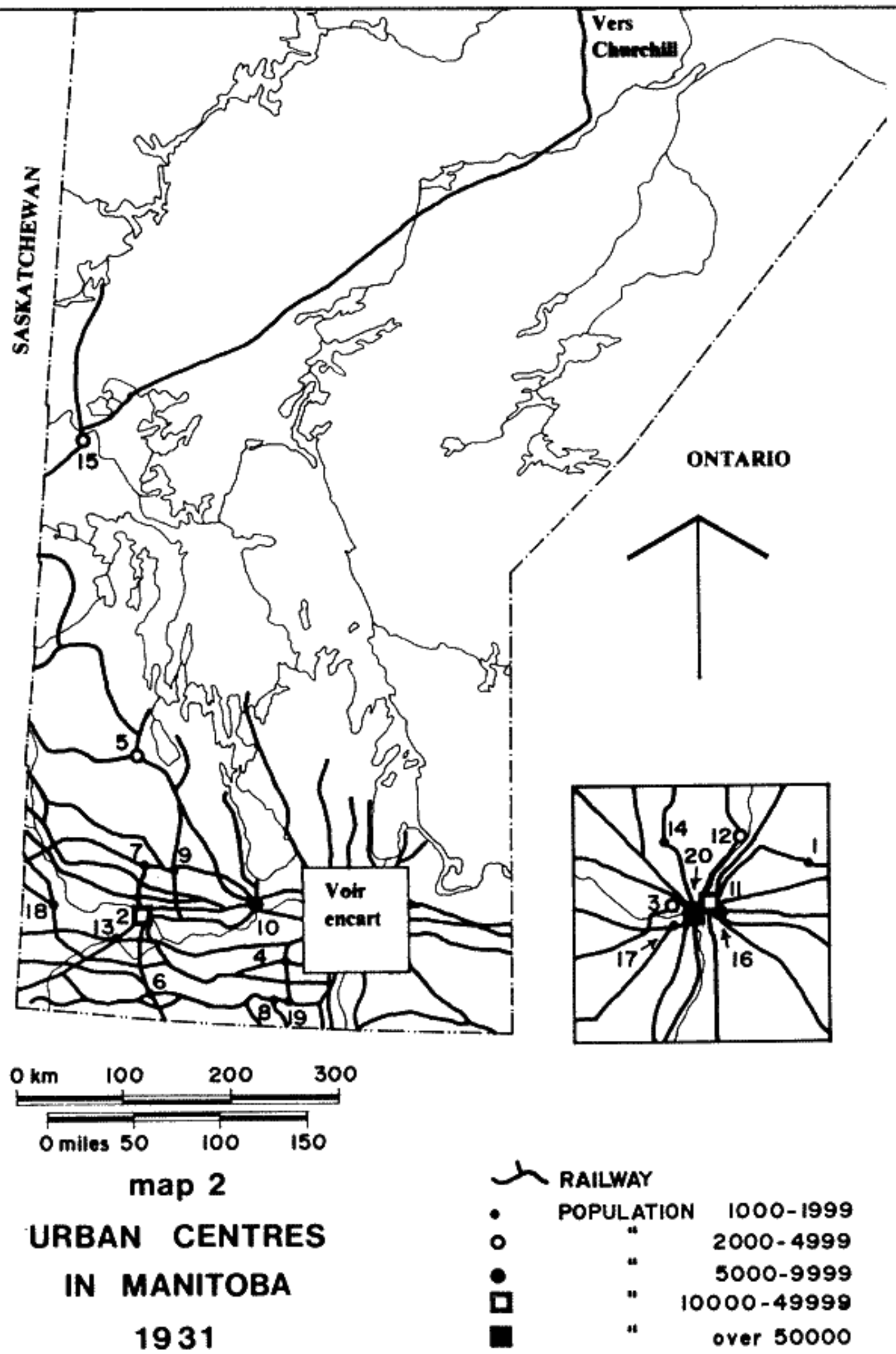
There are numerous studies of individual towns and cities. Many of these are listed in Alan F.J. Artibise, *Western Canada Since 1870: A Select Bibliography and Guide* (Vancouver, 1978).

Appendix

Table I	Rural and Urban Population Growth in the North West Territories and Prairie Provinces, 1871-1931.
Table II	Population Growth in Incorporated Villages, Towns, and Cities in Manitoba, 1871-1931.
Table III	Population Growth in Incorporated Villages, Towns, and Cities in Saskatchewan, 1881-1931.
Table IV	Population Growth in Incorporated Villages, Towns, and Cities in Alberta, 1881-1931.
Table V	Rank of Selected Canadian Cities by Size, 1901-1931.
Table VI	Population Growth in Selected Prairie Cities, 1871-1931.
Table VII	Area and Density of Population of Canada's Twenty Largest Cities, 1921.
Table VIII	Per Cent of Population Urban in Canada's Regions, 1901-1931.


ATHABASKA
KEEWATIN
ALBERTA
SASKATCHEWAN
COLOMBIE-BRITANNIQUE
MANITOBA
ASSINIBOIA
0 km 100 200 300
0 miles 100 200
map 1
URBAN CENTRES ON THE PRAIRIES 1901
RAILWAY: -1891
1892-1901
POPULATION: -1999
2000-4999
5000-9999
10000-
MANITOBA
1 BRANDON
2 CARBERRY
3 CARMAN
4 DAUPHIN
5 MINNEDOSA
6 MORDEN
7 NEEPAWA
8 PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE
9 ST. BONIFACE
10 SELKIRK
11 WINNIPEG
ASSINIBOIA
12 MEDICINE HAT
13 MOOSE JAW
14 REGINA
SASKATCHEWAN
15 PRINCE ALBERT
16 SASKATOON
ALBERTA
17 CALGARY
18 EDMONTON
19 LETHBRIDGE
20 STRATHCONA

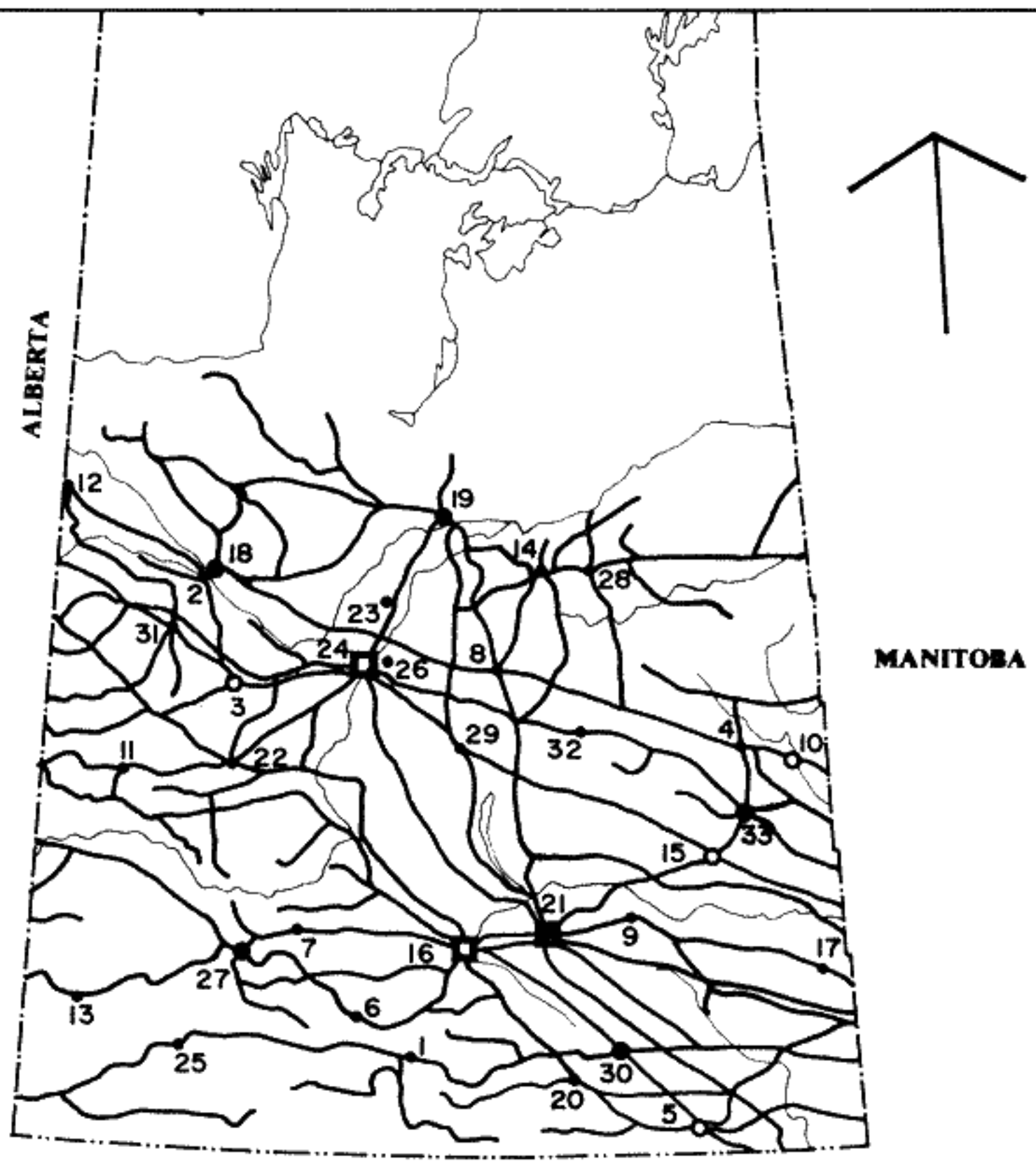
1 BEAUSEJOUR
2 BRANDON
3 BROOKLANDS
4 CARMAN
5 DAUPHIN
6 KILLARNEY
7 MINNEDOSA
8 MORDEN
9 NEEPAWA
10 PORTAGE LA PRAIRIE
11 ST. BONIFACE
12 SELKIRK
13 SOURIS
14 STONEWALL
15 THE PAS
16 TRANSCONA
17 TUXEDO
18 VIRDEN
19 WINKLER
20 WINNIPEG



map 2

URBAN CENTRES IN MANITOBA 1931

1 ASSINIBOIA
2 BATTLEFORD
3 BIGGAR
4 CANORA
5 ESTEVAN
6 GRAVELBOURG
7 HERBERT
8 HUMBOLDT
9 INDIAN HEAD
10 KAMSACK
11 KINDERSLEY
12 LLOYDMINSTER
13 MAPLE CREEK
14 MELFORT
15 MELVILLE
16 MOOSE JAW
17 MOOSOMIN
18 NORTH BATTLEFORD
19 PRINCE ALBERT
20 RADVILLE
21 REGINA
22 ROSETOWN
23 ROSTHERN
24 SASKATOON
25 SHAUNAVON
26 SUTHERLAND
27 SWIFT CURRENT
28 TISDALE
29 WATROUS
30 WEYBURN
31 WILKIE
32 WYNYARD
33 YORKTON



0 km 100 200 300

0 miles 50 100 150

RAILWAY

POPULATION 1000-1999

2000-4999

5000-9999

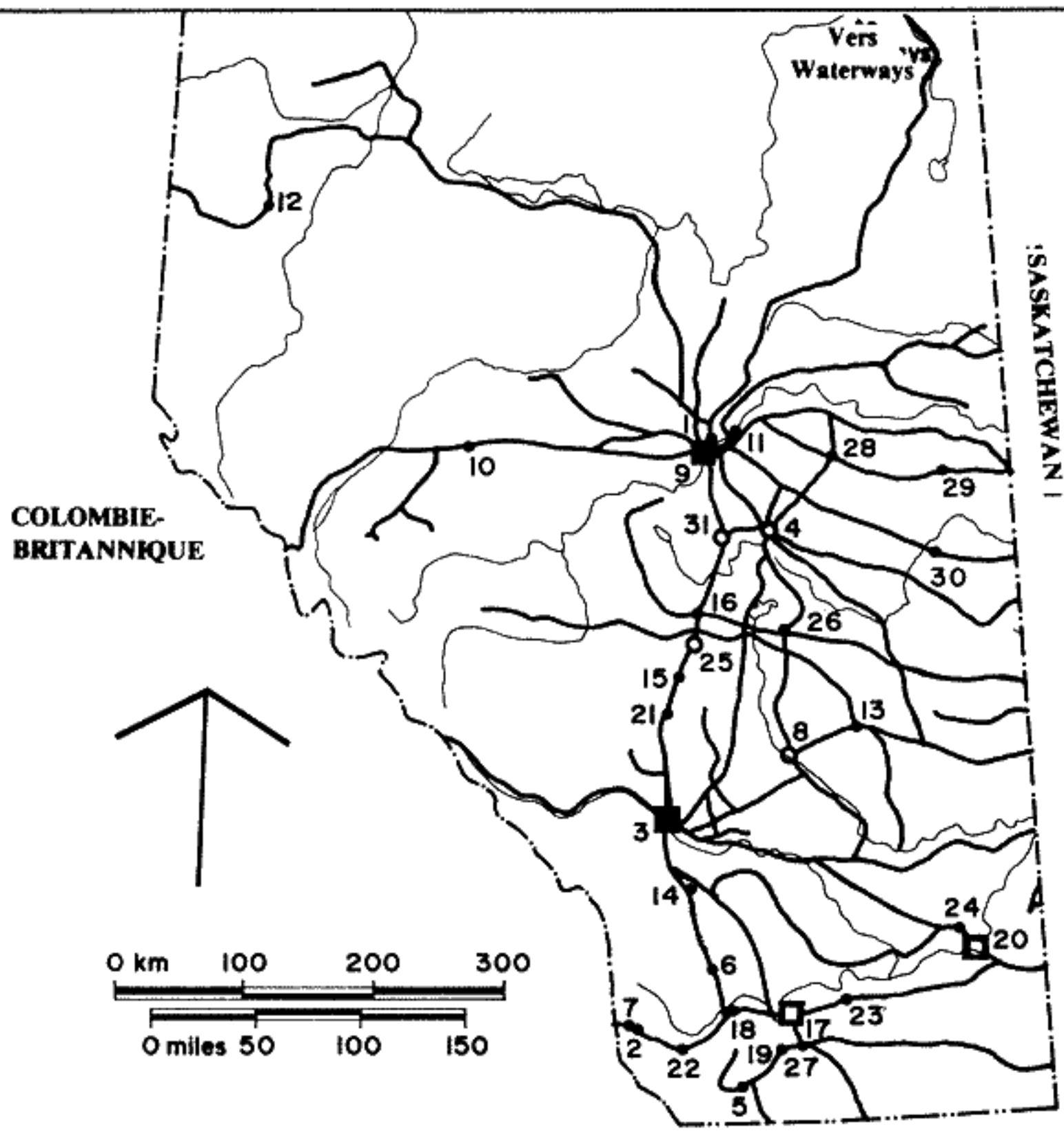
10000-49999

over 50000

map 3

URBAN CENTRES IN SASKATCHEWAN 1931

1 BEVERLEY
2 BLAIRMORE
3 CALGARY
4 CAMROSE
5 CARDSTON
6 CLARESHOLM
7 COLEMAN
8 DRUMHELLER
9 EDMONTON
10 EDSON
11 FORT SASKATCHEWAN
12 GRAND PRAIRIE
13 HANNA
14 HIGH RIVER
15 INNISFAIL
16 LACOMBE
17 LETHBRIDGE
18 MACLEOD
19 MAGRATH
20 MEDICINE HAT
21 OLDS
22 PINCHER CREEK
23 RAYMOND
24 REDCLIFFE
25 RED DEER
26 STETTLER
27 TABER
28 VEGREVILLE
29 VERMILLION
30 WAINWRIGHT
31 WETASKIWIN



RAILWAY
POPULATION 1000-1999
" 2000-4999
" 5000-9999
" 10000-49999
" over 50000

map 4

URBAN CENTRES IN ALBERTA 1931

TABLE I

RURAL AND URBAN (a) POPULATION GROWTH IN THE NORTH WEST TERRITORIES AND PRAIRIE PROVINCES, 1871-1931

(in thousands)

	Northwest Territories		Manitoba		Total Prairies		
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	% Urban
1871	48	–	25	–	73	–	0
1881	56	–	52	10	108	10	8
1891	95	4	111	41	206	45	18

	Alberta		Saskatchewan						
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban					
1901	61	12	86	6	192	64	339	81	19.3
1911	264	110	413	80	269	193	946	383	28.8
1921	411	177	630	128	341	269	1,382	574	29.3
1931	504	228	735	187	357	343	1,596	758	32.2

Notes: (a) In 1871, 1881, and 1891, the urban category includes all incorporated villages, towns, and cities, regardless of size. From 1901-1931, urban population includes incorporated cities, towns, and villages of 1,000 and over and incorporated municipalities of this size range surrounding the larger cities which were later defined as parts of the census metropolitan areas.

Sources: *Census of Canada, 1931;* and *Census of Canada, 1956* -- "Analytical Report: Rural and Urban Population," p. 26.

TABLE II

Population growth in incorporated villages, towns, and cities in Manitoba, 1871-1931 (a)

	DATE OF INCORPORATION			POPULATION										
Urban centre	Village	Town	City	1871	1881	1886	1891	1901	1906	1911	1916	1921	1926	1931
Beauséjour	1908	1912		–	–	–	–	–	–	847	879	994	996	1,139
Brandon	–	–	1882	–	–	2,348	3,778	5,620	10,408	13,839	15,215	15,397	16,443	17,082
Brooklands	1921	—	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	2,462
Carman	1899	1905	–	–	–	–	–	1,439	1,530	1,271	1,426	1,591	1,385	1,418
Dauphin	1898	1901	–	–	–	–	–	1,135	1,670	2,815	3,200	3,885	3,580	3,971
Killarney	1903	–	–	–	–	–	–	585	1,117	1,010	989	871	901	1,003
Minnedosa	–	1883	–	–	–	549	614	1,052	1,299	1,483	1,833	1,505	1,681	1,680
Morden	–	1903	–	–	–	–	1,196	1,522	1,437	1,130	1,261	1,268	1,354	1,416
Neepawa	–	1883	–	–	–	255	774	1,418	1,895	1,864	1,854	1,887	1,833	1,910
Portage la Prairie	–	1880	1907	–	–	2,028	3,363	3,901	5,106	5,892	5,879	6,766	6,513	6,597
St. Boniface	–	1883	1908	817	1,283	1,449	1,553	2,019	5,119	7,483	11,021	12,821	14,187	16,305
Selkirk	–	1882	–	–	–	705	950	2,188	2,701	2,977	3,399	3,726	4,201	4,486
Souris	–	1093	–	–	–	–	–	839	1,413	1,854	1,845	1,710	1,613	1,661
Stonewall	1906	1908	–	–	–	–	–	589	1,074	1,005	1,152	1,112	1,043	1,031
Le Pas	–	1912	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1,270	1,858	1,925	4,030
Transcona	–	1912	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	3,356	4,185	5,218	5,747
Tuxedo	–	1913	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	192	1,062	717	1,173
Virden	1890	1904	–	–	–	–	606	901	1,471	1,550	1,618	1,361	1,380	1,590
Winkler	1906	–	–	–	–	–	–	391	530	458	547	812	971	1,005
Winnipeg	–	–	1873	241	7,985	20,238	25,639	42,340	90,153	136,035	163,000	179,087	191,998	218,785

Notes: (a) Includes only those centres with a population exceeding 1,000 in 1931.

Sources: *Censuses of Canada, 1871-1931:* and *Censuses of the Prairie Provinces, 1906-1926.* Also, various other sources have been used to provide data for the period of 1871-1891. Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate data on all the communities in existence during these years.

TABLE III

Population growth in incorporated villages, towns and cities in Saskatchewan, 1881-1931 (a)

	DATE OF INCORPORATION			POPULATION								
Urban Centre	Village	Town	City	1881-1882	1891	1901	1906	1911	1916	1921	1926	1931
Assiniboia	1912	1913	–	–	–	–	–	–	719	1,006	1,245	1,454
Battleford	1899	1904	–	–	–	609	933	1,335	1,436	1,229	1,018	1,096
Biggar	1909	1911	–	–	–	–	–	315	830	1,535	2,034	2,369
Canora	1905	1910	–	–	–	–	169	435	835	1,230	1,121	1,179
Estevan	1899	1906	–	–	–	141	877	1,981	2,140	2,290	2,336	2,936
Gravelbourg	1912	1916	–	–	–	–	–	–	463	1,106	1,201	1,137
Herbert	1907	1912	–	–	–	–	–	559	950	827	997	1,009
Humboldt	1905	1907	–	–	–	–	279	859	1,435	1,822	1,751	1,899
Indian Head	–	1902	–	–	–	768	1,545	1,285	1,334	1,439	1,313	1,438
Kamsack	1905	1911	–	–	–	–	204	473	1,202	2,002	1,948	2,087
Kindersley	1910	1910	–	–	–	–	–	456	770	1,003	987	1,037
Lloydminster (b)	1903	1907	–	–	–	–	389	441	494	469	847	1,516
Maple Creek	1896	1903	–	–	–	382	687	936	1,140	1,002	930	1,154
Melfort	1903	1907	–	–	–	–	351	599	971	1,746	1,605	1,809
Melville	1908	1909	–	–	–	–	–	1,816	2,100	2,808	3,352	3,891
Moose Jaw	–	1884	1903	c.100	1,200	1,558	6,249	13,823	16,934	19,285	19,039	21,299
Moosomin	–	1887	–	–	–	868	1,152	1,143	1,329	1,099	1,121	1,119
North Battleford	1906	1906	1913	–	–	–	824	2,105	3,154	4,108	4,787	5,986
Prince Albert	–	1885	1904	c.500	1,009	1,785	3,005	6,254	6,436	7,558	7,873	9,905
Radville	1911	1913	–	–	–	–	–	233	621	883	1,082	1,005
Regina	–	1883	1903	c.800	1,681	2,249	6,169	30,213	26,167	34,432	37,329	53,209
Rosetown	1909	1911	–	–	–	–	–	317	731	865	1,142	1,553
Rosthern	1898	1903	–	–	–	413	918	1,172	1,200	1,074	1,273	1,412
Saskatoon	1901	1903	1906	–	–	113	3,001	12,004	21,048	25,739	31,234	43,291
Shaunavon	1913	1914	–	–	–	–	–	–	897	1,146	1,459	1,716
Sutherland	1909	1912	–	–	–	–	–	421	940	961	1,010	1,148
Swift Current	1904	1907	1913	–	–	121	554	1,852	3,181	3,518	4,175	5,296
Tisdale	1905	1920	–	–	–	–	61	250	458	783	846	1,069
Watrous	1908	1909	–	–	–	–	–	781	843	1,101	1,172	1,303

TABLE III (cont'd)

Population growth in incorporated villages, towns and cities in Saskatchewan, 1881-1931 (a)

	DATE OF INCORPORATION			POPULATION								
Urban Centre	Village	Town	City	1881-1882	1891	1901	1906	1911	1916	1921	1926	1931
Weyburn	1900	1903	1913	–	–	113	966	2,210	3,050	3,193	4,119	5,002
Wilkie	1908	1910	–	–	–	–	–	537	815	778	1,041	1,222
Wynyard	1908	1911	–	–	–	–	–	515	682	849	833	1,042
Yorkton	1894	1900	1928	–	–	700	1,363	2,309	3,144	5,151	4,458	5,027

Notes: (a) Includes only those centres with a population exceeding 1,000 in 1931.

(b) Until 1930, population is split between Alberta and Saskatchewan. Amalgamated with Alberta in 1930.

Sources: See Table II.

TABLE IV

Population growth in incorporated villages, towns and cities in Alberta, 1881-1931 (a)

	DATE OF INCORPORATION			POPULATION								
Urban Centre	Village	Town	City	1881	1891	1901	1906	1911	1916	1921	1926	1931
Beverley	–	1914	–	–	–	–	–	–	813	1,039	931	1,111
Blairmore	1901	1911	–	–	–	231	449	1,137	1,219	1,552	1,609	1,629
Calgary	–	1884	1893	100	3,867	4,398	11,967	43,704	56,514	63,305	65,291	83,761
Camrose	1905	1906	–	–	–	–	412	1,586	1,692	1,892	2,002	2,258
Cardston	1898	1901	–	–	–	639	1,001	1,207	1,370	1,612	2,034	1,672
Claresholm	1903	1905	–	–	–	–	680	809	687	963	956	1,156
Coleman	1904	1910	–	–	–	–	915	1,557	1,559	1,590	2,044	1,704
Drumheller	1913	1916	1930	–	–	–	–	–	312	2,499	2,578	2,987
Edmonton	–	1892	1904	263	700	2,626	11,167	31,064	53,846	58,821	65,163	79,187
Edson	1911	1911	–	–	–	–	–	497	500	1,138	1,493	1,547
Fort Saskatchewan	1899	1904	–	–	–	306	585	782	993	982	943	1,001
Grand Prairie	1914	1919	–	–	–	–	–	–	337	1,061	917	1,464
Hanna	1912	1914	–	–	–	–	–	–	711	1,364	1,400	1,490
High River	1901	1910	–	–	–	153	1,018	1,182	1,182	1,198	1,377	1,459
Innisfail	1899	1903	–	–	–	317	643	602	838	941	944	1,024
Lacombe	1896	1902	–	–	–	499	1,015	1,029	1,047	1,133	1,151	1,259
Lethbridge	–	1890	1906	–	–	2,072	2,936	9,035	9,436	11,097	10,735	13,489
Macleod	–	1892	–	–	–	796	1,144	1,844	1,811	1,723	1,715	1,447
Magrath	1901	1907	–	–	–	424	884	995	938	1,069	1,202	1,224
Medicine Hat	1894	1898	1906	–	–	1,570	3,020	5,608	9,272	9,634	9,536	10,300
Olds	1896	1905	–	–	–	218	554	917	730	764	1,003	1,056
Pincher Creek	1898	1906	–	–	–	335	589	1,027	1,026	888	1,003	1,024
Raymond	1902	1903	–	–	–	–	1,568	1,465	1,205	1,394	1,799	1,849
Redcliff	1910	1912	–	–	–	–	–	220	1,294	1,137	916	1,192
Red Deer	1894	1901	1913	–	–	323	1,418	2,118	2,203	2,328	2,021	2,344
Stettler	–	1906	–	–	–	–	570	1,444	1,168	1,416	1,127	1,219
Strathcona (b)	–	1899	1907	–	–	1,550	2,921	5,579	–	–	–	–
Taber	1905	1907	–	–	–	–	578	1,400	1,412	1,705	1,342	1,279
Vegreville	1906	1906	–	–	–	–	344	1,029	1,156	1,479	1,721	1,659
Vermilion	1906	1906	–	–	–	–	623	625	929	1,272	1,203	1,270
Wainwright	–	1910	–	–	–	–	–	788	818	975	1,028	1,147
Wetaskiwin	1899	1902	1906	–	–	550	1,652	2,411	2,048	2,061	1,884	2,125

Notes: (a) Includes only those centres with a population exceeding 1,000 in 1931.
(b) Annexed to Edmonton in 1911. The Edmonton total in 1911 includes Strathcona.

Sources: See Table II.

TABLE V

Rank of Selected Canadian Cities by Size, 1901-1931

Rank	1901	1911	1921	1931
1	Montreal	Montreal	Montreal	Montreal
2	Toronto	Toronto	Toronto	Toronto
3	Québec	WINNIPEG	WINNIPEG	Vancouver
4	Ottawa	Vancouver	Vancouver	WINNIPEG
5	Hamilton	Ottawa	Hamilton	Hamilton
6	WINNIPEG	Hamilton	Ottawa	Quebec
7	Halifax	Québec	Québec	Ottawa
8	Saint John	Halifax	CALGARY	CALGARY
9	London	London	London	EDMONTON
10	Vancouver	CALGARY	EDMONTON	London
11	Victoria	Saint John	Halifax	Windsor
12	Kingston	Victoria	Saint John	Verdun
13	Brantford	REGINA	Victoria	Halifax
14	Hull	EDMONTON	Windsor	REGINA
15	Windsor	Brantford	REGINA	Saint John
16	Sherbrooke	Kingston	Brantford	SASKATOON
17	Guelph	Peterborough	SASKATOON	Victoria
18	Charlottetown	Hull	Verdun	Trois-Rivières
19	Trois-Rivières	Windsor	Hull	Kitchener
	—	—	—	—
·36	—	SASKATOON	—	—
	—	—	—	—
73	CALGARY	—	—	—
	—	—	—	—
77	EDMONTON	—	—	—
	—	—	—	—
97	REGINA	—	—	—
	—	—	—	—
110	SASKATOON	—	—	—

TABLE VI

Population growth in selected (a) prairie cities, 1871-1931

City	1871	1881	1891	1901	1906	1911	1916	1921	1926	1931
Winnipeg	241	7,985	25,639	42,340	90,153	136,035	163,000	179,087	198,998	218,785
Calgary	–	100	3,867	4,398	11,967	43,704	56,514	63,305	65,291	83,761
Edmonton (b)	–	263	700	4,176	14,088	31,064	53,846	58,821	65,163	79,187
Regina	–	c.800	1,681	2,249	6,169	30,213	26,167	34,432	37,329	53,209
Saskatoon	–	–	–	113	3,001	12,004	21,048	25,739	31,234	43,291
Moose Jaw	–	c.100	1,200	1,558	6,249	13,823	16,934	19,285	19,039	21,299
Brandon	–	–	3,778	5,620	10,408	13,839	15,215	15,397	16,443	17,082
St. Boniface	817	1,283	1,553	2,019	5,119	7,483	11,021	12,821	14,187	16,305
Lethbridge	–	–	–	2,072	2,936	9,035	9,436	11,097	10,735	13,489
Medicine Hat	–	–	–	1,570	3,020	5,608	9,272	9,634	9,536	10,300
Prince Albert	–	c.500	1,009	1,785	3,005	6,254	6,436	7,558	7,873	9,905
Portage la Prairie	–	–	3,363	3,901	5,106	5,892	5,879	6,766	6,513	6,597
North Battleford	–	–	–	–	824	2,105	3,154	4,108	4,787	5,986
Swift Current	–	–	–	121	554	1,852	3,181	3,518	4,175	5,296
Yorkton	–	–	–	700	1,363	2,309	3,144	5,151	4,458	5,027
Weyburn	–	–	–	113	966	2,210	3,050	3,193	4,119	5,002

Notes: (a) Table includes only those centres which were incorporated as cities by 1931 and had a population in excess of 5,000.
(b) Beginning in 1901, figures for Edmonton include Strathcona. See Table IV.

Sources: See Table II.

TABLE VII
Area and Density of Population of Canada's Twenty Largest Cities, 1921

City	RANK by Size	RANK by Density	Population	Land area in sq. miles	Population per sq. mile
Montreal	1	3	618,506	50.24	12,311
Toronto	2	1	521,893	25.89	20,158
Winnipeg	3	9	179,087	23.22	7,712
Vancouver	4	10	117,217	16.89	6,703
Hamilton	5	6	114,151	12.11	9,426
Ottawa	6	2	107,843	6.44	16,745
Quebec	7	5	95,193	8.84	10,768
Calgary	8	19	63,305	40.50	1,563
London	9	11	60,959	10.03	6,077
Edmonton	10	20	58,821	42.50	1,384
Halifax	11	8	58,372	6.72	8,686
Saint John	12	16	47,166	14.31	3,296
Victoria	13	13	38,727	7.25	5,341
Windsor	14	7	38,591	4.26	9,058
Regina	15	17	34,432	13.17	2,614
Brantford	16	12	29,440	4.93	5,972
Saskatoon	17	18	25,739	12.50	2,059
Verdun	18	4	25,001	2.22	11,262
Hull	19	15	24,117	6.25	3,859
Sherbrooke	20	14	23,515	4.85	4,848

Source: *Census of Canada*, 1921, Vol. I.

TABLE VIII

Per Cent of Population Urban (a) in Canada's Regions, 1901-1931

REGION	1901	1911	1921	1931
British Columbia	46.4	50.9 (4.5)(b)	56.1 (5.2)	67.3 (11.2)
Prairies	19.3	28.8 (9.5)	29.3 (0.5)	32.2 (2.9)
Ontario	43.6	52.8 (9.2)	60.7 (7.9)	65.3 (4.6)
Quebec	38.2	45.9 (7.7)	52.0 (4.1)	59.7 (7.7)
Maritimes	26.2	32.7 (6.5)	37.9 (5.2)	38.9 (1.0)

Notes: (a) See definition in Table IV, note (a).
(b) Bracketed figures represent per cent increase for decade.

Source: *Census of Canada, 1956* – "Analytical Report –– Rural and Urban Population," p. 26.