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# Immigration: The Prairie Story\*

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Many Western Canadians are able to trace their family origins to relatives who immigrated to the Prairie Provinces in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Encouraged by the aggressive policies of Clifford Sifton, the Federal Minister of the Interior from 1896 to 1905, immigrants from Europe migrated in increasing numbers to Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. In the six years preceding World War I, approximately 1.7 million people immigrated to Canada. Of these, 646,135 came to the Prairies, which represented 37.7% of the total immigration to the country. In terms of the percentage of total immigration to the country, immigration to the region dropped during the 1930s and declined throughout the remainder of the 20th century. In the past five years, however, this trend has started to shift as more immigrants choose the Prairie Provinces as a destination. The purpose of this article is to provide a snapshot of immigration trends to the Prairies from 2003 to 2007 and to briefly review some of the factors leading to these increased immigration numbers.

## Historic trends

The largest number of immigrants to arrive in Canada in a single year was in 1913, when 400,870 newcomers entered the country. The Prairie Provinces received 32.6% of these immigrants. In 1927, just before the onset of the Great Depression, 52% of immigrants to Canada arrived in the Prairies. These numbers represent

the peak years for immigration to the region. Table 1 illustrates how, as a percentage of the total immigration to Canada, the numbers peaked and then generally declined throughout the 20th century. The decline was particularly acute from 1987 to 1997.

TABLE 1  
**Immigration to the Prairies, 1908-1997**

Year	Immigrants to the Prairies	Percentage of Canadian total
1908	66,446	46.3
1927	80,068	52
1937	3,221	21
1947	7,909	12.3
1957	13,172	13
1967	28,071	12.6
1977	19,983	17.4
1987	18,863	12.4
1997	18,268	8.4

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada (n.d.).

By 2003, the downward trend of the second part of the 20th century had reversed, with 24,004 immigrants arriving in the three Prairie Provinces. By 2007, this number had grown to 35,396.

Table 2 shows the number of immigrants destined to each of the three Prairie Provinces from 2003 to 2007.

This increase in the number of immigrants settling in the Prairies is even more significant when viewed in the context of their percentage of total immigration to Canada. Table 3 illustrates the rise of immigration to the Prairies, proportionally to total national figures.

\* The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of Citizenship and Immigration Canada or the Government of Canada.

TABLE 2

**Immigration to the Prairie Provinces and to Canada as a whole, 2003–2007**

Year	Canada	Manitoba	Saskatchewan	Alberta	Total – Prairies
2003	221,349	6,503	1,668	15,833	24,004
2004	235,823	7,426	1,942	16,474	25,842
2005	262,240	8,096	2,108	19,404	26,608
2006	251,643	10,047	2,724	20,716	33,487
2007	236,758	10,995	3,517	20,857	35,396

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2008).

TABLE 3

**Rise of immigration to the Prairie Provinces, proportional to the total of Canada**

Year	Manitoba	Saskatchewan	Alberta	Total – Prairies
2003	2.9	0.8	7.2	10.9
2004	3.1	0.8	7	10.9
2005	3.1	0.8	7.4	11.3
2006	4.0	1.1	8.2	13.3
2007	4.6	1.5	8.8	14.9

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2008).

**Immigrant categories and the impact of Provincial Nominee Programs**

The selection of immigrants is made according to immigrant categories, as defined by the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act*. In general, these categories are family class immigrants, economic immigrants and refugees. Additionally, each year small numbers of immigrants fall into the category of “others.” As Table 4 illustrates, the immigrant categories of newcomers to the Prairies from 2003 to 2007 generally match those of Canada as a whole.

However, when these figures are examined on a province-by-province basis, interesting differences emerge. As Table 5 illustrates, Manitoba and Saskatchewan have proportionally higher numbers of newcomers in the economic immigrant category than does Alberta. Further, Saskatchewan has a higher proportion of refugees in its newcomer population than do its Prairie neighbours. This is a result of the specific government policy designed to send a high proportion of Government Assisted Refugees to the Prairies.

These numbers can be further analyzed by reviewing the number of Provincial Nominees, a sub-category of the economic immigration category. Table 6 compares immigration within this category and demonstrates the strong impact of the Provincial Nominee Programs (PNP) in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

The PNP allows provincial and territorial governments to actively participate in the immigration process. Like other provinces,

TABLE 4

**Immigrant category of newcomers to the Prairie Provinces compared to Canada as a whole, 2003–2007**

Immigrant category	% to the Prairies	% to Canada
Family class	25.6	28.0
Economic	58.8	55.4
Refugee	13.4	11.8

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2008).

Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba have signed agreements with the Government of Canada in order to be able to identify and designate immigrants who will meet their local economic needs. While these nominees must meet federal health and security admission criteria, they are not subject to the skilled worker selection grid that determines eligibility. Through these agreements, provinces are afforded a significant opportunity to promote immigration to their regions and fulfill labour market needs that may not be reflected nationally.

The PNPs of all three Prairie Provinces have evolved considerably since their inception. Alberta signed a PNP Agreement with the Government of Canada in 2002. As of the autumn of 2008, Alberta’s program consisted of an employer-driven stream (including categories for international graduates and a limited semi-skilled category), a family stream and a self-employed farmer stream. Saskatchewan’s Agreement, signed

TABLE 5

**Immigrant category of newcomers to individual Prairie Provinces, 2003–2007**

Immigrant category	Alberta	%	Saskatchewan	%	Manitoba	%
Family class	29,700	31.8	2,314	19.3	6,003	14
Economic	50,180	53.8	6,505	54.4	3,057	71
Refugees	10,987	11.8	2,907	24.3	5,988	13.9

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2008).

TABLE 6

**Provincial nominees (principal applicants, spouses and dependents) by province, compared to Canada as a whole, 2003–2007**

Alberta	%	Saskatchewan	%	Manitoba	%	Canada	%
3,820	4	3,763	31.5	26,134	60.7	49,144	4

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2008).

in 1998, includes the following categories: skilled workers, family members, entrepreneurs, farm owner/operators, health professionals, long haul truck drivers, students and a project for the hospitality sector.

Manitoba's PNP Agreement was signed in 1998 as an addendum to the Canada-Manitoba Immigration Agreement, originally signed in 1996. Manitoba has aggressively used the PNP to promote immigration to the province and, in terms of numbers, has been the most successful in Canada. The Manitoba program includes categories under a general stream, an international student priority assessment stream, an employer direct stream and categories for business and strategic initiatives. As Table 6 shows, the Manitoba PNP accounted for 60.7% of immigration to the province between 2003 and 2007. This compares to 4% for Canada. Saskatchewan's PNP numbers are also quite high when compared to the country as a whole.

Aggressive utilization of a PNP can have a dramatic effect on the population growth of communities, as illustrated by immigration to the Manitoba towns of Steinbach and Winkler. These two communities are amongst the fastest growing in Manitoba. Statistics Canada 2006 Census data for Steinbach shows a population of 11,066, up 19.9% from 2001 (Statistics Canada 2008b). During the same period, Winkler's population grew 14.6% to 9,106 (*Ibid.* 2008c). Obviously, immigration is not the sole factor contributing to migration in and out of Steinbach and Winkler. However, the immigration numbers to both communities are striking. From 2003 to 2007, 3,119 people immigrated to Winkler. Of these, 93% were provincial nominees or their

dependants. During the same period, 91% of the 1,839 people who immigrated to Steinbach were in the PNP category. Manitoba has promoted immigration to destinations outside of Winnipeg through specific agreements with a number of municipalities.

The increase in the number of people obtaining Canadian citizenship also illustrates how the region is attracting people who wish to settle permanently. In 2007, 26,872 permanent residents living in the Prairies applied for and received a grant of citizenship. This compares to only 10,798 in 2003.

**Secondary migration**

Secondary migration occurs when an immigrant destined to one part of Canada moves to another region after becoming a permanent resident. Tracking this phenomenon is problematic as there is no easy way to quantify the movement of secondary migrants and relatively little research has been done on the issue. However, anecdotal information, provided primarily from immigrant service organizations and front line CIC officials, suggests that significant numbers of immigrants are moving to Alberta. Statistics Canada data from the 2006 Census on "Immigrant status and period of immigration" does provide some insight. Table 7 compares the number of immigrants who became permanent residents in the Prairie Provinces from 2001 to 2006 with the number of people who stated on the census they were immigrants to Canada who arrived approximately during the same period (*Ibid.* 2008a).

This suggests that Alberta had a net increase of over 20,000 newcomers during the 2001 to 2006 period, while Saskatchewan and Manitoba

TABLE 7

### Number of immigrants who became permanent residents in the Prairie Provinces, compared to number of people who immigrated to Canada, 2001–2006

Province	Permanent residents 2001–2006	Individuals who stated on the Census that they immigrated between 2001–2006	Variance
Alberta	82,900	103,680	+20,780
Saskatchewan	11,812	8,095	-3,717
Manitoba	41,279	31,190	-10,089

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2008) and Statistics Canada (2008a).

TABLE 8

### Stock<sup>a</sup> of temporary foreign workers, 2003–2007

Year	Alberta	Saskatchewan	Manitoba
2003	11,067	1,541	2,104
2004	12,936	1,733	2,454
2005	15,815	2,017	2,717
2006	22,392	2,200	3,356
2007	37,257	2,998	4,603

<sup>a</sup> Stock statistics measure the number of temporary residents present in the CIC system on December 1.

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2007 and 2008).

experienced a decrease. However, this inference should be viewed with a degree of caution for a variety of reasons, including the fact that the census data records only immigrants who landed in Canada prior to Census Day, May 16, 2006, while the permanent resident statistics include landings for the entire year. Certainly, it cannot be stated with certainty that Saskatchewan and Manitoba are experiencing a net loss of immigrants. Nevertheless, this data supports the notion that a region with a booming economy such as Alberta's experiences an influx of secondary migration.

#### Temporary foreign workers

From 2003 to 2007, growth in the Temporary Foreign Worker (TFW) program in the Prairies has matched or, in the case of Alberta, surpassed growth in the permanent resident programs. Table 8 illustrates the increasing numbers of TFWs in the Prairie Provinces from 2003 to 2007.

These temporary foreign workers represent a significant pool of applicants for permanent residence. All three of the Prairie Provinces' PNPs provide opportunities for TFWs in various categories to obtain permanent residence. In all three provinces this is becoming an increasingly common path to permanent residence. In Manitoba the practice has become so widespread that some employers refer to the TFW program as the "Transitional Foreign Worker" program. A noteworthy example of this is the utilization

TABLE 9

### Temporary foreign workers employed under National Occupation Classification (NOC) codes O, A or B, 2007

Province	Number of TFWs	%
Alberta	14,842	40
Saskatchewan	1,657	55
Manitoba	2,030	44

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2008).

of the PNP by Maple Leaf Foods in Brandon.

The federal Canada Experience Class (CEC), implemented in September 2008, provides further opportunities for foreign workers to become permanent residents. The CEC allows for TFWs who have worked in Canada for at least two years in a managerial, professional, skilled or technical position (National Occupation Classification codes O, A and B) to apply for permanent residence without leaving the country. In 2007, considerable numbers of TFWs in the Prairies were working in jobs that made them potential applicants under the CEC.

These numbers represent only individual foreign workers, and many of those who choose to become permanent residents will eventually be accompanied by spouses and children, thus increasing the overall immigration numbers even further.

The economic downturn, which began to affect Canada's economy late in 2008, may temporarily affect this growth.

## Conclusion

In terms of the proportion of total immigration to Canada, it seems improbable that the Prairies will ever again reach early 20th century numbers. However, since 2003, there has been a definite trend towards increased numbers of newcomers arriving in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The draw of booming economies combined with aggressive and targeted PNPs and a growing pool of potential permanent resident applicants currently in the country as TFWs are major factors driving this trend. The growth of communities such as Winkler and Steinbach demonstrates that policies designed to attract immigrants can be successful even in smaller centres. Clifford Sifton would be pleased.

## About the author

RANDY GURLOCK holds a B.A. in History from the University of Alberta. He began his career in the federal government in 1983 as an immigration officer. He is currently the Area Director for CIC Northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories.

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## Canadian Diversity

# The Experiences of Second Generation Canadians

The Metropolis Project, in partnership with the Association for Canadian Studies, has produced a special issue of the magazine *Canadian Diversity* about the experiences of second generation Canadians. The issue (Spring 2008) presents a range of perspectives on the second generation in Canada and includes two articles from international researchers on the experiences of the second generation in Los Angeles, United States, and in Europe. This publication describes issues of diversity, identity and integration as they pertain to and affect those of the second generation, and features an introduction by Audrey Kobayashi of Queen's University. The publication includes more than 25 articles by knowledgeable policy-makers and researchers.

### Spring 2008

**Guest Editor: Audrey Kobayashi (Queen's University)**

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