The name of William Richard Motherwell has become almost a legend in Saskatchewan. A stone cairn on the Trans-Canada Highway at Indian Head, an impressive federal government building in Regina, a northern lake—all bear his name. They perpetuate the memory of a man who, after heading the powerful Territorial Grain Growers' Association, became Minister of Agriculture for Saskatchewan, 1905-1918, then for Canada, 1921-1930. Motherwell brought to public office in 1905 an experience of over twenty years in pioneer farming, community activities, politics and the farmers' movement. His early career illustrates many of the trials and triumphs of prairie agriculture; moreover, it provides an insight into the policies which he was to pursue in his ministerial career.

Motherwell was born in 1860, the son of an Irish farmer near Perth, in Lanark County, Ontario. His boyhood was spent in the pattern of rural Ontario life. He went to the country school during the winter months and worked on the farm in the busy summer season. After reaching the age of sixteen he combined farm work with attendance at the Perth Collegiate Institute where he completed his matriculation in 1879. He then enrolled in the Ontario Agricultural College at Guelph and graduated with high class honours in 1881. Thereupon he and two of his fellow students headed West to see the country and to investigate the possibility of homesteading. They spent some time in exploring southern Manitoba, secured work in the harvest fields of Portage la Prairie, and returned to Ontario for the winter. In the following spring of 1882 Motherwell came west to the end of the rail at Brandon, and then travelled by wagon and ox-team to Fort Qu'Appelle where he engaged a land surveyor to help him locate a homestead. There being no land available south of the Qu'Appelle he chose a site north of the river in the Pheasant Hills country, thus becoming one of the first settlers of the Abernethy district.
Motherwell had made a wise choice. The Dominion land surveyor responsible for the outline survey of township 20, range 11, west of the 2nd meridian, described its soil as a first-class, rich clay loam, well adapted for settlement. Pheasant Creek crossed the south-east portion of the township and wood was in plentiful supply immediately to the east. This township was sub-divided in 1883 and Motherwell filed his homestead entry for the north-east quarter of section 14 on March 26 of that year. At the same time he made entry for the adjoining south-east quarter as a pre-emption. He then embarked on the careful program of husbandry that was to make his farm, later called Lanark Place, one of the finest in the province. By 1889, in making application for his homestead patent, he was able to report that he had broken 100 acres and had enclosed seventy-five acres with a pole fence. His modest house, eighteen by twenty-four feet in size, was valued at $400, and he had erected a log stable, thirty by sixty feet, valued at $100. He then had thirty head of livestock, a marked increase over the yoke of oxen and three horses with which he had begun. He was granted letters patent for his homestead on December 3, 1889, and completed the purchase of his pre-emption on May 31, 1890.

Subsequent improvements to his farm included the building of an impressive house of cut field stone in 1897 and a stone barn in 1907. The material, obtained from nearby coulees, was gathered stone by stone for several years before enough was assembled for building. This substantial program was undertaken on the earnings of the farm, without any outside financial assistance. The planting of shelter belts and shrubbery began with cottonwood cuttings obtained from the Indian Head Experimental Farm. Motherwell told of "cutting off branches from the cottonwood trees and of tying them together with the halter shank and bringing them home in the waggon on the return trip from Indian Head where he had been drawing grain a distance of about twenty-five miles." Many of his trees were planted from seed. The carragana hedges were eventually strong enough he said, "to turn a bull or stallion".

Motherwell's name has frequently been associated with the discovery of the dry farming technique of summerfallowing. At least one account states that the discovery was made on his and a number of other farms in the Indian Head district in 1886, as a result of fields having been left fallow while the men were absent during the North-West Rebellion the previous year. Evidence now avail-

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1C. F. Miles, in Descriptions of the Townships of the North-West Territories (Ottawa: Dept. of the Interior, 1886).
2Archives of Saskatchewan (hereafter cited as AS), Dept. of the Interior Homestead File No. 215741.
3Entry in Township General Register, Sask. Dept. of Agriculture, Lands Branch. Mr. Motherwell acquired additional property in later years but his farming operations were always carried out from the original homestead on which he continued to reside.
5Personal Papers of Dr. F. H. Auld: Motherwell to F. H. Auld, Sept. 17, 1934.
able indicates that, while Motherwell engaged a man to drive his team in transporting supplies for the troops, he managed to sow his land in 1885. He broadcast the seed by hand and harrowed it in with a two year old Shorthorn bull. This situation is confirmed by his application for homestead patent in which he showed that in 1885 he cropped all the acreage he had broken by that year. In a letter written many years later, Motherwell stated: "Eighty-six was our first experience of a real dry year.... Where an occasional fallow had been made the year previous—85—the resultant crop of wheat thereon ran from 15 to 25 or 30 bush." Another resident of the Abernethy district relates that Tom Rogers, who homesteaded the south-east quarter of section 28, left his farm, on which he had broken and cropped a few acres in 1884, to take advantage of the lucrative pay for transport drivers in the Rebellion. He made arrangements with neighbours to plant his field. Apparently it was prepared for seeding but owing to the scarcity of labor some or all of it was left fallow. In 1886 this acreage produced a crop which yielded much better than neighbouring fields. Motherwell was much impressed by this phenomenon and drew it to the attention of his friend, Angus MacKay, of Indian Head. The latter investigated the conditions under which the grain had been grown, and this was the basis for the experiments he proceeded to undertake at the new Dominion Experimental Farm. The discovery of dry-farming, whether

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confined to the Rogers farm or originating on several, led to the almost universal application of the method on the plains of western Canada.10

Motherwell commenced to practice summerfallowing and was rewarded in the dry year of 1889 with a crop of thirty bushels to the acre on his summerfallow. In 1894 he began to grow brome grass seed which he had imported directly from Austria. This proved a profitable crop, with the advantage over wheat that it did not lodge, ripened ahead of frost, yielded a seed that was worth seven times as much as wheat and, since it weighed so heavily for its bulk, required fewer trips to market. In 1904, when the railway station was built within two miles of his farm, Motherwell went into oat growing extensively, and still later he began to grow winter rye because of its advantages in the western climate.

Motherwell’s interest in improved farming practices led him to take an active part in the work of local agricultural societies. In 1887 he took prizes for seed grain at the Fort Qu’Appelle, Wolseley, and Indian Head fairs. He entered an essay contest sponsored by the Indian Head Agricultural Society and won a first prize. His paper, entitled “Oat Growing for the Qu’Appelle Valley”, was published in the Nor’West Farmer in April, 1901. In this practical discussion he stressed the need for proper preparation of the soil and the use of sound, well-cleaned and treated seed. His conversion to the “gospel of dry farming” was reflected in his counsel: “Do not begrudge a nicely prepared plot of fallow for a portion of your oat crop at least”.

In the Abernethy community Motherwell was an elder of the Presbyterian church, clerk of its Session for a time, and chairman of the Church Building Committee. He was active in financial support and volunteer labor when construction of a stone church was begun about 1900. He also served on the committee which undertook the organization of the local school district. When Abernethy S.D. No. 300 was erected, February 20, 1894, Motherwell was elected a trustee, served as secretary-treasurer for seven years then was chairman of the Board of Trustees until he entered the government. He also was a Justice of the Peace for the North-West Territories from 1892. In 1894 he took part in the organization of his township as a Statute Labour and Fire District.11

In 1891 Motherwell made an abortive foray into politics. He was one of the organizers of a meeting at Fort Qu’Appelle to select a candidate to oppose William Sutherland, the sitting member for the electoral district of North Qu’Appelle in the Legislative Assembly of the North-West Territories. The meeting drew only a small turn-out. Motherwell, whose name was proposed as a candidate, declined to stand on the grounds that the meeting was not representative of the

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10 Dry farming techniques may be traced into antiquity. In Canada a form of summerfallowing was known to the Red River settlers who left their fields fallow one year out of five or six. The re-emergence and adaptation of the practice to semi-arid regions in North America in the 1880’s appears to have been independent of earlier experiences and occurred almost simultaneously in a number of districts in the United States as well as at Indian Head.

constituency. The invitation to delegates had been mishandled with the result that some districts, including the town of Fort Qu'Appelle, had been overlooked. The local paper, the *Vidette*, commented editorially:

Mr. W. R. Motherwell . . . gave his reasons for refusing to accept the honor at their hands in a most manly and straightforward manner, and by so doing he proved himself to be a man of strong convictions and honest intentions, and well qualified to look after the interests of all of his constituents should he at any time be honored with the confidence of his neighbors as their representative in the Assembly or any other position of trust, and should he at any future time allow his name to be placed in nomination as an independent candidate he may be sure of the support of very many of all shades of politics.12

Three years later he undertook his first election campaign. A general election to select a new Legislative Assembly had been called for October 31, 1894. At a public meeting in Fort Qu’Appelle William Sutherland appealed for re-election and was opposed by G. F. Guernsey who had announced his candidacy. In brief speeches following those by the candidates, A. Hamilton and W. R. Motherwell “alluded to a number of irregularities in the performance of certain work in the Balcarres and Abernethy districts.”13 At that time public works expenditures in the North-West Territories were administered by the sitting member in each electoral district. Sutherland replied to the charges at the meeting by promising to look into the matter and to discontinue contracts with parties who might have accepted payment for work which they had not satisfactorily completed. On nomination day, October 24, Motherwell was nominated in addition to Sutherland and Guernsey. At the public meeting that day Motherwell “reiterated two or three cases of boodling, and stated that these not being explained to his satisfaction was the grounds for his coming out at this late hour.”14 The *Vidette*, despite its comments on Motherwell at the time of the 1891 election, strongly supported Sutherland and made light of Motherwell’s candidacy. In one column it printed an uncomplimentary bit of verse, which avoided the use of names beyond the rather obvious title, “Smotherwell’s Soliloquy”, and in another column concluded its report of a public meeting at Abernethy at which the candidates had spoken with this note: “The meeting . . . closed with cheers for Sutherland and groans for Motherwell, both of which were given with a will and considerable spirit”.15 Nonetheless, the electors of the Abernethy poll gave Motherwell a majority, as did neighboring Balcarres, but he trailed behind in the other eleven polls in the riding. Sutherland won handily with 312 votes; Guernsey polled 183; Motherwell received only 71.

Motherwell published a card of thanks in these words: “Thank you, friends, you fought nobly, but defeat is not necessarily disgrace, nor victory honorable.”16

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12 *Qu’Appelle Vidette*, Oct. 29, 1891.
13 Ibid., Oct. 13, 1894.
14 Ibid., Oct. 25, 1894. Elections for members of the Territorial Assembly were non-partisan, so that candidates were nominated on a personal basis rather than as the representative of a political party.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid., Nov. 1, 1894.
The wording was prophetic. Suggestions of irregularities in the North Qu’Appelle expenditures continued. Motherwell took the lead in pressing for an official investigation with the result that, in 1895, Premier Haultain was appointed a special commissioner to enquire into the charges. Motherwell expressed his strong feelings over delays in the matter in a letter to Haultain:

... your policy on this question has been from the first (to use a hackneyed phrase) one of masterly inactivity... You have seen fit to treat us with contempt and indifference, as if we were a lot of soreheads clamoring about nothing. While admitting that external circumstances might probably point in that direction for a time, you are surely now persuaded that such grave offences have been committed that the safety of the public interest demands a remedy.\(^1\)

Motherwell stated bluntly that should Haultain persist in balking the investigation he would “refer the whole subject to the Dominion government and ask for a thorough enquiry on their part”.\(^1\) However, Haultain in his report to the Assembly in 1896 confirmed the charges, although he exonerated the member of personal complicity therein. Sutherland promptly resigned. A by-election was called for December 1, 1896. While D. H. McDonald, a Fort Qu’Appelle banker and businessman, early announced that he would be a candidate, rural demand for a public meeting to consider nominations resulted in a gathering of seventy electors in the town hall at Fort Qu’Appelle on November 14. Three men, Messrs. Miller, Nicholls, and Motherwell, were proposed. Motherwell framed the principal issues in three questions:

1. Is it your wish to perpetuate the painful past in regard to the expenditure of public money in the district?  
2. Has the time not come when the great agricultural interests of this district demand such recognition and representation of their views in the Legislature as their importance justify?  
3. Would it not be in the interest of good government to assist in organizing an energetic though fair opposition to the present Executive?\(^2\)

McDonald also addressed the meeting and then withdrew with his supporters while a ballot was taken. Motherwell was declared the choice of the meeting.

Attendance at the ensuing Motherwell-McDonald campaign meetings was hampered by extremely cold weather, but both candidates found space in the local paper to publish an “Address to the Electors”. Motherwell’s was brief. He appealed for support “as one whose interests are entirely the same as your own, and believe that in justice to yourselves you will determine that the Farmer’s Candidate shall be your next representative in the Assembly”.\(^3\) The \textit{Vidette} took a neutral position and stated:

Naturally the contest has become more or less a question of the relation of either candidate to the past history of the constituency and the claims of each from a personal and business point of view to the support of the

\(^{1}\)AS, Motherwell Papers, 1890’s Sutherland-Boyd case: Motherwell to Haultain, June 27, 1896.  
\(^{2}\)Ibid.  
\(^{3}\)The \textit{Vidette} (Fort Qu’Appelle), Nov. 19, 1896.  
\(^{4}\)Ibid.
electors. Whichever candidate is successful, his majority will not, we think, be a very large one".  

Motherwell polled 157 votes, far short of the total of 382 received by D. H. McDonald.

Following this second defeat at the polls Motherwell abandoned any personal political ambitions for a time, although in Dominion politics he appears to have supported James M. Douglas more or less actively, and worked on behalf of the Liberal party in his immediate district. Shortly he turned to other means of advancing the interests of the farmers which he had sought to represent in the Territorial Assembly.

The circumstances surrounding the formation of the Territorial Grain Growers' Association have been described by a number of writers. The Manitoba Grain Act of 1900, drafted to carry out the recommendations made the previous year by the Royal Commission on the Shipment and Transportation of Grain, provided for general supervision of the grain trade by a warehouse commissioner and granted the farmer the right to ship his own grain and build flat warehouses to facilitate loading. It required the railway to furnish loading platforms where necessary. These provisions were expected to end the monopoly in grain handling extended to elevator companies by the railway and which had been attended by such evils as low grades, short weight, excessive dockage, and unfair prices. However, the crop of 1901 proved to be the largest the country had yet known; the railway was quite unprepared to move it. Elevators plugged up; farmers could not deliver their grain. The frustrations of the farmers were expressed in the Indian Head district at a meeting called by John Sibbold and John Millar. Motherwell attended but deplored the violence which was threatened by the more radical farmers. Nevertheless, some sort of concerted action was indicated.

Motherwell and his neighbour, Peter Dayman, got together to discuss the situation. They met in the living room at Lanark Place which might thus be said to be the cradle of the grain growers' movement in Saskatchewan. It was a cheerful, well-lighted room, with simple but comfortable furnishings and a few Victorian adornments—a hanging lamp, two stuffed owls on the mantel over the fireplace, and enlarged portraits of Motherwell's parents on the white plaster walls. Motherwell, dressed in overalls and flannel shirt, heavily bearded and wearing a walrus moustache, made use of the table-height stone window sill to draft notices for a meeting of farmers to be held in Indian Head on December 16, 1901.

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21Ibid., Nov. 26, 1896.
Dayman, a Conservative, and Motherwell, a Liberal, both signed the notices to avoid the possibility of partisan interest being attached to the undertaking.\(^{24}\)

The date of the meeting was chosen to coincide with the much heralded debate between Premiers Haultain of the North-West Territories and Roblin of Manitoba, on the proposed extension of the Manitoba boundary. With many people in town for the debate in the evening, the afternoon meeting in the fanning mill factory drew a sizeable turn-out of some seventy-five farmers. The aroused farmers agreed to form a Grain Growers' Association.\(^{25}\) Motherwell was elected provisional President, and a meeting to draft a constitution was set for Indian Head on January 2, 1902. At this second meeting, Motherwell recapitulated the causes leading to the formation of the association:

There could be no doubt that there were many grievances to correct and he had every faith in the solution of many difficulties through the combined wisdom of the farmers of the West. The eastern papers had recently conveyed the news of the completion of the grain blockade. It was a most serious state of affairs and one which affected not alone every grain grower, but also every merchant, mechanic and professional man in the country. Cessation in moving the grain practically meant cessation of business. The aim of the association would be to indicate and press for a practical solution of as many problems now before them as were susceptible of solution.\(^{26}\)

Motherwell and other members of the Board of Directors proceeded to address local meetings in eastern Assiniboia with the result that several branch associations were organized. The Directors then convened the first annual convention of the Territorial Grain Growers' Association at Indian Head on February 12, 1902. In his presidential address, Motherwell reiterated his belief in the efficacy of concerted action and voiced the traditional agrarian antipathy to "big business":

The day has gone by for our remaining scattered, unhanded communities, a tempting bait to the ambitious designs of others. No one can deny that the farmer extracts the wealth from the soil by his industry and skill, in conjunction with the forces of nature, and no one can deny that in the past his rights have been ruthlessly trodden upon by dealers and transportation companies. It is a fact that in other branches of agriculture such as dairy, fruit, and stock interests, all have recognized organizations, and it seems strange that grain growers have not before this realized the importance of organizing also.\(^{27}\)

He went on to suggest practical steps that would alleviate the difficulties in grain handling. Changes should be made in the Grain Act to require the railways to supply loading platforms within a reasonable time after demand and to grant the right to load cars from vehicles whether there was a platform or not. These

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\(^{24}\) This was to avoid the fate of the Patrons of Industry, an American movement transplanted to Canada, which flourished in western Canada in the mid-90's but disintegrated before the end of the decade due to political candidacies and internal quarrels. See Wood, \textit{op. cit.}, Ch. 11.

\(^{25}\) See Moorhouse, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 49-52, for a description of the Indian Head meeting of Dec. 16, 1901.

\(^{26}\) The \textit{Nor'West Farmer} (Winnipeg), Jan. 6, 1902, p. 22.

\(^{27}\) \textit{Ibid.}, Mar. 5, 1902, p. 187.
proposals were incorporated in resolutions of the convention, together with another which would require the local railway agent to apportion cars, where there was a shortage, in the order in which they were applied for, and in cases where such cars were misappropriated by applicants not entitled to them the penalties of the act should be enforced. The resolutions, pressed upon the federal government and debated in Parliament, were adopted as amendments to the shipping clauses of the Manitoba Grain Act at the 1902 session.

The crop of 1902 surpassed the bountiful harvest of 1901. Despite the new provisions of the Grain Act, the C.P.R. was unwilling or unable to revise its practices in line with them. Elevator companies continued to command the available supply of cars. Loading platforms without cars were of no help to the farmers. Motherwell and Peter Dayman went to Winnipeg on behalf of the Grain Growers' Association and secured promises from C.P.R. officials that they would carry out the intent of the car-distribution clause of the Grain Act. The promises, however, were not translated into action at the local stations. The Association then took the more drastic step of laying a charge against the C.P.R. agent at Sintaluta for an infraction of the Grain Act in his allocation of cars. The celebrated case, tried before two magistrates at Sintaluta, resulted in the agent being fined fifty dollars and costs. The C.P.R. eventually appealed the case to the Supreme Court but that body upheld the magistrates' decision. Speaking at a Grain Growers' meeting in Regina, March 27, 1903, Motherwell said, "The C.P.R. has got to keep the law no matter how many prosecutions we have to enter". The company, however, bowed to the inevitable with good grace and instructed its agents to distribute cars in the order in which they were booked.

In his Regina speech Motherwell warned that the farmers must not relax their vigilance. "So long as the farmers of the West grew a product like wheat", he said, "it would be necessary to have an organization." While the elevator companies realized they would now have to conduct their business differently, the farmers should not depend upon them, he warned. They must avoid the "ruinous way" of selling by the load. It was better to sell in bulk or through farmers' elevators. The latter should provide only handling facilities, since, he maintained, if they bought grain, they would be in the same position as the other companies, and their prices would be governed "by the same combine".

The Sintaluta test case publicized the T.G.G.A. Its membership grew rapidly and spread into Manitoba, where Motherwell assisted in forming the first local association at Virden on January 3, 1903. Two months later a Manitoba Grain Growers' Association was formed. Their strength augmented by two members of this organization, Motherwell and Gillespie of the T.G.G.A. proceeded to Ottawa to confer with representatives of the grain dealers and the railway companies with the result that further refinements in the shipping clauses of the Grain Act were made at the session of 1903. The principles of direct shipment and equality in car distribution were thus firmly established. The Grain Growers' then turned to

28 See Paton, op. cit., pp. 35-36 for details of this case.
29 The Leader (Regina), Apr. 2, 1903.
30 Ibid.
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then turned to effecting improvements in the grading and inspecting of grain shipments, meeting again with success. Motherwell continued as President of the T.G.G.A. until his resignation following his entry into the Scott cabinet.31

While party politics had not, nominally at least, entered into the make-up of the Territorial Assembly, with the passing of the Alberta and Saskatchewan Acts in 1905 the Dominion political parties began to organize on a provincial basis. Motherwell attended the Liberal provincial convention held at Regina in August, 1905, to elect a leader and adopt a platform. He was appointed to the Resolutions Committee and moved the resolution respecting agriculture and ranching.32 He was also elected to the provincial executive as the representative for the North Qu'Appelle constituency. The Regina Leader interviewed Motherwell “as to the report that he was likely to be a candidate in North Qu'Appelle in the Liberal interest at the forthcoming provincial election.” He replied that “so long as he held the position he now does as President of the Territorial Grain Growers’ Association he had no intention or thought of entering political life.”33

On August 30 Walter Scott, who had been chosen Liberal leader, wrote to Motherwell: “There will likely be quite a number of the friends gathered here next Monday, and if at all possible I wish you would make a point of being here. A number of things require to be discussed.”34 The occasion of course was the inauguration ceremony of the province. On September 5, Lieutenant Governor Forget asked Scott to form a government. In a public statement, Scott said that he at once invited Calder, Lamont and Motherwell to join him. “Messrs. Lamont and Motherwell requested me to give them until the end of the week for consideration, to which I consented. All rumours as to friction and difficulty which have been in circulation are, so far as I know, quite baseless. Each of the gentlemen had consented to join the Government and this morning (Sept. 12) the full cabinet was sworn in . . .”35 The rumours had been associated with Lamont; there is no record of the considerations Motherwell may have taken into account in the few days which elapsed before he made his decision.

Motherwell’s prominence as a leader of the grain growers, combined with his professional training in agriculture and practical experience as a farmer, made him an eminently satisfactory choice as Commissioner of Agriculture36 for the new province. His policies in that office will be examined in a future article.


31 Motherwell’s resignation became effective at the annual meeting of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers’ Association, Feb. 6-7, 1906.
32 The Leader, Aug. 23, 1905. The brief resolution read: “Resolved that, inasmuch as the progress and prosperity of the Province will depend almost entirely upon the development of its agricultural and ranching industries, the Provincial Government should assist these industries in every possible way.”
33 Ibid.
35 Quoted in the The Leader, Sept. 13, 1905.
36 The office was known as Commissioner of Agriculture until Dec. 18, 1909, when the designation of Minister of Agriculture was adopted. Motherwell also held the portfolio of Provincial Secretary, Sept. 12, 1905, to Aug. 19, 1912.