Early Industries

These write-ups and resource links are intended to serve as the meat on the bones of the lecture outlines and PowerPoints of the Local History Teaching Aids (LHTA) materials. The goal in composing them has been for clarity, which is a key part of making the material interesting and inspiring. The material below is presented as a resource for the teacher, rather than for the students.

I. A Survey of Enterprise in Red River North

*Selkirk, St. Andrews, and St. Clements today boast a mixed economy with pillars in commerce, steel, healthcare. In the colonial era and early twentieth century, however, their economies were based on the development of the rich natural resources around the south basin of Lake Winnipeg.*

Before the fur trade era, the only industry in Red River North was the hunting, fishing, horticulture, and long distance trade conducted by various Indian tribes. The Larter (1000-200 BC) and Laurel Culture (200 BC-AD 1000) people of archaeology were nomadic, depending especially on the buffalo for subsistence. They also hunted smaller animals, fished, and harvested wild rice.

**A)   
Pre-Contact**

The **Dakota Culture (1000-1300)** was noteworthy for practicing **horticulture** near present-day **Lockport**. They grew large gardens of corn near the now-submerged rapids on the east side of the Red River. These people have been called "Manitoba's first farmers," although this is something of an overstatement. They could not rely exclusively on their crops. Horticulture refers to gardening and is not sufficient to live off of. Part of the Dakota Culture's reason for settling near the rapids, it has been surmised, was because the area was both ideal for fishing, and was a natural crossing point for large herds of bison.

**Horticulture at Lockport in the Middle Ages**

The Selkirk and Blackduck Cultures (both existing from about 900 to 1700) continued the trend. Evidence has been found that indicates they hunted bison, ate wild rice, made pottery, and traded with distant areas. Connections with the people of North and South Dakota and Minnesota are evident.

With the arrival of Europeans and their increasing progress inland the fur trade dominated the industry of the region. Until the nineteenth century, most of the trapping was done by Indians who then traded the furs with outposts of the **Hudson Bay Company (HBC)** or **Northwest Company (NWC)**. Indians functioned as middlemen for European traders, travelling vast distances for work or trade.

**B) The  
Fur Trade**

As early as the **1730s**, French explorer **Jean-Baptiste Gaultier de La Vérendrye** trekked through St. Clements. He and his sons founded a number of forts across southern Manitoba, including two both called **Fort Maurepas**. One stood near present-day **Fort Alexander**, while the other was north of Selkirk, possibly on **Netley Creek**. The biggest fur trade establishment in Red River North was set up after the merger of the HBC and NWC in 1821. HBC governor Sir George Simpson had **Lower Fort Garry** constructed in the **1830s**, hoping it would become the new administrative centre for the HBC in Red River. It was located above the **St. Andrews Rapids** (now submerged by Lockport Lock and Dam) on high ground and was more secure from floods than were buildings at the Forks. Unfortunately, it failed to fulfill Simpson's purpose, being on the outskirts of settlement in the colony.

**Fur trade forts**

British and French fur traders sometimes intermarried with the Cree and Ojibway. Their offspring, the Métis, became the most populous group of people in Red River in the nineteenth century. Many of the Métis found work with the HBC supplying pemmican or working in **York boat** crews that made the run between the **Forks**, Portage La Loche, and **York Factory** on Hudson Bay. So many men of Red River took service on the boats that it became a sort of rite of passage to make the long trip north on them.

**The Métis and the boat brigades**

One of the more renowned York boat crews was known as the **La Loche Brigade**. Its men were Métis recruits from the Red River area. The two most famous **guides** of the brigade were **Alexis L'Esperance** and **Baptiste Bruce**, who were renowned for their skill and efficiency. Explorer Dr. John Rae remarked that "there has evidently much more care been taken of the packages in the boats under Bruce than in the other - indeed the bales, flour bags &c are so clean, that they appear as if they had just been handed out of the store."

**C) The   
Red River Colony**

The growth of the Selkirk Settlement led to the true beginnings of industry in Red River North. Once the food supply was mastered, enterprising individuals experimented with mechanized processes for increasing productivity. Two noteworthy examples were the St. Peters settlement's two windmills and John Gunn's flour mill.

**St. Peter's** began in 1833 when Anglican missionary William Cockran convinced Chief Peguis and his band of Ojibway Indians to relocate there to farm. By 1843, Peguis's people were producing surplus crops. Cockran spearheaded the construction of the **first** **windmill** for grinding grain into flour in **1835**. The people had to bring materials from the core of the Red River colony around the Forks. They built the **second windmill** in **1846**.

**St. Peter's Windmills**

To the south in the **1850s**, **John Gunn** set up his mill along the creek that bears his clan name (**Gunn's Creek** flows through Lockport on the river's east side south of the locks by the Half Moon). He was the son of Manitoba historian **Donald Gunn**, who came from Caithness, Scotland, in 1823 and became a pillar in church and politics. Donald gave John the river lot the creek flowed through. John then bought a nearby lot after deciding to build the mill. John used mostly local men and materials to build the mill. The millstone was cut from granite on Lake Winnipeg's east side across from Grindstone Point on Hecla Island. A York boat brought it back to Gunn's Creek. John also imported a few parts from Missouri. Gunn's Creek flour mill operated from the 1850s to the **1870s**, when steam flour mills came into business.

**D) Confeder-ation**

**Gunn's Creek Flour Mill**

The arrival of the railway in the 1870s brought new life and activity to Red River North. Selkirk shot up as a boomtown in the early 1880s (incorporated 1882) and swiftly became the hub of the region. It was connected to Winnipeg by railway and the whole of Lake Winnipeg by the Red River. The town also attracted many merchants. **W. H. Eaton**, a relative of Timothy Eaton, ran a large general store on Eveline St. **R. H. Gilhuly** worked with **James Colcleugh** (the town's first mayor, 1882-1885), then bought him out to own the most important drug store in town. **R. C. Moody** dealt in hardware. **Fred Pook** was the mechanic and a blacksmith. The enterprising men of Selkirk had ambition for their town's future.

Selkirk was "The Head of Inland Navigation" (*Selkirk: The First Hundred Years*). It prospered by **fishing** and **lumbering** industries on the lake. **William Robinson** (for whom Robinson Avenue is named) was the major figure in these endeavours. He came from Guelph, Ontario, as a young man to get work laying tracks for the Canadian Pacific Railway. In the 1870s, he toured the lake on the steamer *Colvile*'s maiden voyage and witnessed the isolated fishing and lumbering activities taking place there. Sensing opportunity, he proceeded to build steamboats of his own. He used them to forge a network that brought shipments of fish, from all over the lake, to freezers in Selkirk, for export by rail to the United States. Robinson bought up small businesses all around the lake. By the 1890s, his partnership with the **Dominion Fish Company** dealt with 3 million pounds of fish every year. Some of his vessels were also involved with the lumbering that was a blessing to people from St. Andrews and St. Clements as well.

**Lords of the Lake**

**The Merchants of Selkirk**

Another leading figure in Selkirk's lake business was **William Purvis**. Purvis passed through Selkirk on his way from Manitoulin Island to the Klondike gold rush in the Yukon. He failed to strike it rich there and brought his family to Selkirk around 1900. He and his cousin **Joe Simpson** (mayor, 1907-1910) joined with three other men to found the **Northern Fish Company**. Despite Robinson's monopoly, they carved out a market of their own in the rich fishing world of Lake Winnipeg. Purvis and his sons became famous for **shipbuilding** as they supplied their company with steamers.

Across the river in East Selkirk, resource industries were more plentiful than commercial activities at the end of the nineteenth century. Of note were the several **quarries** that furnished **stone and brick** for buildings in Selkirk and Winnipeg. Ferries heaped with stone drifted back and forth across the Red to connect with the railway in Selkirk. East Selkirk's stone was soft and was used ornamentally in Winnipeg. It could also be burnt to make clean white lime. One man who involved himself in these industries was **Arthur Doidge** of Peterborough, Ontario. He arrived in East Selkirk in the 1870s and opened **Doidge's Pottery Works**. East Selkirk's quarries declined when Garson and Tyndall's Tyndall stone came into fashion at the end of the century.

**Quarries and Pottery**

The dawn of the twentieth century saw the arrival of several large businesses that influenced the region. The **Van Horne Farm** that started in **1899**. It was the work of **Sir William Cornelius Van Horne**, who was renowned for overseeing construction of the CPR. Van Horne's East Selkirk farm served its purpose as a site for agricultural experiments in the Canadian west. It also patronized community activities like curling. In Selkirk, the Manitoba Bridge & Engineering Company made a sizable investment. In **1913**, H. B. Lyall of Lockport convinced his company to build a steel mill at the south end of town. The early workers at "**the Mill**," many of whom were raised in the small houses built near the smelter, assured the "blue collar" character of Selkirk. The industry had long-lasting effects for employment on the whole region. South of East Selkirk, the lawyer of the **C-I-L (Canadian Industries Limited)** company began negotiations with the St. Clements municipal council for the construction of an explosives manufacturing plant in 1929. C-I-L's goal in East Selkirk was to cut in half the distance between mines and explosives factories in the west. The Great Depression and a dispute over tax rates, however, kept the project from proceeding until **1934**. The plant was called "Brainerd Works." **Dr. Thomas Brainerd** was a major Canadian powder manufacturer. His plants had played important roles in the construction of the **Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR)**. He died in 1910, but his sons carried on his legacy in the industry. Winthrop Brainerd was C-I-L's vice president when the East Selkirk plant was built. The plant ceased manufacture in 1970. Its location is commemorated by the name of C-I-L Road.

**The Van Horne Farm and steel**

Underlying the development of local industry was the young province's gradual mastery of the transportation technology and infrastructure it needed to grow. In order of temporal importance, the three fields of transportation were those concocted for water, rail, and road. Each enjoyed its period of primacy.

**Dynamite**

**E) The Progress of Civilization:  
Transport**

For the longest period of the region's history, fur traders and colonists relied on river transport. **La Vérendrye** and his sons conducted their explorations in canoes by rivers, lakes, and portages. After **1774**, the Hudson Bay Company began sending its **York boat brigades** inland from Hudson Bay. They soon penetrated south of Lake Winnipeg and became the main means of river transport. Sometimes they hoisted sails instead of using oars. They carried cargo between Red River and **York Factory** for over 100 years.

**Water transport**

The York boats were superseded in southern Manitoba by the arrival of steamboats. The first steamboat in Manitoba was the ***S.S. Anson Northrup***, which sailed up the Red River from Minnesota in **1859**. The era of steamboats did not last long, however. In **1877**, the *S.S. Selkirk* delivered the first railway engine in the province, the **Countess of Dufferin**, to Winnipeg. As Manitoba's network of railways expanded, they naturally phased out the boats.

Once the railway arrived, the steamboats moved their home port to Selkirk. The town sat north of the **St. Andrews Rapids** and so avoided the barrier the shallow water presented to steamboats. For a time, the boats thrived at Selkirk. They made trips all around Lake Winnipeg to supply communities and take on cargoes of fish and lumber for export. The HBC constructed a wharf and warehouse across the river at **Colvile Landing** in the east slough in **1880**. Selkirk's railway outlet integrated with lake freighting to get resources to market. Even in the twentieth century steamboat traffic was still deemed important. The dam constructed at Lockport submerged the rapids and contained a lock that allowed boats to pass freely between Selkirk and Winnipeg. With railway expansion, however, the boats increasingly moved north to concentrate themselves on the Lower Saskatchewan River.

From the 1880s to the 1920s, rail was the most important means of transportation. Selkirk was born of real estate speculation at the spot where the CPR was expected to bridge the Red River. When the rail turned south, townsmen quickly made efforts to save their futures. They succeeded in having a branch line built between Winnipeg and Selkirk in **1883**. This line effectively saved the town. The branch line became of great significance to the town's economy and made it a strategic centre. Across the river, the line that turned south at East Selkirk brought thousands of new settlers. In the twentieth century, the CPR line to Lake Winnipeg secured the existence of **Clandeboye** when it passed through in **1902**. On a smaller scale, an **electric streetcar** service connected Winnipeg and Selkirk after **1908**.

**Railway transport**

Railways in the twentieth century created new business by entering the leisure market. In **1902**, the **CPR** opened a line to a resort run by the company at **Winnipeg Beach** in St. Andrews. The **Canadian Northern Railway (CNR)** opened a competing track and resort in St. Clements at **Grand Beach** in December of **1914**, and **Victoria Beach** in **1916**.

The history of road transportation was less colourful than that of water or rail. The Selkirk Settlers, though relying on the river, had two noteworthy roads. One was the dusty trail along the river called **River Road**. The other was the **King's Road**, which today has become **Highway #9**, and Main Street within Selkirk's city limits. These roads were for people, animals, and ox carts.

**Road transport**

Early experiments with road improvement in the area included the method for laying what were known as **corduroy roads**. This approach involved laying logs side by side to provide a more firm surface for travel. This technique was useful for soft and marshy ground such as was encountered throughout St. Andrews.

Road travel eclipsed railways in the early decades of the twentieth century. **Lockport** **Lock and Dam**, completed in **1910**, had a road across the top of it. Henry Ford had only begun producing his Model T in 1908, sparking the beginnings of the automobile revolution. By the 1920s, however, cars were becoming important. The government of Manitoba **Premier John Bracken** paved a series of roads in the **1920s**. In 1925, **Pete Homenick** of St. Clements opened **Red River Motor Coach Bus Lines**, becoming the first rural daily service between Winnipeg and Lockport. In **1936**, **Selkirk Bridge** was completed as a **Great Depression** public works project. It ended the need for river **ferries**, phasing out one more means of water transportation.

Transportation by road was quick to become of first importance in Red River North. Even so, it has yet to become the longest used form of transport. If the era of water transportation wound down around 1910, it lasted for 140 years. The railways that came in the 1880s faded in importance by the 1930s. Counting the roads era from the 1920s or 1930s to the present (2018) makes this current era only 90 or 100 years long, leaving it to come in second place behind water transport for duration. That ***Manitobans relied on boats longer than they have relied on cars*** is an interesting thought. Even if one reckons the boat era from the Selkirk Settlers to 1900, automobiles still finish in only a narrow win as of 2018.

**Additional Resources from the Red River North Heritage Website:**

Gunn, George Henry. "Gunn's Creek Flour Mill." Red River North Heritage. Accessed August 11, 2018. https://redrivernorthheritage.com/gunns-creek-flour-mill/.

Slh. "Red River Brick and Tile." Red River North Heritage. Accessed August 11, 2018. https://redrivernorthheritage.com/red-river-brick-and-tile/.