

LANDSCAPE AND PLACE-IDENTITY IN A GREAT PLAINS RESERVATION
COMMUNITY: A HISTORICAL GEOGRAPHY OF POPLAR, MONTANA

by

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ABSTRACT

This study constructs a historical-geographical narrative of Poplar, Montana and explores residents' place-identity in the context of economic restructuring. Located on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in northeastern Montana, Poplar offers an ideal setting to better understand how economic restructuring affects the lives of residents in northern Plains reservation communities. Loss of businesses, consolidation of services, and general economic restructuring continue to challenge communities on the Great Plains. For Great Plains Indian reservations, however, these problems are compounded by additional variables such as persistently high poverty rates, a dynamic relationship with the federal government, and increasing populations. Archival research, landscape analysis, and interview data are all used to better understand the influence of economic restructuring in shaping Poplar. This study demonstrates the value of historical and cultural geographic approaches in understanding the past evolution as well as the contemporary challenges of reservation communities in the American West.

INTRODUCTION

Economic restructuring has always been a hallmark of the American West. Local communities expand and decline as the imprint of capitalism shifts across the region, bringing with it significant challenges. In the northern Great Plains, many communities face declining economic opportunities as distant trading centers siphon away business and the consolidation of local farms results in fewer agricultural jobs. As a result, downtown business districts contract and many residents leave these small towns in search of new opportunities in distant cities.

The northern Plains is not a monolithic region, however, and the many Indian reservations in the region present an additional set of variables that compounds the story of economic decline. The special relationship that Indian reservations have with the federal government gives these areas both advantages and disadvantages in making decisions about the local economy.

The reservations also have a complex social geography where American Indians of multiple tribes and non-Indians live in the same communities. American Indians are also sustaining and sometimes increasing their populations in these communities as non-Indians often leave for other settings. These three factors –cultural diversity, a unique political relationship with the federal government, and population stability– make reservation communities differ from surrounding communities.

As the capital of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation in Montana, Poplar and its recent socioeconomic challenges illustrate many of these themes. The Fort Peck Reservation encompasses parts of Roosevelt, Sheridan, Daniels, and Valley counties, and

is home to 10,321 people (U.S. Census 2000). Assiniboine, Sioux, American Indians of various other groups, non-Indians, and a handful of other ethnic groups all live on the reservation. Poplar's population is 911, with 580 of those identifying themselves as American Indians, and most of the rest identifying themselves as white (U.S. Census 2000). Poplar's economy is primarily based on a mix of agriculture, oil, and manufacturing.

Many of the larger economic processes that have influenced the historical development of Poplar have also worked to influence other reservation communities in the northern Plains. With its cultural diversity and traditional extractive and manufacturing economy, Poplar offers an ideal setting to better understand how economic restructuring affects the lives of residents in northern Plains reservation communities.

Research Objectives

This research has two objectives. The first is to construct a historical-geographical narrative of Poplar from its initial founding in the 1870s to the present. This analysis will focus on the forces that coalesced to bring the various groups of people that make up Poplar's contemporary social geography to northeastern Montana. It assesses the evolution of Poplar and its recurring cycles of economic boom and bust. It also considers how larger ideological forces have shaped the development of the town. Ultimately, it provides a historical context for understanding the contemporary geography of the community. This part of the study also explores how the contemporary cultural

landscape reflects historical and ideological forces, and how this landscape also shapes the lives of Poplar's residents. A description and interpretation of housing types, commercial buildings, and institutional landscapes along a cross section of the town will be used in this assessment.

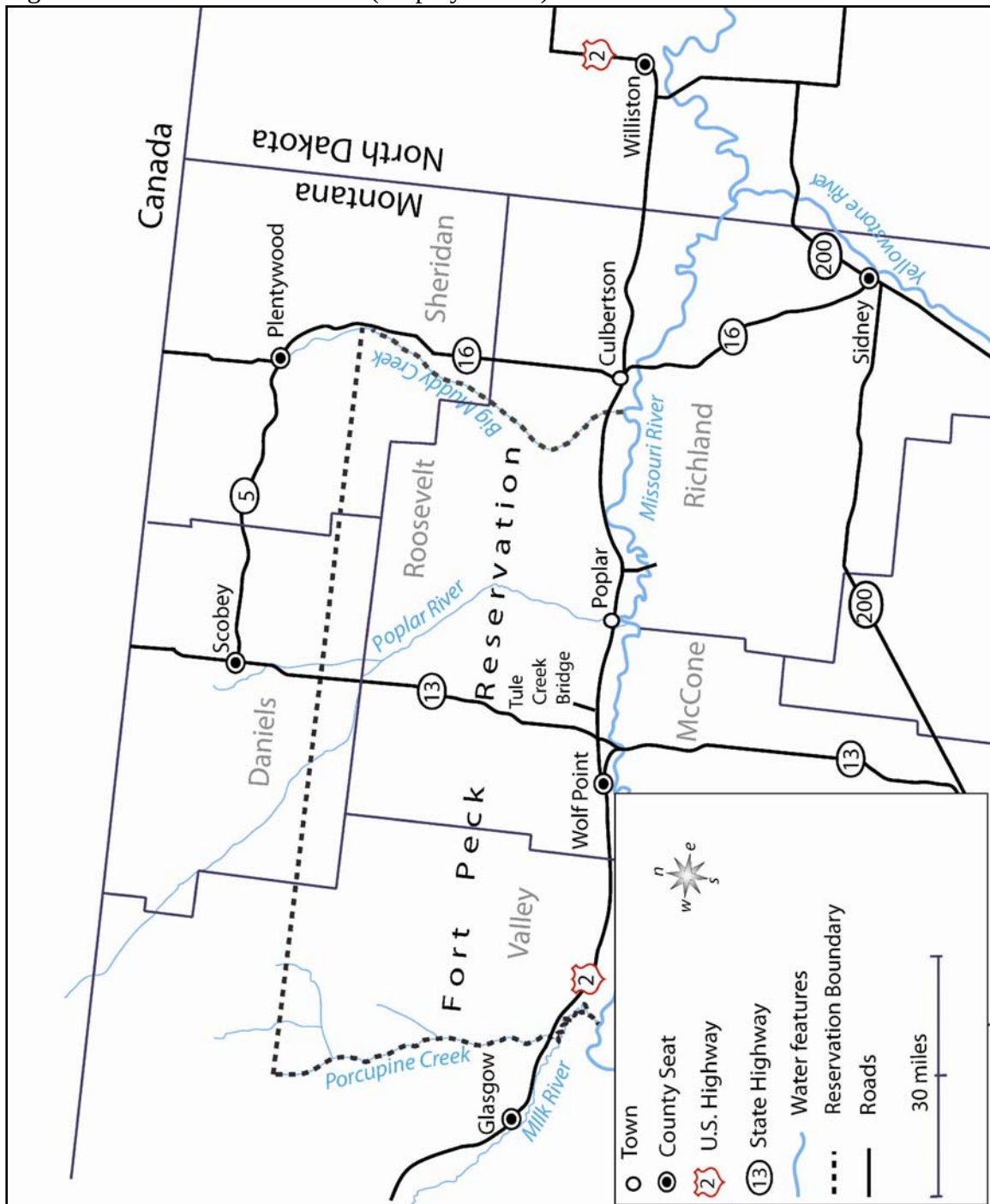
The second objective is to understand how residents of Poplar identify with their community. This will be addressed through residents' responses to interview questions. Central to this analysis will be how residents perceive socioeconomic challenges in their community, how they delineate community space, and what they identify as important landmarks within their community.

Both of these objectives offer Poplar residents a historical-geographical perspective on the historical, economic, and ideological forces that have shaped their community. While both of these perspectives will offer insight into these forces, Poplar residents may find the interview section to be the most useful as they work to stimulate economic development and effect social change. This section contains the words of local residents and as such offers the best insight into the community's current challenges.

Setting

Poplar and the Fort Peck Reservation are located in a sparsely populated part of northeastern Montana (Figure 1). The southern boundary of the Fort Peck Reservation generally follows the Missouri River, although the changing course of the river in many places no longer corresponds exactly with the boundary. The western boundary follows the Milk River from its confluence with the Missouri to its junction with Porcupine

Figure 1. Northeastern Montana (Map by author).



Creek. The line continues north along Porcupine Creek to a point halfway across Township 33 North, where it cuts to the east until it meets Big Muddy Creek. From here it follows Big Muddy Creek back to its confluence with the Missouri.

Poplar is situated on a small rise near the confluence of the Poplar and Missouri rivers. Vegetation along the bottom-land near the confluence is denser with thick groves of cottonwood trees. North of the Missouri River the landscape of rolling and broken plains is dominated by short grasses and wheat fields.

Dryland agriculture is prevalent on the reservation, although some irrigation does exist. Oil pump-jacks, storage tanks, and a few drill rigs dot the agricultural landscape in the East Poplar oil field north of town (Figure 2). Where the land isn't cultivated, the main economic activity is grazing.

The Fort Peck Reservation was established by act of congress in 1888. In 1893 the Great Northern railroad began servicing Poplar and other communities on the southern end of the reservation, and by 1914 the reservation was opened to non-Indian homesteaders. Poplar's dryland wheat economy expanded due to favorable market and climatic conditions, but by the late 1910s and early 1920s changing markets and drought led to a painful economic decline. The world-wide depression of the 1930s hit the reservation particularly hard, and World War II saw a temporary out-migration of residents to serve in the military or work in defense jobs on the west coast.

Figure 2. Agriculture and Oil (photo by author). About 10 miles north of Poplar.



Following the War, favorable farming conditions and the discovery of oil north of Poplar brought a second economic boom. The town grew with the success of the East Poplar oil field which brought an in-migration of workers and new residents to town. Tempering this boom for American Indians, however, was a national sentiment that sought to assimilate minority groups in the United States and the federal government's policy of termination. American Indians in Poplar, along with national Indian rights groups, fought against termination policies in the 1950s, which were largely seen as an assault on tribal identities and self determination.

In the 1960s national sentiment was beginning to shift toward acceptance of cultural pluralism and the Fort Peck tribes was able to secure federal money to develop much-needed housing projects and manufacturing facilities on the reservation. Contracts

with the federal government and policies that encouraged companies to work with minority-owned businesses helped the manufacturing industry grow in the late 1960s and 1970s. An industrial park was built south of town and the largest employer, Assiniboine and Sioux Industries (A&S), had a workforce of over five hundred by the early 1990s. Sustained by military contracts that made A&S a large-scale producer of camouflage nets and metal chests, A&S employed a significant portion of the community. By the mid 1990s, however, contracts became increasingly difficult to secure as global economic restructuring and neoliberal policies reduced the amount of federal money available to the community.

Today, Poplar is home to the Fort Peck tribal headquarters and a number of other institutional buildings (Figure 3). The elementary, middle and high schools are grouped together at the west end of town, and the main campus of the Fort Peck Community College is located near the center of town north of Highway Two. A handful of businesses are grouped along the Highway and on the main commercial avenue of 2nd Street.

Figure 3. Map of Poplar showing key places (map by author, image source: Google Earth 2008).



Conceptual Framework

Great Plains

As a region, the Great Plains have received relatively little attention, although there are some key studies. A small but important tradition has looked at environmental and sociological issues pertaining to the region as a whole. Walter Prescott Webb (1931) produced an early settlement history of the Great Plains that considered the larger role of that region in shaping American life and defining a western settlement pattern markedly different from the east. Kraenzel (1955) attributed much of the political and social transformation of the region as well as its sociological problems to the challenges of adapting a humid-area civilization to a very different physical setting. Mather (1972, 237) added that the Great Plains lack a regional identity, noting that “in the vernacular language, the Great Plains remain unarticulated as a region.”

In more recent years the loss of population in the Great Plains and a continuing environmental concern has given rise to a movement to recreate the region’s pre-agricultural landscape. Popper and Popper (1987) proposed that the depopulating areas of the Plains be converted to a vast wildlife refuge known as the Buffalo Commons. While the authors note that much of the proposal was a metaphor and not to be taken literally (Popper and Popper 1999), Matthews (1992) outlines how many residents of the Plains reacted strongly against the proposal in her journalistic account of the Poppers’ speaking engagements throughout the region. Callenbach (1996) echoed the economic and ecological importance of a Buffalo Commons in his proposal for a sustainable future

of the Plains, and much of east central Montana was identified in the late 1980s as a potential wildlife reserve to be known as the Big Open (Duncan 1993).

The Great Plains has been the subject of numerous studies on population loss and economic decline. Baltensperger (1987) correlated farm consolidation in the northern Plains to cycles of economic boom and bust, and Lonsdale and Archer (1998) found that from 1990-1995 forty-three percent of all counties in the United States that lost population were located in the Great Plains. Lonsdale and Archer (2003) more recently returned to this topic, noting that population loss is not uniform across the region as some areas within the Great Plains have grown at the expense of others.

Geographers have considered the social consequences of economic decline and the nature of the debate over the Great Plains' future. Shortridge (1997) explored how economic and political forces beyond the control of local residents have hindered the creation of a sense of place in the northern Plains. Shortridge (2004) has also linked the continuing economic and population decline in the region with a decrease in optimism, a distrust of outsiders, and increased levels of substance abuse. Hudson (1996) suggests that proposals like the Buffalo Commons may be premature and that population decline in the region is simply a process of adjustment, and Rees (2003) notes that the future of the Great Plains will be shaped in large part by those who control its popular image through writing and speaking.

The history of the Montana plains has been explored by Malone et al. (1991) in *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*. In addition, Toole (1972) has considered the

region in his discussion of the importance of the homestead boom and bust in eastern Montana in *Twentieth-Century Montana: A State of Extremes*.

Native Americans

American Indian reservations in the northern Plains face an additional set of challenges. Shortridge (1997, 132) notes that compared to the rest of the Great Plains, “life on the reservations...differs from [the] norm in being vastly more isolated, dependent, and victimized.” He uses the Pine Ridge reservation as a poignant example: “Caught between traditional values and the allure of the modern economy, yet somewhat removed from both worlds, Pine Ridge is in many ways the dilemma of the Plains intensified” (1997, 133).

While the reservations represent the dilemma of the Plains intensified, the experience of Native Americans on the reservations diverges from other residents of the Plains in more than just degree. The semi-autonomous political space of the reservations and their relationship with the federal government creates a unique set of circumstances. Also, the complex and traumatic history of Native Americans and the reservations influence contemporary society. Shresta and Smith (2002, 280) recognize that “For American Indians, the reservations...project a complex landscape where visions of homeland mix with images of poverty, racism, and genocide.”

Frantz (1999) took a comprehensive look at reservations in *Indian Reservations in the United States*. In this cultural-geographical study he explores a number of issues on the reservations including economic concerns about manufacturing, agriculture, and mining. Reinhardt (2003) considers the historical-geographical influences of Native

Americans in the West, and Lewis (1998) explores Native American issues in the post-World-War-II West and the potential for a creation of a pan-racial rural identity of Native Americans and Anglo Americans.

Hosmer and O'Neil (2004) compiled a series of essays that consider the role of Native American culture in the economic development of the reservations. In one essay, O'Neil (2004) looks at some of the assumptions that have guided development on the reservations, particularly the modernist assumption that economic success would require Native societies to change their cultures. Rosier (2004) explored the influence of politics and culture in guiding development of oil reserves on the Blackfoot reservation, and Allison (2006) looked at the influence of tribal politics and culture on 1970s coal mining on the Crow reservation.

Capitalism and the American West

The issues that residents of Great Plains Indian reservations face are often rooted in the shifting influence of capitalism. Robbins (1999) notes that capitalism is such an ingrained economic system that it becomes a way of living and seeing. The influence of capitalism as both an economic system and an ideology in shaping the American West has received much attention. DeVoto (1934) broached the issue in *The West: A Plundered Province*. He articulated the idea that the West's resources were exploited by eastern capitalists, and that this basic hinterland relationship was ongoing. Garreau (1981) echoed this sentiment in *Nine Nations of North America* when he identified much of the West and the Great Plains as part of an Empty Quarter where resource extraction was the dominant economic activity.

White (1991) notes the supremacy of market capitalism and its obliteration of Native American economies, and he points out that the ultimate control of Western economic destiny was outside the region. Robbins (1994, xiii) continues this theme in *Colony and Empire* and suggests the harsh realities of capitalism: “As each mode of production replaced the other and as new technologies replaced the old the restructuring created winners and losers and pain and suffering.”

Robbins (1999, 293) also notes that “Little research has looked at the sense of reality and social experience that is capitalism.” The few that have are Duncan (1993) who looked at this sense of reality and social experience in *Miles from Nowhere: Tales from America’s Contemporary Frontier*, and Raban’s (1996) look at eastern Montana in *Bad Land: an American Romance*. Wyckoff (2002, 43) explored some of these themes in *Life on the Margin: the Evolution of the Waning West*, finding that in many economically declining areas life is “...a compromise between leaner economy, fewer services, and declining populations on the one hand and a way of life that many remaining residents still hold dear.”

Some authors have also considered the underlying influence of capitalism in shaping debates that are seemingly not about economics. Mandryk (2001) has explored the racial tensions between First Nations peoples and Euro Canadians in Saskatchewan and found that racist discourses are heavily influenced by discourses about economics. He notes that most of the complaints levied against First Nations peoples by Euro Canadians express economic tensions as much as racial tensions. Walker (2003) has explored how ideological and political debates in Nevada County, California are

reflections of competing ideas about capitalism. He relates the changes that have taken place in Nevada County as traditional resource-extraction economies have been largely replaced by amenity-based economies. He notes that while both long-term residents and recent immigrants are fully incorporated into the capitalist system they are often divided over which form of capitalist production is best for the region. Breitbach (2007) has explored how large meat-packing plants and Wal-Mart super centers have obliterated the landscape of local butchers and groceries in North Dakota, noting that the control of the landscape lies almost entirely in the hands of large multinational corporations.

Landscape

These larger economic forces and the conditions of Great Plains reservation communities play out in the cultural landscape of Poplar. An analysis of the cultural landscape can reveal important historical-geographical clues about the evolution of a place such as Poplar.

The idea that landscapes reveal important information about larger histories is echoed by Wyckoff (2006, 5) who notes that in Montana “there are the intimate, local stories of particular farm families, how their lives unfolded, who stayed and who left, and how their decisions about crops, fences, trees, and houses shaped the everyday landscape, both then and now.” Glassie (1982, 603) also argues that one of the best sources for historical information comes from the “...vast and democratic handmade history book of the landscape.”

Several authors have suggested ways to interpret the landscape. Lewis’ (1979, 12) *Axioms for Reading the Landscape: Some Guides to the American Scene* established

that “Our human landscape is our unwitting autobiography...,” and reading the landscape like any other text will reveal important clues about the culture that created it. Meinig (1979) suggested, however, that the interpretation of the cultural landscape is ultimately subjective, as any ten different people might have ten different interpretations of the same scene. Clay (2003, 110) adds that landscapes can be fruitfully studied through the use of a cross section, as the cross section “...forces us to confront changes and differences that we might not see in everyday life.”

The notion that landscapes can be read to reveal clues about the culture that created them is important. But Schein (1997, 664) adds that the landscape is not just a reflection of culture, it is essentially “discourse materialized” and “... simultaneously disciplinary in its spatial and visual strategies and empowering in the possibilities inherent for individual human action.” Some of the ideas behind the landscape as “discourse materialized” can be seen in Meinig’s (1979, 43) view of “landscape as ideology,” and Jackson’s (1979) suggestion that the cultural landscape of the American frontier was shaped by settlers’ unquestioning adherence to a particular cosmological order. Building on Schein, Mitchell (2000) suggests that there is a normative discourse when he asserts that landscapes “... [seek] to regularize or naturalize relations between people...” Building on this theme, Mitchell (2007) argues that landscapes often work to obscure aspects of society that are deemed subversive, noting that as such landscapes suggest something about unequal power relationships. Schein (2006) echoes this idea in a recent exploration of the complicity of landscapes in normalizing racist ideology in *Landscape and Race in the United States*.

Place

Understanding Poplar residents' place-attachments also is central to this study, but place is a concept that has many meanings and is ultimately difficult to define (Cresswell 2004; Steele 1981). An exploration of some of the ways in which place is used will be essential in understanding how Poplar residents identify with their community.

Tuan (1975, 152) stressed that "...place is a center of meaning constructed by experience." For Jackson (1995, 151) a sense of place is something that accrues over time as the "...result of habit or custom." Experience does not necessarily mean affection, however, as Relph (1976, 41-42) notes that

The places to which we are most committed may be the very centers of our lives, but they may also be oppressive and imprisoning... Our experience of place, and especially of home, is a dialectical one—balancing a need to stay with a desire to escape.

Many residents of economically depressed areas either choose to leave or are forced to leave in search of better economic opportunity. Those who remain, however, often develop especially strong ties to their place. Marsh (1987) described this phenomenon in Pennsylvania coal-mining towns, and Wyckoff (1995) noted that as the setting of Butte, Montana provided fewer means of survival it accumulated more meaning for its remaining residents. Tuan (1974, 97) described this phenomenon as well when he noted that despite an unforgiving climate and harsh weather, Great Plains farmers who "...hang on seem to develop a curious pride in their ability to endure."

These local place-attachments aren't necessarily always recognized or respected by outsiders. Lopez (1998, 133) notes that "It is the chilling nature of modern

society...to find the commitment of people to their home places only momentarily entertaining. And finally naïve” (133). Comstock (1988) also suggested that a divide between urban and rural residents often results from a fundamental difference between the ways residents of small towns and residents of large cities communicate about their places.

The value of understanding these local place attachments, however, was most convincingly argued in Ryden’s (1993) *Mapping the Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing and the Sense of Place*. Ryden’s invisible landscape is the local accumulation of experience and memory that attaches special significance to the visible landscape. In Idaho’s Coeur D’Alene mining district he taps into this invisible landscape by listening to the stories residents tell about the place. Ryden (1993, 206-207) feels that this “...constitutes the study of geography in its most real human sense, that study being the earnest attempt to understand and appreciate the way that people live on and feel about the surface of the earth.” Lynch (1960) also suggested the importance of understanding local residents’ image of their place as a necessary consideration when considering how to plan for a community’s future.

The construction of place is ultimately the result of a number of interacting forces. Cross (2001) suggests that the key place-making interaction is between an individual and the setting, and Casey (2001, 683) echoes this when he says that place is the “...immediate environment of my lived body—an arena of action that is at once physical and historical, social and cultural.” Massey (2004) goes beyond the micro view and

suggests that all places are a mixture of various global and local forces that must be put into their larger geographical context to be understood.

Sources and Methods

This project involved three interrelated research methodologies that focused on 1) completing a historical narrative of Poplar; 2) analyzing the cultural landscape along a community cross-section; and 3) interviewing residents to assess their sense of place. The first included archival research at various locations including the Poplar Museum, the *Poplar Shopper* Office, the state historical archives in Helena, the Montana State University Library Special Collections, and the federal archives in Denver, Colorado.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Company maps of Poplar from 1914 and 1920 at the Montana Historical Society were particularly helpful in reconstructing the historical landscape, and Major Charles Lohmiller's photo collection of the Fort Peck Reservation during the early twentieth century was also invaluable. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) records including employee correspondence, annual reports to the commissioner, agricultural statistics and other materials were available at the federal archives in Denver. A number of sources were also available in Montana State University's Special Collections, including a 1979 Montana Study entitled *Life as Seen in Poplar, Montana*. The Poplar Museum provided excellent information on the town's history, and boxes of photographs and correspondence at the office of the *Poplar Shopper* became an invaluable resource.

There were other key sources as well. A significant amount of historical-geographical information came from resident interviews, and Pat Beck's collection of scrap books and newspaper clippings saved hours of additional searching. Editor Leota Hoye's (1976) *Roosevelt County's "Treasured Years"* provided a comprehensive and detailed history of Poplar, and Shields' (1998) *Images of the Fort Peck Reservation, Montana* provided many images of Poplar in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Local newspapers such as the *Poplar Shopper* and *Wotanin Wowapi* were definitive sources for information regarding community events, and the *Fort Peck Journal's* coverage of local politics and social issues provided insightful commentary.

The second data-gathering method consisted of landscape analysis. In March 2008, photos and notes were taken along a cross section of the community which provided the bulk of the data for this analysis. This analysis focused on a number of landscape elements including housing types, commercial buildings, government institutional buildings, and important transportation avenues through the community. Notes were taken in the field for each landscape element and compared to the photos in order to illustrate the importance of historical, ideological, and economic forces that have shaped the town.

The third data-gathering initiative focused on resident interviews. A total of 29 interviews were conducted during four separate field sessions totaling 24 days from March 2007 to August 2007. These interviews followed a questionnaire (Appendix A) and focused on 1) perceptions of change over time, 2) recognition of community landmarks, 3) divisions of space, and 4) critical issues facing the community. There was

leeway for respondents to explore other topics during interviews, and this occasionally did happen.

Interview participants were selected primarily using a snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling was used to generate a list of potential participants as each participant would suggest other potential respondents (Dunn 2005; Beyers and Nelson 2000; Wiltsie 1998). In addition to the snowball sample, a handful of business owners and government officials were selected for their leadership positions in the community. Numerous informal conversations also provided valuable insight.

Chapter Organization

Chapter two begins the historical narrative of Poplar, tracing the movements of both the Assiniboiné and Sioux to northeastern Montana. This chapter includes discussion of the political and economic forces that confined the Assiniboiné and Sioux, created the Fort Peck Reservation, and led to the initial development of Poplar. Chapter two traces the narrative until 1907, when the federal legislation to open the Fort Peck Reservation to homesteading was introduced to Congress.

Chapter three assesses change between 1907 and 1960. This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part considers the impact of opening the reservation to non-Indian homesteaders, the subsequent agricultural boom, and the rapid growth of Poplar. Part two considers economic and social restructuring as a result of the regional depression in the 1920s and the global depression of the 1930s. This part also considers how the new government policies and agencies of the New Deal worked to restructure

northeastern Montana's regional economy and social geography. The third part examines the economic and social restructuring that occurred as a result of World War II, the development of oil resources, and the implementation of termination policies that attempted to end the federal government's trust responsibilities with American Indian groups.

Chapter four continues the historical narrative from 1960 to the present. This chapter considers the changes that took place in Poplar during the 1960s and early 1970s as a result of increased federal funding of social programs that led to the creation of public housing projects and manufacturing facilities. This chapter also looks at how changing ideologies and global economic restructuring beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s led to a reduction of federal spending and economic opportunities in the community. This chapter also considers the changing demographics of Poplar and some of the socioeconomic challenges facing the community today.

Chapter four also contains an analysis of Poplar's cultural landscape along a community transect. This section looks specifically at the material expression of historical, economic, and ideological forces that have shaped the town and how the landscape in turn shapes the lives of local residents.

Chapter five explores Poplar residents' sense of place. This chapter presents interview data that illustrate how residents construct place identity amidst larger historical, economic, and ideological forces that have shaped the town. This chapter includes quotes from residents excerpted from interviews designed to elicit key aspects of place identity.

Chapter six offers some concluding thoughts on Poplar's current socioeconomic conditions and its meaning as a place. This chapter offers some insight on how residents might find a historical-geographical analysis helpful in planning for the future of their community.

INITIAL SETTLEMENT PATTERNS TO 1907

This chapter examines the migrations of Assiniboiné, Sioux, and non-Indians to northeastern Montana and the evolution of Poplar's cultural landscape until 1907. This chapter has three parts. The first part looks at how the European fur trade and the United States federal government influenced early settlement patterns in northeastern Montana from the seventeenth to the mid nineteenth centuries. This part considers how pressures from the fur trade encouraged the Assiniboiné and Sioux to move into the northern Plains by the eighteenth century and how the U.S. government influenced settlement patterns in northeastern Montana in the mid and late nineteenth century.

The second part assesses the formation of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation. This part considers the influence of capitalism and the U.S. government in forcing the acculturation of the Assiniboiné and Sioux and in solidifying patterns of settlement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The third part considers how the federal government and other related institutions directly influenced the development of Poplar from the 1870s to 1907.

Changing Worlds

By the late nineteenth century northeastern Montana had become home to Assiniboiné, Sioux, Euro American, and other American Indian groups. Their reasons for migrating to the region were varied, but competition over resources and the fact that it was one of the last areas to be brought under control by the United States military drove many American Indians to the region. This conflict over resources largely stemmed from

increasing European and American settlement pressures, which began to significantly impact American Indian groups through the seventeenth century fur trade. This conflict shaped settlement patterns in northeastern Montana which persist to this day.

In the early seventeenth century French and British traders brought the European fur trade to North America. While Indian tribes had an established tradition of trade before the arrival of Europeans, the global reach of the fur trade and the fact that it was driven by European companies was unprecedented. As this form of market capitalism expanded across North America, it restructured native life and politics in significant ways.

Northeastern Montana became incorporated into this expanding European fur-trading network and these connections altered both native and European worlds. Fur companies, trading posts, and native societies became intertwined in the effort to secure trade goods. Economics, politics, and social relations converged in the fur trade as both Indians and Europeans created new societies under this economic system. Skilled Indian negotiators who were able to secure quality trade goods became highly respected, leading to the creation of new hierarchies and power structures that altered regional politics (Malone et al. 1991).

Tribes were often fragmented as various groups jockeyed for position within these regional trade networks. Enterprising individuals, families, and bands often split from larger tribal groups as they sought new economic opportunities. In the case of the Assiniboiné, for instance, Miller (1986) notes that in the early stages of the fur trade it was not Assiniboiné society at large that was directly involved in this jockeying for

position, but rather entrepreneurial subgroups. These subgroups often became distinct new bands and divisions within the tribes.

The Assiniboiné

The Assiniboiné migrated south to northeastern Montana from the woodlands and parklands stretching from Lake Nipigon to the Assiniboiné River (Figure 4). In the late 1660s Jesuits recorded the Assiniboiné living in the area just west of Lake Nipigon in present-day Ontario (Assiniboiné and Sioux Tribes 1975; Ray 1974). Oral traditions and similar language dialects suggest that the Assiniboiné lived in the western Great Lakes region as part of the Yanktonai Sioux in the early seventeenth century (Assiniboiné and Sioux Tribes 1975; Ray 1974). According to these accounts, Yanktonai bands, which eventually became Assiniboiné, moved north and either gradually separated from the tribe or abruptly severed connections due to a disagreement. While anthropologists recognize this Yanktonai ancestry, Four Star (2003) suggests that the Assiniboiné were always a distinct tribe.

European goods first reached the Assiniboiné from Indian middlemen who traded with the French in the mid seventeenth century (Ray 1974). This trade was oriented along an east-west axis extending from Montréal and other French settlements to the Great Lakes region (Ray 1974). In 1670, however, the English-owned Hudson Bay Company (HBC) was established and HBC posts on Hudson Bay began diverting much of the upper Great Lakes trade to the north.

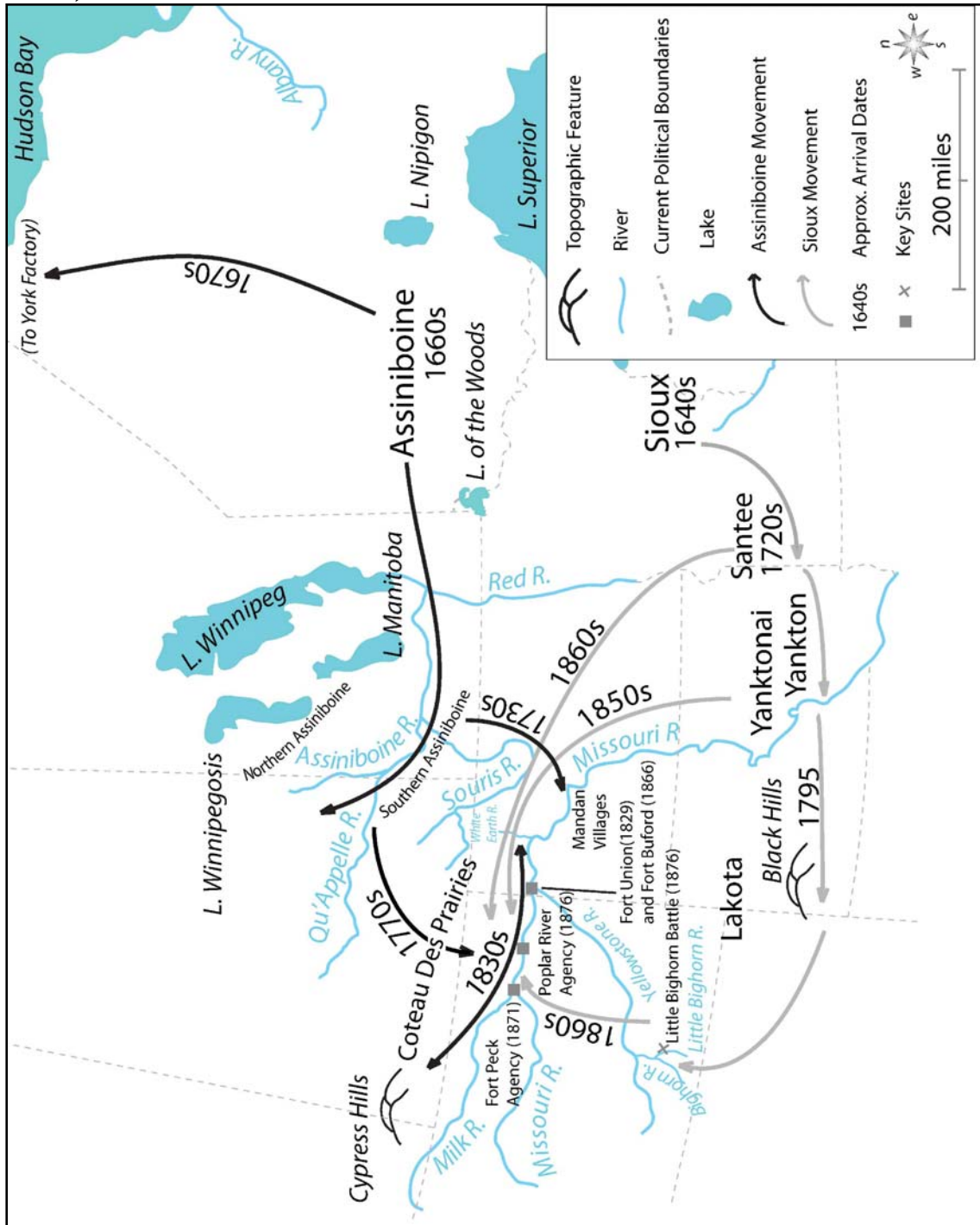
Enterprising bands of Assiniboiné traded at the HBC posts and became middlemen in dealing with other tribes. As the trade expanded to the south and west,

Assiniboine bands exerted their influence in the parklands and prairies southwest of Hudson Bay. By 1730 the Assiniboine had also extended trade networks to the Mandan villages on the upper Missouri River (Smith 2008a).

The Assiniboine presence southwest of Lake Winnipeg had probably been established by the seventeenth century (Smith 2008a), but Ray (1974) suggests that by 1765 they were in firm control of this area. The Assiniboine were split into a northern and southern division, with the southern division inhabiting the parklands along the Qu'Appelle and Assiniboine rivers. Within these two divisions were a number of distinct bands, and by the late eighteenth century southern Assiniboine bands began moving into northeastern Montana.

By the early nineteenth century American fur traders had moved into present-day northeastern Montana to exploit trapping grounds in the northern Rocky Mountains. Fort Union was established at the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers by the American Fur Company (AFC) in 1829, partly to take advantage of the regional trade networks already forged by the Assiniboine (Miller 2000) (Figure 4). It quickly became a pivotal trading post for the Assiniboine, and by the early nineteenth century the Missouri-Yellowstone confluence was firmly under Assiniboine control. Fort Union trader Edwin Thompson Denig (2000) noted that by the 1830s Assiniboine territory was bounded by the Missouri River to the south, the Coteau des Prairies to the north, the White Earth River to the east, and the Cypress Hills to the west.

Figure 4. Map of Assiniboine and Sioux migration to northeastern Montana (map by author).



The Sioux

The Sioux eventually migrated to northeastern Montana from the southeast after moving to the Plains as a result of new opportunities and increasing pressures resulting from the fur trade. In 1641 Jesuits noted that the Sioux lived in the wooded area near the present-day Minnesota-Wisconsin border (Gibbon 2003). In the western Great Lakes region the French controlled much of the fur trade and kept the flow of goods moving along an east-west axis. Even after their 1763 cession of Canada to Great Britain at the end of the Seven Year's War, French fur companies such as the Northwest Company (NWC) maintained a strong influence over the region (Gibbon 2003).

The Sioux participated in the trade but were increasingly pressured by other tribes encroaching on their territory from the east. In general the encroaching tribes themselves were pushed west by European and later Euro-American settlements, which created a westward domino effect as displaced tribes in turn displaced other tribes (Malone et al. 1991).

The Sioux were already split into three divisions when they first encountered Jesuit missionaries in the seventeenth century, but as a result of their westward movement, the three divisions became increasingly distinct from one another. Collectively the three divisions comprise the "Dakota" nation, since "Sioux" is a derogatory term given them by their Chippewa enemies. The Dakota or Sioux nation's three divisions speak different language dialects and are further subdivided into bands. Table 1 summarizes the three divisions, their Dakota dialect, and their relative location from east to west.

Table 1. Divisions of the Sioux (Assiniboiné and Sioux Tribes 1975).

<u>Santee or Eastern Division</u>	<u>Middle Division</u>	<u>Teton or Western Division</u>
Language dialect: Dakota	Language dialect: Nakota	Language dialect: Lakota
Bands: Mdeqakanton Wahpekute Sisseton Wahpeton	Bands: Yankton Yanktonai	Bands: Hunkpapa Minneconjou Sihhasapa Oohenonpa Brulé Sansarcs Oglala

There were many push and pull factors influencing the movement of the Sioux and other groups into the open prairies. Increasing geopolitical pressures from the east were central, but as populations of woodland game were diminished the Sioux and other Indian groups became dependent on the large bison herds that migrated along the edge of the forests and prairies. The bison provided food and also became central to the fur trade as bison robes were a valuable commodity in international markets. As the bison herds became depleted along the margin of the prairie and forests, Sioux bands increasingly became tied to the environment of the open prairies. As bison herds were depleted on the eastern prairies, the Sioux and other groups moved farther into the western Plains.

With the northward diffusion of the horse from Spanish settlements in the eighteenth century, the mobility of the Sioux and other groups increased dramatically. Horses made transportation across the open plains easier and more efficient, allowing the Sioux to more-effectively pursue the bison herds. By the 1720s the Yankton Sioux had entered the southeastern corner of South Dakota and the Lakota controlled much of the land between the Yankton territory and the Missouri River (Gibbon 2003). By the late

eighteenth century the Lakota had extended their influence west of the Missouri River into present-day western South Dakota and eastern Wyoming.

Changing Geopolitical Setting on the Northern Plains

As the Sioux and other tribes moved into the Plains of present-day North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, and eastern Montana, conflict erupted over access to bison herds. In order to secure the best hunting lands, the Lakota formed an alliance with the Yankton, Yanktonai, Northern Cheyenne, and Northern Arapaho in the 1820s and 1830s (Gibbon 2003). This alliance was successful in gaining new hunting lands and put considerable pressure on the sedentary tribes of the upper Missouri including the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara.

The Lakota alliance gained power throughout the early and mid nineteenth century for a number of reasons. Their access to firearms and horses and their mobility gave them an advantage over other tribes that were more sedentary. They were also able to extend their influence as other tribes succumbed to the waves of diseases that swept through the region in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Diseases such as smallpox followed the flow of European goods and people into northeastern Montana and significantly impacted the region's demography. Because smallpox has no animal vectors and must be transmitted from one human to another, its story is one of human contact (Fenn 2001). This unintended consequence of contact affected both Indians and Europeans, but the Indians' lack of resistance made it catastrophic.

Outbreaks of old world diseases in North and South America devastated native populations since the earliest contacts between Europeans and Native Americans. An initial spread of smallpox and other diseases may have led to native depopulation rates of as much as 90 percent in some areas (Denevan 1992). Successive waves of smallpox in the upper Missouri River region killed large percentages of populations and drastically altered the survivors' lives by fragmenting societies and destroying communal bonds (Wishart 1979).

In 1779 an outbreak of smallpox in Mexico quickly spread throughout North and South America (Harris 1997). By the early 1780s the pandemic had reached the northern Plains and western Great Lakes region and devastated Indian populations. Denig (2000) noted that the devastation of this epidemic was burned into the collective memory of the Assiniboine.

A second outbreak of smallpox along the upper Missouri in the 1830s played a pivotal role in restructuring geopolitics on the northern Plains. Denig (2000) again recorded the devastating effects of the disease on the Assiniboine in the area of Fort Union, noting that in 1838 they were reduced in population from 1,200 to 400 lodges. The military power of the Blackfeet tribe was also permanently broken when as many as half of the tribe was killed by smallpox during this outbreak (Malone et al. 1991). Due in part to their more nomadic way of life and partial inoculation, however, the power of the Lakota Sioux and their allies actually increased at the expense of these other tribes (Gibbon 2003). By the 1850s, for instance, Yankton and Yanktonai Sioux were encroaching on Assiniboine Territory along the White Earth River (Smith 2008a).

At the same time that the Lakota and their allies were expanding their power across the northern Plains, non-Indian migration increased across the region. The opening of the Oregon Trail in 1832 eventually led to a flow of emigrants through present-day Nebraska and Wyoming, and the discovery of gold in California in 1848 brought unprecedented numbers of non-Indians across this and other trails.

The increased flow of migrants led to more contact and often violence between Indians and non-Indians. In 1854 inexperienced army volunteers at Fort Laramie were decisively defeated after demanding that a Brulé Lakota be punished for killing a cow (Barbour 2001). In 1856 between 5,000 and 10,000 Lakota converged in the Black Hills and decided to restrict Euro Americans from the area north of the North Platte River and west of the Missouri River, and to defend their territory with military force (Ostler 2004).

Gradually, the native inhabitants of northeastern Montana fell under the increasing dominance of the United States government as tensions increased between the Lakota alliance and U.S. citizens. The federal presence was both military and diplomatic, although in the early years the military was rarely up to the task of policing the region. Troops had been stationed at Fort Union and a few other locations by the 1830s, but it wasn't until the 1860s that the military commanded a significant presence.

Initially the federal government pursued diplomatic solutions with the Lakota and other tribes. The federal government's dealings with tribes was guided by federal Indian policy which had been codified in the Trade and Intercourse Acts passed between 1790 and 1834 (Canby 2004). These Acts established the role of the federal government as mediator between U.S citizens and Indian tribes and subjected most interaction between

the two groups to federal oversight. Chief Justice John Marshall further defined the legal status of tribes in an 1831 decision regarding the ability of the Cherokee tribe to bring a suit against the state of Georgia. Marshall (quoted in Canby 2004, 16) decided that the Cherokee could sue the state as the tribe was essentially autonomous in its functions, but he added that Indian tribes were "...domestic dependent nations..." that were "...in a state of pupilage [with] their relation to the United States [resembling] that of a ward to his guardian."

In this context, treaties both acknowledged and limited tribal sovereignty. In 1825 a largely ineffectual treaty was signed between the federal government and the tribes of the upper Missouri, including the Assiniboiné. But the first treaty to have serious implications for land claims in northeastern Montana was the Fort Laramie treaty of 1851. This treaty codified Indian land claims in the northern Plains in the eyes of the federal government, designating much of the region as Sioux territory and reserving the area west of Fort Union for the Assiniboiné (Figure 5).

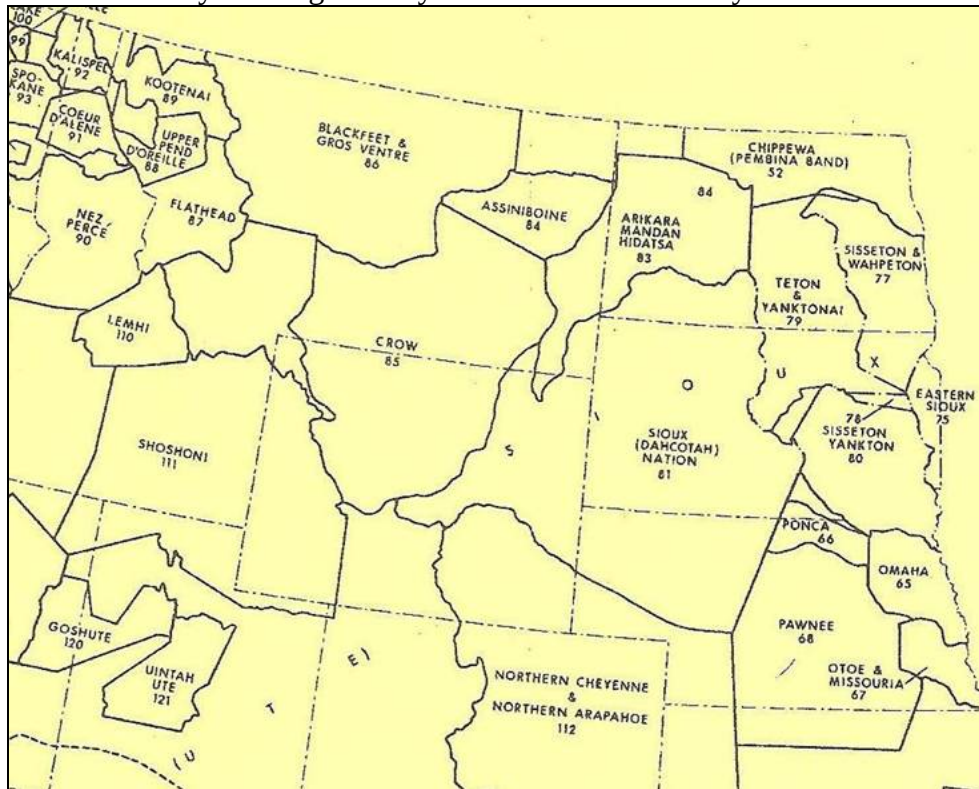
Tensions in the northern Plains escalated in the 1860s. The discovery of gold in present-day western Montana increased the flow of migrants through the area. New wagon roads cut through the region, such as the one pioneered by James L. Fisk in 1862 which followed the Missouri River through the present-day Fort Peck Reservation (Hoye 1976). River boat traffic on the Missouri also increased dramatically after the arrival of steamers at Fort Benton in 1862. In response to this increased traffic the military also increased its presence after the Civil War. Fort Buford, for instance, was built adjacent to

Fort Union in 1866 to protect the flow of goods and people from Lakota attacks along the upper Missouri.

In 1862 a violent conflict between the Santee Sioux in western Minnesota and non-Indian settlers reverberated across the northern Plains. Anger and frustration over the loss of land led many Santee to rebel against the government of Minnesota and the United States. The resulting war was bloody and ended with the exile and execution of many Santee, including some who took no part in the rebellion (Brown 1970). As a result many thousands of Santee fled Minnesota to live with their Yanktonai and Lakota relatives to the west. In the 1860s many Santee arrived in the area around Fort Union which had been identified as Assiniboine territory in the 1851 Fort Laramie treaty.

Soon thereafter conflicts also broke out along the western margin of Sioux territorial control with the opening of the Bozeman Trail. The Bozeman Trail crossed rich hunting grounds in northern Wyoming and southern Montana en route to western Montana's goldfields. The Lakota had recently wrested control of this area from the Crow and resented the trail and the military forts built along it. Led by Red Cloud, the Lakota systematically attacked the forts and migrants along the trail, leading to the signing of a second treaty at Fort Laramie in 1868. This treaty closed the Bozeman Trail and established a large Sioux reservation that included sacred sites such as the Black Hills. Not all Sioux bands signed on to this treaty, however, as many of the provisions were unclear and may have even been changed after it was signed.

Figure 5. Indian Land Claims Commission Map (Beck and Haase 1989). This map reflects territory as designated by the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1851.



Non-treaty Lakota and their allies shifted the focus of resistance to the upper Missouri as they attacked Fort Buford and continued to pressure the Assiniboiné and other tribes in the region. Bands of northern Lakota and Northern Cheyenne consolidated their control over much of the area between the Yellowstone and Missouri rivers as well as the Powder River country south of the Yellowstone. By the early 1870s the Lakota alliance had consolidated these areas along with the Black Hills into the core of their territorial control.

A number of factors led to the final episode of large-scale resistance by the Lakota alliance in the 1870s. In 1873 surveyors for the Northern Pacific railroad entered Lakota territory along the Yellowstone, and in 1874 Colonel George Armstrong Custer

announced the presence of gold during a military expedition to the Black Hills. Unable or unwilling to keep American citizens out of the Black Hills, the federal government tried unsuccessfully to purchase the Hills. Angry over this treaty violation, many Lakota fled the Greater Sioux Reservation to join Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Gall, and other chiefs who had refused to sign the 1868 Fort Laramie treaty. In 1875 the U.S. military issued the order for all off-reservation Indians to return to the reservations. They refused, and in the spring of 1876 the military was sent out to bring them in. In June of 1876 Colonel Custer led the Seventh Cavalry against a massive encampment of the Lakota alliance at the Battle of the Little Bighorn and was annihilated.

While the discovery of gold in the Black Hills is often cited as one of the events that instigated the Battle of the Little Bighorn, Ostler (2004) notes that the announcement of the discovery of gold was linked to larger shifts in national Indian policy. In the 1860s and early 1870s the federal government under the Grant administration had pursued a policy with Indian tribes that emphasized diplomacy. He argues that many Americans at this time saw this policy as a failure as wars were being fought with tribes across the West. He notes that a retreat from liberalism toward Indians had already begun when the financial Panic of 1873 struck. Public opinion toward Indians, he notes, was linked to a growing conservative attitude that advocated less government concern for issues such as the reconstruction of the South or pursuing a policy of diplomacy with Indians. Instead, public opinion was now concerned with building the national economy and maintaining social order. Ostler argues that a harsher attitude toward Indians, combined with the

economic depression of 1873, led to the exploitation of the mineral wealth of the Black Hills.

After the victory at the Little Bighorn, the Lakota and their allies split into smaller groups and dispersed. The military pursued them throughout the winter of 1876 and 1877, forcing many bands to acquiesce to federal demands to report to the Indian agencies. Many of the refugees from this battle moved into Assiniboiné territory north of the Missouri River in the late 1870s, as this became one of the few areas where bison herds could still be found.

Sitting Bull and many of his followers were able to escape to Canada, but by the early 1880s it became clear that they would no longer be able to resist. In 1881 Chief Gall and his band were captured after a skirmish near Poplar, and later that year Sitting Bull and the last of his group surrendered at Fort Buford.

The Fort Peck Reservation

By the 1860s and 1870s the Assiniboiné were facing increasing population pressures as other tribes encroached on their territory west of Fort Union and north of the Missouri River. They found themselves at war with the Gros Ventres to the west, the River Crows to the South, and the Sioux to the east. Large numbers of Yanktonai and Teton Sioux had already moved into the upper-Missouri region, and Santee refugees from the Minnesota uprising had fled to the area. By the late 1870s Sioux refugees from the military campaigns following the Battle of the Little Bighorn also began to move into Assiniboiné territory along the Missouri.

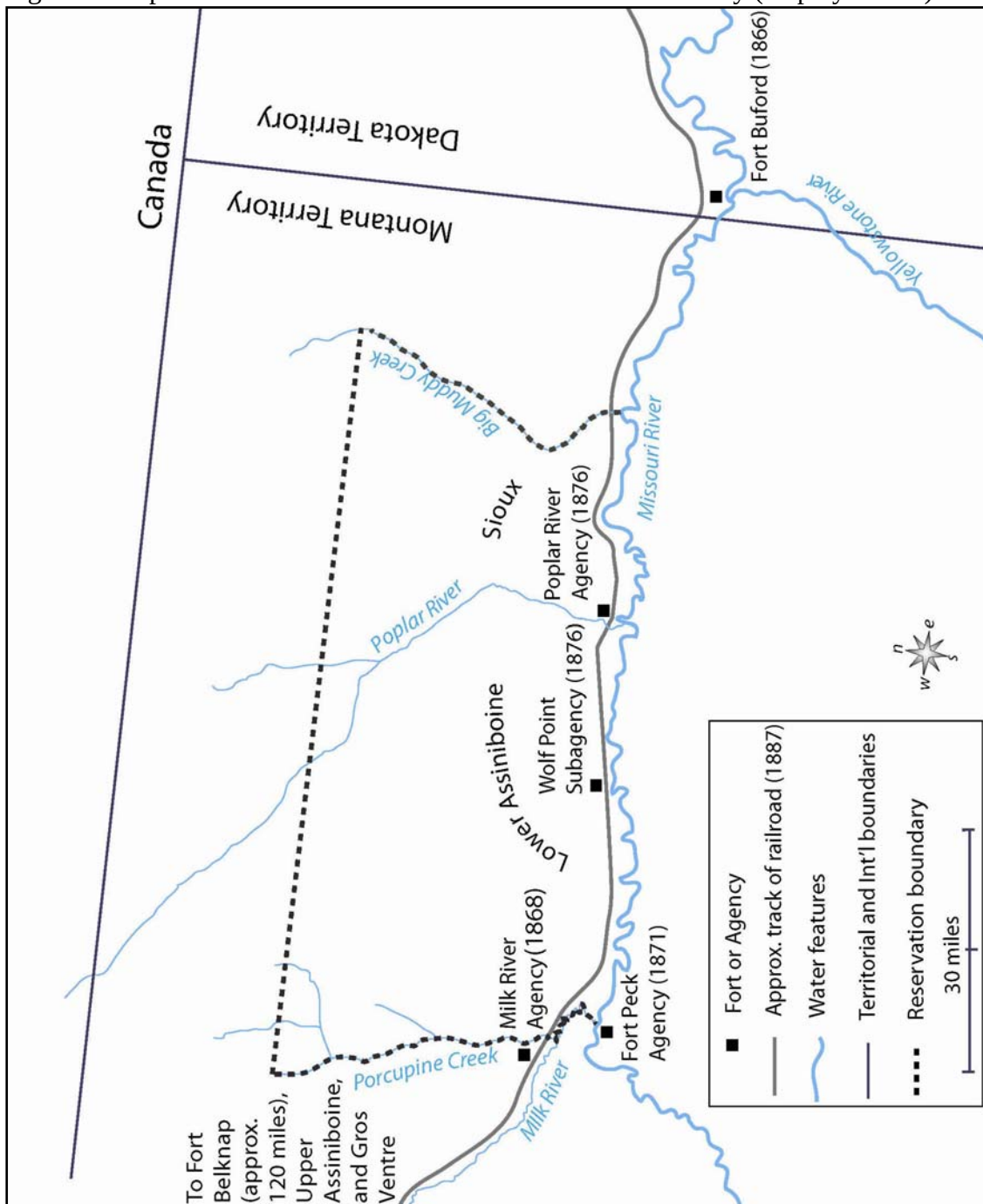
During this time the Assiniboiné increasingly sought to isolate themselves from the influences of other tribes and the federal government, but their weakened position after waves of smallpox made it necessary to make new allies (Miller 1986). The northeastern Montana Assiniboiné gradually split into two divisions, with the upper division forging close ties with the Gros Ventre and the lower division associating with the Yanktonai Sioux. As the Yanktonai and the Gros Ventre remained enemies, the upper and lower divisions of Assiniboiné became increasingly at odds with one another (Miller 1986).

Most Assiniboiné had been collecting annuities from Fort Buford, but in 1868 the Milk River agency was established on the Milk River to serve the Gros Ventres (Figure 6). The upper division of Assiniboiné gathered at this agency until it was closed in 1872. Later, two separate agencies were established; one farther up the Milk River at Fort Belknap and a second at a trading post along the Missouri called Fort Peck. The Post at Fort Belknap served the Gros Ventre and upper Assiniboiné while the post at Fort Peck served the lower Assiniboiné and Yanktonai Sioux.

Continued fighting between the tribes in northeastern Montana, however, strained alliances. The Yanktonai and the lower Assiniboiné eventually began raiding one another. In 1876 the agency at Fort Peck was moved to the confluence of the Poplar and Missouri rivers (Figure 6). Government agents preferred this location as it was closer to the military at Fort Buford and thought to be in a better location for agriculture (Miller 1986). The tensions between the Yanktonai and lower Assiniboines, however, made it necessary to establish a sub agency at present-day Wolf Point. The Assiniboiné

congregated around the Wolf Point sub-agency, while the Sioux congregated at the Poplar agency.

Figure 6. Map of northeastern Montana in late Nineteenth Century (map by author).



In the 1880s the Assiniboiné and Sioux became more dependent on annuity payments. The extermination of the bison and the scarcity of other small game in northeastern Montana made them entirely dependent on the agencies for food. With the encouragement of the agency the Yanktonai had a small farming operation near the confluence of the Poplar and Missouri rivers by 1880, but insufficient rations caused chronic starvation on the reservation during most of the 1880s. When adequate rations did not arrive in the winter of 1883-1884, for example, many Sioux and as many as 300 Assiniboines may have died of starvation (Hoye 1976).

Setting the Boundaries

By the late 1880s a series of events unfolded that established the current boundaries of the Fort Peck Reservation and signaled another shift in federal Indian policy. Increasing pressure was placed on the federal government to reduce Indian lands in the West by opening them for settlement and economic exploitation. At the same time, lawmakers who considered themselves friendly to the Indian cause increasingly became dissatisfied with the reservation policy. The hopeless poverty and economic stagnation of the reservations convinced them that the current policy was a failure (Canby 2004).

While motivated for different reasons, these two groups both supported the General Allotment Act of 1887 which turned out to be the most disastrous piece of Indian legislation in U.S. history (Canby 2004). The Allotment Act provided the necessary framework for Indian reservations to be subdivided into parcels and distributed to individual Indians. The land that remained could then be opened to non-Indian settlement. Supporters thought this would provide the most economic benefit to Indians

and non-Indians alike, while accelerating Indians' assimilation into American society. Supporters also saw the Act as a way to open these lands to non-Indian settlement and development.

At the same time as the provisions for the Allotment Act were being settled, two other pieces of legislation had more immediate consequences for the Assiniboiné and Sioux in northeastern Montana. The first came as a result of Jim Hill's efforts to make the Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Manitoba Railway a transcontinental line. The railroad was planned to cross northern Dakota Territory and Montana Territory on the route that Isaac I. Stevens had surveyed along the Missouri and Milk rivers in 1855.

The railroad stalled when it reached Montana Territory, however, as the communal reservation north of the Missouri blocked further construction. Hill assembled a team of lobbyists that went to Washington D.C. in 1886 to secure a right-of-way across the reservation, but their first attempt was blocked by President Cleveland. While the President cited the Indians' welfare in his decision to veto the bill that would have allowed the railroad to be built, Malone (1996) notes that his primary motivation to do this came from Hill's competitor, the Northern Pacific Railroad.

The veto infuriated Hill, and his associates redoubled their efforts early in 1887. This time they succeeded in pushing a bill through Congress that President Cleveland signed into law February 7, 1887 which granted the railroad a 150-foot easement through the reservation (Malone 1996). Construction proceeded rapidly during the summer of 1887, passing through the entire length of what would soon become the Fort Peck Reservation (Figure 6).

At the same time that Hill and his associates were lobbying for a right-of-way across the reservation, the Northwest Commission arrived at the Poplar agency to negotiate new land cessions. Similar Congressional commissions had already negotiated large amounts of land away from the Greater Sioux Reservation in Dakota Territory by using questionable methods, and their approach with the Assiniboiné and Sioux in northeastern Montana was also suspect.

The commission met first with the Sioux at the Poplar River agency. Some of the Sioux agreed to the cession partly because the commission assured them that they would not be forced to relocate to the east, which was a continuing fear (Miller 1986). However, there were also allegations that the commission fraudulently obtained signatures from other Sioux as well as the Assiniboiné by encouraging individuals to sign the agreement multiple times (Miller 1986). The commission also convinced many Sioux and Assiniboiné that this new agreement would help to end the extreme poverty and chronic starvation that had been plaguing the reservation. The commission offered a \$165,000 annual payment for 10 years, which also convinced many to sign the agreement. The federal government did honor this obligation, and in subsequent years this payment did help to alleviate some of the most extreme poverty on the reservation (Smith 2008b). Along with concessions from the Gros Ventre, Upper Assiniboiné, and Blackfeet, the large communal reservation that encompassed most of Montana north of the Missouri River and east of the Rocky Mountains was broken into the three smaller reservations of Fort Peck, Fort Belknap, and Blackfeet. On May 1, 1888 Congress passed the Act that set the current boundaries for the Fort Peck Reservation (Figure 6).

Poplar's Development

By the 1860s the areas near the confluence of the Poplar and Missouri rivers had been the location of a fur trading post (Hoye 1976). Other posts may have been located here before the 1860s, but the changing course of the Missouri River makes it difficult to pinpoint their exact location. A continuous record of settlement began when the Fort Peck Agency was relocated to the bluff overlooking the Poplar River in 1876.

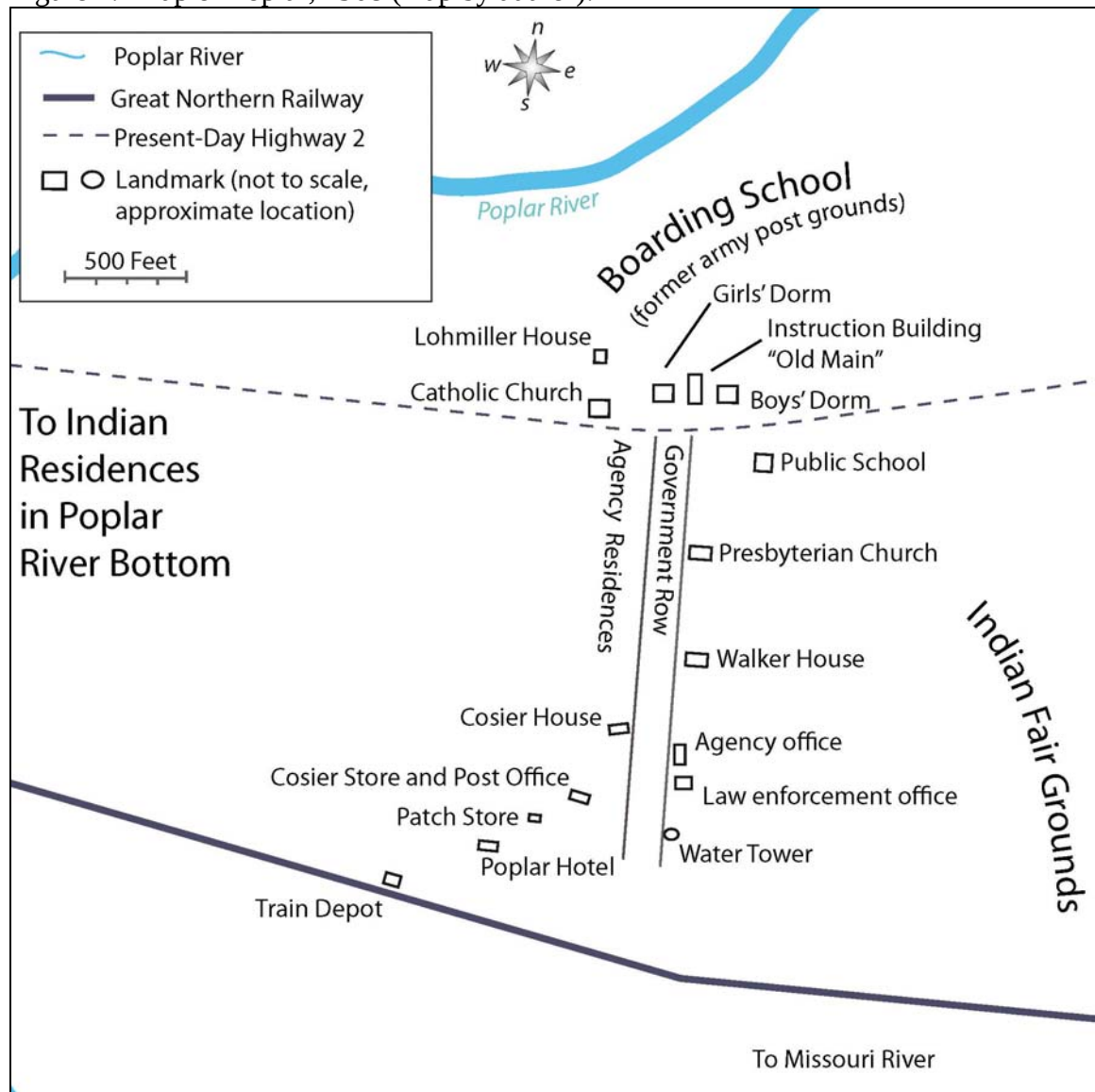
Poplar's initial development was entwined with market-capitalism, social institutions, and the federal government's policy of assimilation. This mixture of institutions was tightly controlled by officials in Washington D.C. and local reservation personnel. While not subject to quite the same level of surveillance and control as Indians, non-Indians and their institutions on the reservation also faced tight restrictions.

As an extension of the federal government, the Poplar agency continued its role as mediator between Indians and non-Indians. Certain Euro-American cultural influences on the reservation were restricted while others were encouraged. American-style schools and religious institutions were deemed necessary as they established the disciplinary constraints that guided everyday life and assimilated Indians.

The expansion of market capitalism into Poplar and the reservation was also tightly regulated. Businessmen and traders had to be licensed to operate on the reservation. Federal policies, however, were certainly not against the expansion of capitalism as was evidenced by the construction of Jim Hill's railway. In fact, those businessmen who were able to establish themselves early in Poplar were usually well

positioned to take advantage of the lack of competition and exert a strong influence over the future development of the town.

Figure 7. Map of Poplar, 1908 (map by author).



The initial development of Poplar's landscape reflected the federal government's tight control and in turn the landscape was influential in normalizing that control. The agency buildings, school, and other institutions were reflections of federal authority, but

their presence and fixture on the landscape were also necessary in making that authority seem natural over time (Figures 7, 8).

The agency buildings were located in the center of town in the area that came to be known as Government Row. The buildings faced a north-south thoroughfare with the

Figure 8. Boarding School in 1893 and 1904-1905, respectively (*Poplar Shopper*).



agency office located on the southeast corner. The superintendent's house and other offices were located on the east side of this thoroughfare with housing for the agency employees on the west side. Corrals and a water tower anchored the south end of the agency where the Indians would gather to be issued their rations (Shields 1998).

North of the agency buildings was the army's Camp Poplar River. In reaction to fears about the return of Sitting Bull and his band from Canada, companies B and F of the 11th infantry were stationed at Poplar in late 1880. The buildings of the military post were laid out in a square surrounding an interior parade grounds with a bar and store operated by H.M. Cosier (Figure 9).

Camp Poplar River was established at the same time as Fort Assiniboine near present-day Havre to help bring in non-reservation Indians, but with the surrender of Gall

[illegible]

The first school classes were held in one of the army camp's log buildings in 1882. In that year two Presbyterian missionaries taught 45 mostly Indian children along with some non-Indian children of agency personnel (Poplar Shopper 1992). By 1888 the attendance had grown to 216 students (Poplar Shopper 1992), and by 1893 a school farm

had also been established just south of town in the Missouri River bottomlands. The growth in attendance at the school was largely due to the fact that school was compulsory, and that agency personnel increased threats and punishments against Indian families that refused to comply (Smith 2008b).

After a fire destroyed the school buildings in 1893, most Indian students were sent to boarding schools off the reservation. In 1897 the school facilities at Poplar were rebuilt and considerably upgraded. By 1899 two large brick dormitories replaced much of the area that was once the Army's Camp Poplar River. Classes were taught in a building between these dormitories which still stands today on the campus of Fort Peck Community College.

By 1902 attendance at the Poplar boarding school had grown to 308 students out of a total of 414 school-age children on the reservation (Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1902). Non-Indian children attended a separate red-brick school that was located southeast of the Indian Boarding school and built in 1903.

The boarding school was a powerful expression of the federal government's assimilation policy. Schools, and especially boarding schools, were able to control the everyday lives of children. The curriculum was designed to give Indians the skills deemed necessary to live in American society. Classes focused on teaching girls how to perform domestic duties and turning boys into farmers. In 1902 the acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs related to the Fort Peck superintendent that "...the principal strength of an Indian School and its rating in this office are based largely upon the practical

industrial training which is accorded to the pupils...” (Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs 1902, 3).

By the turn of the century most Indian families lived in log cabins and tents along the bottom lands of both the Missouri and Poplar rivers or immediately surrounding the agency (Figure 7). These bottomlands afforded shelter, fuel, and were near the agency. As late as 1915, Ketcham (1915, 76) recorded Indians near Poplar living in “...camps in the river bottoms...some living in tents, others in small log houses.”

Early commercial businesses were located immediately southwest of Government Row. This first commercial district was located in the area that is now the intersection of First Street and Yankton Avenue. Businesses that were able to secure licenses from the government had little competition as only a limited number of licenses were issued.

With the arrival of the agency at Poplar in 1876, the first licensed trading store was opened. After a series of initial ownership changes it was purchased by G.H. Fairchild in 1878. Fairchild eventually sold the post to H.M. Cosier and W.B. Shaw who also operated a store at Wolf Point. In 1908 Cosier bought out Shaw and operated this store as the sole owner. Cosier also operated the bar that catered to the military personnel and served as the de facto post office until the army camp was abandoned in 1893. With the abandonment of the camp, the post office was relocated to Cosier’s trading store at the southwest end of town.

At the same time, Fairchild operated a second trading store in Poplar which was sold to James McDonald in 1894, who in turn sold to R.E. Patch in 1898. Patch operated

this second store until 1914 when he and Cosier merged their businesses into the Cosier-Patch Trading Company.

Although its greatest impact would come with the homesteading boom, Jim Hill's Great Northern railroad also had a significant influence on the development of Poplar at this time. Tracks were laid immediately south of town in the Missouri River bottomlands. The railroad allowed quick and reliable transport into and out of Poplar and brought an end to steamship travel on the Missouri River. A depot was built to the south of the commercial district.

Both the early commercial businesses and the railroad signified the beginning of a new economic order in the region. Indian economies, which were based on both subsistence and the fur trade, had essentially been destroyed by years of disease, warfare, and the extermination of resources such as the bison. While these trading stores initially continued a bartering system reminiscent of the fur trade, they increasingly looked to the railroad and the arrival of non-Indians as a new economic opportunity. The railroad and the trading stores were forerunners of a massive wave of resource exploitation that came during the non-Indian homestead boom in the 1910s.

Other institutions made their mark on Poplar at this time as well. In the 1880s the first catholic church was built at the north end of Government Row and in 1902 the First Presbyterian Church was built along the east side of Government Row (Figure 10). Located immediately west of the town were the Indian fairgrounds which were used for horse races, rodeos, and other events.

Figure 10. View of Presbyterian Church looking southwest, 1908 (*Poplar Shopper*). Housing for agency personnel shown to the west of the church.



BOOM AND BUST, 1907-1960

Poplar became more fully integrated with the national and global economy when the Fort Peck Reservation was opened for homesteading in the 1910s. The town's development during this time mirrored other western towns whose economies were based on the exploitation of resources. In Poplar's case the resources were wheat and oil, and as long as prices and yields for wheat were high or the oil wells were producing, the community enjoyed economic growth, but when those conditions changed, the town suffered.

The Homestead Boom in the Northern Plains, 1908-1917

Farming came to the northern Plains relatively late as most settlers bypassed the region, believing it too dry to support agriculture (Malone et al. 1991). Farming developed in the valleys of western Montana to support the region's mining camps, but eastern Montana was dominated by ranching. After the brutal winter of 1885-1886, many ranching operations began growing feed to support their stock during the winter, but most land in eastern Montana was still used for grazing.

With more desirable western lands already settled by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the focus of homesteading shifted to arid and semi-arid environments such as the northern Plains. This homesteading movement was predicated on new technologies, as well as progressive ideologies that recast the settlement of the Plains as a logical step in the continuing advancement of the country.

Central to the boom was the persistence of the Jeffersonian ideal that held small farmers as model citizens despite the increasing urbanization of the country. Boosters were particularly influential in promoting this ideal and making the settlement of the northern Plains both an economic and a patriotic pursuit.

The industrial revolution also played a central role in the settlement of the region. Walter Prescott Webb (1931) even asserted that without the industrial revolution and its technology, dry-farming in the Great Plains would have been impossible. In addition to new technology used directly in farming, the industrial revolution led to the expansion of railroads which formed key transportation corridors. Industrial growth at this time also created a growing urban population with a high demand for food (Malone et al. 1991).

The influence of progressivism and its assumption that progress could be achieved through science also played an important role in the homestead boom. Toole (1972, 3) notes that the average Montanan at the turn of the century "...differed little from the average American; his invincible optimism was matched only by his certitude that the inevitable course of mankind was upward." The key to this upward path lay in science, which many felt would ultimately overcome the difficulties of farming in arid and semi-arid environments. There was a prevailing feeling that most issues facing the West could be broken down into their component parts, studied, and ultimately solved through science (Strom 2003).

This belief in progress through science led to the development of new farming techniques. Arid and semi-arid environments required new, unfamiliar approaches for most Americans and Europeans from humid environments. It was hoped that scientific

methods could be adapted to traditional methods of irrigation and dry-land farming to ensure homesteaders' success.

Initially, many saw irrigation as the key to agriculture in the northern Plains. Inspired by the findings of John Wesley Powell, proponents felt that the network of rivers flowing out of the eastern Rocky Mountains could be tapped to irrigate much of the Plains (Toole 1972). Powell himself overestimated the potential of irrigation in eastern Montana during an 1889 speech to the territorial convention, but he was booed by members of the 1893 Irrigation Congress when he suggested that their goal of creating one million forty-acre irrigated farms out of the West's remaining public lands was unrealistic (Wrobel 2002).

The federal government became committed to irrigation projects with the passage of the Reclamation Act in 1902. Federal irrigation works were commissioned in Montana between 1902 and 1910 with the Huntley, Lower Yellowstone, Milk River, and Sun River projects. These projects provided some help to farmers, but they ran into unexpected problems as well. High construction costs, little irrigable acreage, and the high cost of water tempered initial optimism about the potential of irrigation (Toole 1972).

Irrigation on the Milk River also led to the Supreme Court decision that came to be known as the Winters Doctrine. With this decision the Court ruled that despite non-Indians' use of water in the Milk River, the Fort Belknap reservation had prior rights that were implied when the reservation was established in 1888 (Canby 1998). Furthermore, the Fort Belknap Indians could not lose their water rights if they didn't use their water

(Canby 1998). This decision established first-use rights for Indian reservations and further challenged the expansion of irrigation in eastern Montana.

Growing concerns over the applicability of irrigation in the northern Plains led to a shift in focus to dry-farming techniques (Toole 1972). Dry farming techniques had been used before, but this latest incarnation touted scientific methods and principles to maximize its effectiveness. The term dry farming was even used alternately with the term scientific dry-land farming.

New technology was central to scientific dry-land farming and was embodied in Hardy Webster Campbell's new plow that loosened topsoil while packing subsoil. This technique became widely used as it was thought to make water available to crops by retaining moisture near the ground surface. In addition, Campbell and others advocated leaving half of the field unplanted for a season to build up moisture.

Contrary to the 40-acre farms envisioned by the Irrigation Congress, dry farming required large tracts of land. Eastern Montana had large tracts of land in the public domain, and the passage of the Homestead Act in 1862 established the precedent of giving these public lands away. This Act allowed settlers to pay a small filing fee and claim a 160-acre plot of land, which they would gain title to if they remained for 5 years and successfully "proved up" the land through farming. Many took advantage of this Act and between 1862 and 1900 as many as 1,400,000 homesteads were filed nationally (Wrobel 2002, 56).

As the popularity of dry farming increased, it became obvious that homesteaders would require more than 160 acres of land in semi-arid regions. In 1908 Congress

doubled the amount of land that could be homesteaded from 160 to 320 acres. In 1912 Congress added further incentive by reducing the prove-up time from 5 to 3 years and by allowing homesteaders to be absent from their land for up to 5 months each year. These new homestead laws encouraged settlers to take up much of the remaining public domain in the northern Plains in the early twentieth century. At the peak of homesteading in 1913, up to 60,000 homesteads were proved up nationally (Wrobel 2002, 56).

The homesteading movement was also driven by massive promotional campaigns. Local commercial clubs, state organizations, and especially the railroads were pivotal in advertising and promoting land to settlers. The growth of agricultural experiment stations and farms often combined scientific research with promotion as scientists studied aspects of dry farming and private interests sought to promote new techniques. In one early example of cooperation, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Montana Agricultural College, and the Northern Pacific Railroad operated four agricultural experiment stations in the state.

In northern Montana the promotional efforts of Jim Hill's Great Northern Railway were highly influential in driving the homesteading movement. Hill relied on information from both scientists and average farmers, but increasingly a divide began to open between academics and non-academics. The 1909 meeting of the Dry Farming Congress in Billings suggested this when Jim Hill's son lobbied to change the name from dry farming to scientific farming to enhance its public image. The scientists at the meeting rejected this proposal since it seemed to lack objectivity and it was non-descriptive (Malone 1996). Cooperation between academics and private interests further

deteriorated when disputes arose over the operation of the Montana agricultural stations (Strom 2003).

Rising wheat prices also contributed to the homesteading movement in the northern Plains. The outbreak of World War I in 1914 created a high demand for American wheat, and the United States' entrance into the war in 1917 encouraged many farmers to increase their planted acreages. In 1917 under the Lever Food and Fuel Control Act, the Wilson administration pegged the price of wheat at \$2.20 per bushel, ensuring consistently high war-time prices for farmers (Malone et al. 1991, 253).

Above all, nature provided the most important contribution to the homestead boom. Between 1907 and 1917 many eastern Montana locations received ample rainfall. Much of this rainfall came during the spring, when it was most needed for growing wheat.

Homesteading the Fort Peck Reservation

Prior to the reservation being homesteaded, Fort Peck lands first had to be allotted to the Assiniboiné and Sioux. The policy of allotment had been codified in the 1887 Dawes Act by supporters who often saw themselves as sympathetic toward Indians. Ultimately these sympathizers felt that allotment would be the quickest way to assimilate Indians into Euro-American society and end welfare rations (Canby 1998).

In Euro-American society, land was valued primarily for its economic production and it was assumed that this cultural value could be adopted by Indians. By distributing parcels of land to individuals and families, it was hoped that Indians would view land as Euro-Americans did and subsequently assimilate into American society. This assumption

was so pervasive that the Act provided for Indians to eventually gain full title to their land and citizenship in the United States. The supporters of the Act often assumed that Indians' political and social organizations would also disappear.

The allotment process resulted in few, if any, positive changes for Indian communities. In many ways, what was a boom for non-Indian homesteaders and businesses in the Fort Peck Reservation was a failure for most Indians. Relatively few Indians were able to become successful farmers on their allotments, and as land was passed down through the generations, problems resulted as land became fractionated among multiple heirs. Nationally, the enduring legacy of the Dawes Act was a continuing loss of Indian lands. Between 1887 and 1934 total Indian lands in the United States were reduced from 138 million acres to 48 million acres (Canby 1998, 22).

In 1908 Congress enacted Montana Senator Joseph Dixon's bill to allot the Fort Peck Reservation (U.S. Congress 1908). The Act provided for the survey of the reservation and allotment of 320-acre parcels to Indian heads of families and single individuals. In addition, each allottee was to receive up to 20 acres of timber land and up to 40 acres of irrigable land. After allotments were complete, the remaining lands were to be appraised and sold to non-Indian settlers. The Fort Peck tribes ultimately agreed to allotment as they were told that it would lead to greater self-sufficiency and that the sale of lands to homesteaders would generate revenue (Miller 2008a).

Lands opened for homesteading would be priced at no less than \$1.25 per acre, which homesteaders would be required to pay in five annual installments. In addition to the acquisition of homesteads, the Act also provided that forty acres be reserved adjacent

to the government agency for a Poplar town site. The Act also allowed Poplar residents who already owned businesses and homes to enter their lots and up to four additional lots prior to the general opening. Because of this, nearly all the available lots in the central business district were acquired by existing residents (Miller 2008a).

The commission appointed to appraise lots on the reservation was headed by Charles Lohmiller, who served as superintendent of the Fort Peck Reservation between 1905 and 1917 (Figure 11). Serving in the army during the campaigns against the Apaches in the 1880s, Lohmiller came to Poplar in 1893 to work as a clerk for the agency (Hoye 1976). Lohmiller was hopeful that the allotment and homesteading of the Fort Peck Reservation would be beneficial to the Assiniboiné and Sioux. Lohmiller was convinced that Indians would themselves become farmers as soon as they saw the benefits of agriculture. He noted that the wet and agriculturally productive year of 1912 would convince even "...the backward ones that farming is a profitable industry" (Fort Peck Superintendent 1912, 13). After the reservation was opened for homesteading, Lohmiller again expressed hopes that the examples set by non-Indian farmers would encourage Indians to adopt agriculture (Fort Peck Superintendent 1915).

Aside from the direct education in farming techniques at the Indian schools, farming was also being promoted at the Indian agricultural fairs that began in 1909. These fairs incorporated farming contests designed to disseminate better techniques and encourage Indians to become farmers. Lohmiller also reported that through the work of state extension agents and others, both Indians and non-Indians on the reservation had

been convinced of the benefits of scientific dry-land farming (Fort Peck Superintendent 1915).

Figure 11. Fort Peck Sioux Delegation to Washington, D.C. 1910 (Miller et al. 2008). From left to right: Chief Iron Whip, Chief Spotted Eagle, Charles Lohmiller, Chief Horses Ghost, Chief Grow Twice, Kill Twice.



Between 1909 and 1912 most of the groundwork had been laid for the coming of non-Indian homesteaders. By 1912 Lohmiller and his commission had completed the allotment work on the reservation, with only one-third of the reservation's total 2,094,000 acres actually allotted to Indians (Fort Peck Superintendent 1912, 1). Initial surveys also identified 152,000 acres of irrigable land on the reservation, and by 1910 the U.S. Reclamation Service began work on a series of irrigation projects (Decker 1923, 1). It

was estimated that water from the Missouri River could irrigate 84,000 acres of land across the southern boundary of the reservation and that the Poplar River alone could irrigate 28,000 acres (Decker 1923, 1). In addition to the benefits of irrigation, these projects were also touted for the jobs they would create.

On July 25th, 1913 President Woodrow Wilson signed the proclamation to open the unallotted lands on the reservation to homesteading (Wilson 1913). The proclamation called for applications to be submitted between September 1 and September 20, 1913. Applications were to be randomly numbered and beginning May 1, 1914 homesteaders were to make selections based on their number. At 9:00 am on June 30, applicants were allowed to move onto their selected lands.

Poplar's Boom

In Poplar, streets were graded and lots adjacent to the agency were quickly sold. The handful of existing businesses became the downtown business district as First and Second streets were laid out perpendicular to the Great Northern tracks (Figure 12). Santee and Yankton Avenues were laid out as cross streets in the downtown, and the area immediately to the west and north filled with private residences.

The railroad stimulated growth as homesteaders used Poplar as an entry point to the reservation. Poplar had also been growing as the center of a large trading area that extended south of the Missouri River, and in 1910 the first grain elevator was built along the Great Northern tracks to the south of Second Street (Hoye 1976).

The non-Indian population increased substantially. *The Poplar Standard* (1916a) estimated that 200 people lived in Poplar in 1911. By 1914 the Sanborn Map Company

(1914) recorded 650 people in the town of Poplar, and by 1916 the *Standard* (1916a) reported the population at 901. By 1918 The *Standard* reported 1,747 people in Poplar, although the community business directory for that year estimated the population to be about 1500 (Figures 13-16).

Indian children continued to attend the agency boarding school, but the increasing population of non-Indians made the red-brick public school inadequate. In 1915 a new public school was built on the grounds of the present-day school at the west end of town. This new public school also provided the first high school facilities for Poplar.

The increasing regional population also led to a series of county subdivisions. When the Fort Peck Allotment Act was passed in 1908, Poplar was part of Valley County. In 1912 Valley County was split in half, with the eastern half becoming Sheridan County. The Leighton Act of 1915 allowed the citizens of Montana counties to make the decision whether or not to create new counties, and by 1919 they had decided to carve Roosevelt County out of Sheridan and Valley counties.

Figure 12. Map of Poplar, 1914 (map by author).

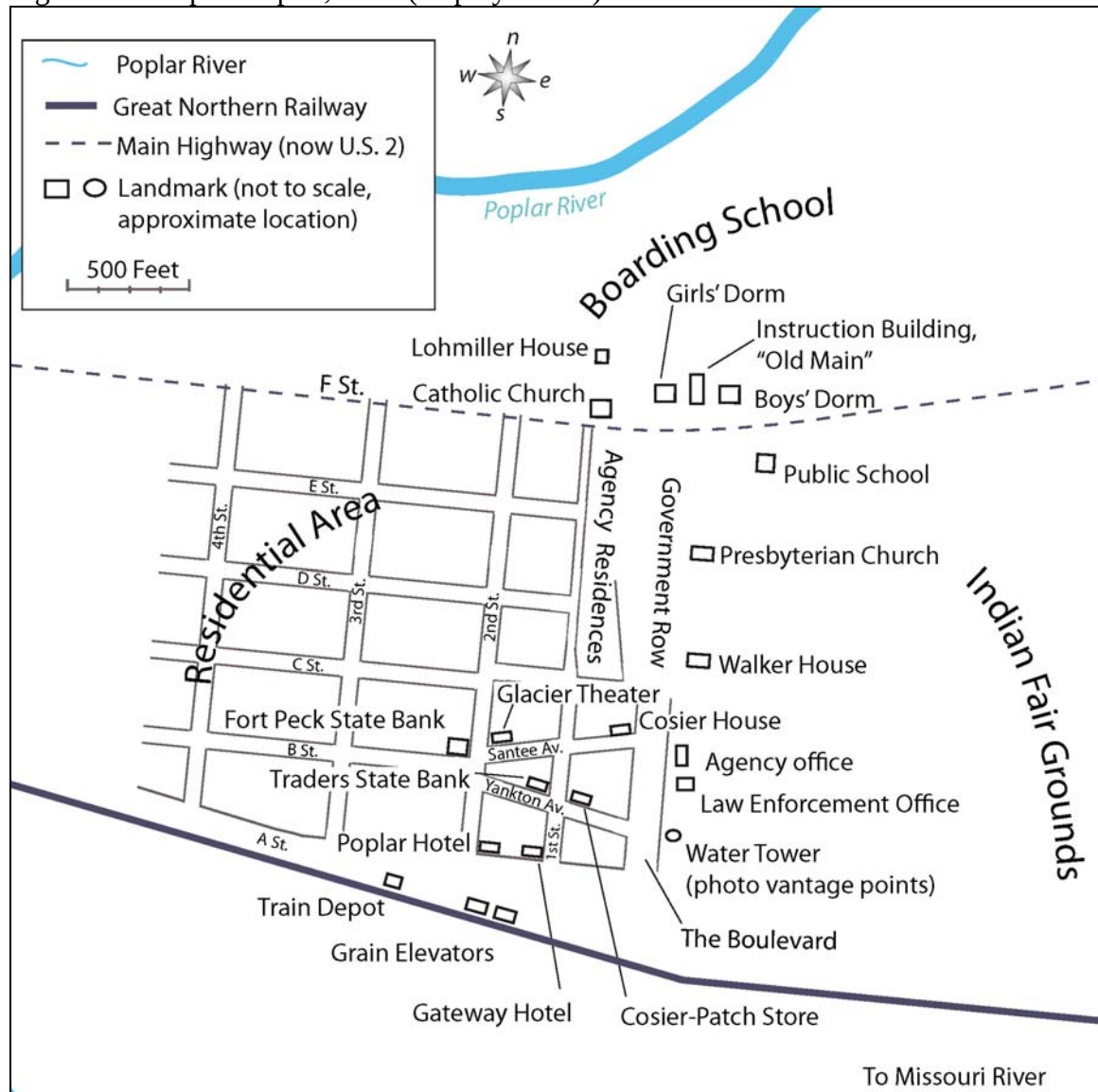


Figure 13. Birdseye view of Poplar looking northwest, c. 1917 (Poplar Shopper). The Gateway Hotel is the three-story brick building on left.



Figure 14. Birdseye view of Government Row looking north, 1917 (Poplar Chamber of Commerce). Girls' and Boys' dormitories are identical-looking buildings in the background.



Figure 15. Birdseye view of Poplar looking west, c. 1917. Gateway Hotel in center, Strand Theater adjacent to the right. (*Poplar Shopper*)



Poplar was originally chosen as the new Roosevelt County seat and the courthouse was located in the red-brick building that had been the public school. Poplar served as the county seat from 1920-1924 until Wolf Point became the official county seat after a controversial second vote (Hoye 1976).

A city government was formed in 1916 with a mayor and four aldermen, and by 1917 Poplar was incorporated in Sheridan County. By 1918 a number of businesses were in operation including the Fort Peck State Bank, Traders State Bank, the Fort Peck land

locating company, two hotels, a theatre, and a handful of restaurants and stores. The community newspaper, *The Poplar Standard*, also began printing in 1910.

Figure 16. Parade on Second Street looking South, c. 1917 (*Poplar Shopper*).



The established businessmen and agency employees in Poplar were well positioned to influence the development of the town. Their influence was codified by the Fort Peck Allotment Act which allowed them to enter their lots before other homesteaders. Individuals such as H.M. Cosier, R.E. Patch, and Charles Lohmiller were key figures in the development of the town at this time and reflected Zelinsky's (1992) Doctrine of First Effective Settlement. Zelinsky argues that the first effective settlers in a location have a significant influence over the development of subsequent institutions, policies, and settlement patterns in the new community. Indian settlement and use of the Poplar area certainly predated this period, but they were often excluded from directly shaping these new institutions.

As superintendent of the reservation and part of the survey committee that appraised lands on the reservation, Charles Lohmiller exerted significant influence on Poplar's growth. His survey team decided where the new Poplar town site would be located and that the new community would grow to the west of the agency. He was active in the cattle business, organized the company that built the Gateway Hotel, and was the director of Traders State Bank (Hoye 1976, 49) (Figure 11). He also served as an officer of the Poplar Electric Company (Poplar Standard 1914).

As licensed traders, H.M. Cosier and R.E. Patch exerted a strong influence on Poplar's commercial landscape. In 1914 they merged their stores into the Cosier-Patch Trading Company, and in 1909 they became partners with Sherman T. Cogswell in organizing Traders State Bank. Traders State Bank was initially located in a wood-frame building, but in 1912 it moved into a brick building on the corner of Yankton and 1st Streets. Both Cosier and Patch each served on the board of directors of the bank, and Patch remained active in the bank, even serving as president at the time of his death in 1956 (Hoye 1976, 712). Patch also served intermittently on the city council, while Cosier was Poplar's first mayor from 1916-1923.

A Segregated Community. The agency continued in its role as mediator between Indians and non-Indians in Poplar. Despite hopes for quick assimilation, however, non-Indians continued to be subject to separate institutions, such as law enforcement and education. Problems soon resulted from the existence of separate institutions and the rhetoric of assimilation in Poplar.

There were also concerns about the competence of Superintendent Lohmiller to manage the various Indian and non-Indian interests in Poplar and the reservation. Non-Indian businesses often found an ally in Superintendent Lohmiller (Johnson 1978), but many Indian leaders expressed frustration at the lack of attention being paid to their economic and social concerns. These leaders accused Lohmiller of having conflicting interests, as he was heavily invested in the growth of Poplar, and their complaints contributed to Lohmiller's decision in 1917 to resign (Miller 2008a).

Ultimately the persistence of separate institutions during this time reflected the continuing assumption that Indians would assimilate into Euro-American society. The Dawes Act and the Fort Peck Allotment Act reflected this thinking as both sought to turn Indians into farmers and American citizens. The idea that assimilation was inevitable and that it would bring an end to cultural differences was reflected in Lohmiller's opinion that prejudice would be reduced as "...the proportion of Indian blood diminishes and [the] health and physical appearance [of Indians] improves" (Fort Peck Superintendent 1915, 13).

Reflecting notions of progress that influenced thinking in the early twentieth century, it was assumed that jurisdictional conflicts between town and agency would be temporary. This thinking assumed that reservations as distinct political entities would cease to exist as Indians were absorbed into American society, and there would no longer be a need for these separate institutions.

For the time being, however, town and agency governments were sometimes at odds. With town governments that represented non-Indians, Superintendent Lohmiller

did worry that inadequate law and order and new businesses in the towns provided too much "...temptation to the Indian to loaf and spend money foolishly" (Fort Peck Superintendent 1915, 3).

Central to Lohmiller's concerns was the trafficking of alcohol on the reservation. Neither Indians nor non-Indians could have alcohol within the boundaries of the reservation, although this law was frequently broken.

In one early example of a dispute between the agency and the town, Lohmiller accused the town Marshall, Jack Hanson, of allowing alcohol into Poplar (Poplar Standard 1916b). Lohmiller even went so far as to accuse Hanson of participating in the illegal traffic. Hanson, however, considered the possession and importation of alcohol to be a minor offense and argued that he had neither the time nor the resources to enforce this particular agency law.

The separation of Indians and non-Indians was most obvious in Poplar's schools. While Indian children attended the boarding school, non-Indian children and children of Indian mothers and white fathers attended the public school. Despite attempts to desegregate the schools as early as 1915, a separate Indian school remained until 1932. Many non-Indians objected to their children being educated with full-blood Indian children, citing concerns that they were unsanitary and unhealthy (Fort Peck Superintendent 1915, 13). Lohmiller predicted that desegregation of the schools would have to wait at least fifteen years due to these high levels of prejudice (Fort Peck Superintendent 1915, 13).

Depression, 1918-1939

The optimism of the homestead boom was challenged in the 1920s. Many non-Indians were forced off their homesteads as declining agricultural prices and drought made it increasingly difficult to farm in the northern Plains. A brief economic resurgence in the mid 1920s gave hope to remaining homesteaders, but the return of drought in the late 1920s and the onset of a worldwide depression in the 1930s brought hard times again.

The Homestead Bust, 1918-1928

Drought effectively ended Montana's homestead boom in the late 1910s. Drought came to the Hi-Line in 1917, the rest of eastern Montana by 1918, and even parts of western Montana in 1919. An environmental crisis unfolded as the drought was accompanied by windstorms and plagues of grasshoppers. Federal and state agencies provided loans for farmers to purchase seed, but ultimately the problem was lack of rainfall (Toole 1972). During the boom years wheat yields of 25 bushels per acre were common in eastern Montana, but in 1919 the average yield was just 2.4 bushels per acre (Malone et al. 1991, 281).

Adding to the crisis was the onset of an economic recession following World War I. Overseas demand for wheat declined as Europe began producing enough food to support its population. In response, the federal government removed price supports. In 1920 wheat dropped from \$2.40 per bushel in August to \$1.25 per bushel in October (Malone et al. 1991, 281). Between 1919 and 1925 two million acres of farm land went

out of production and half of all Montana farmers lost their land (Malone et al. 1991, 283). The tax base of many new counties evaporated as homesteaders left the state or were simply too poor to pay taxes.

Montana's over extended banking system felt the repercussions, as 70 percent of banks failed between 1921 and 1929 (Toole 1972, 91). This mirrored a national trend as banks across the country failed in the 1920s, but Montana had one of the highest rates of failure.

Some Montanans blamed the boosters and especially the Great Northern for overzealous promotion. Others blamed the federal government for encouraging farmers to expand acreages and borrow money during the war years (Toole 1973). Ultimately, though, the bust was a result of a number of false assumptions. For instance, it had been assumed that rainfall would increase, that a 320-acre farm would support a family, and that all the numerous small towns established by the railroads would remain important trading centers. The homestead bust forced many to rethink these assumptions.

The Fort Peck Reservation. Hints of the impending crisis were present during the boom years. As early as 1910 there was concern over whether or not homesteaders would be able to prove up their claims in northeastern Montana due to poor yields (Poplar Standard 1910). Superintendent Lohmiller recognized that both 1910 and 1911 were bad years for agriculture and urged demonstration farmers on the reservation to do their best to improve farming prospects in 1912 (Lohmiller 1912). Lohmiller was also concerned that the land on the reservation was not being settled quickly enough because of the double requirement of residence and payment (Fort Peck Superintendent 1915). In

March of 1917, before the onset of the drought, Congress recognized the difficulties faced by homesteaders on the reservation and granted them an extension on their payments (United States Congress 1917).

False assumptions also haunted the homesteading movement on the reservation. It had been estimated by Thomas Shaw that the 1,345,000 acres of land available to homesteaders on the reservation would be capable of producing 19,312,500 bushels of wheat per year (Poplar Standard 1913). This estimate not only assumed that all the available land could actually be farmed, but that there would be a consistent yield of just over 14 bushels per acre. The low statewide yields of 1919 made it clear that some years this would not happen.

The drought also forced officials to recognize the limits of irrigation. For each year between 1912 and 1923, all the irrigation projects on the reservation operated at a financial loss (Decker 1923). Officials were often reluctant to admit that low stream flows simply made the projects infeasible. In the late 1920s Superintendent Charles Eggers expressed frustration that Indians weren't interested in the irrigation projects, and hoped that non-Indians would set a positive example by using irrigation water (Eggers 1927). The water master for the reservation projects, however, noted the reality of the situation: "...it is uphill work to try and convince a farmer that irrigated land is a good investment and then have to tell him that we have no water supply" (Bogart 1927, 2).

By 1919 the problems on the reservation had become acute and Congress granted homesteaders a second extension on payments (United States Congress 1919). Still, many homesteaders had no choice but to abandon their claims. Many acres of

reservation land remained in limbo as extensions were granted across the board to homesteaders, many of whom had no intention of returning to their land.

A visit by Congressman Scott Leavitt in September of 1924 led to a meeting of Indians and homesteaders to decide what to do with abandoned farmsteads. The Fort Peck Indians were primarily upset that extensions on payments had been granted with neither their consent nor their input (Moller 1924a). At the November meeting the joint committee of Indians and homesteaders agreed that bona fide homesteaders would be given until November 1, 1925 to make full payment on their claims (Moller 1924a). It was also decided at this meeting that reservation lands should not be reappraised at a lower price as had been suggested to provide some relief to struggling farmers.

These decisions, however, came as the agricultural economy was experiencing some resurgence. *The Poplar Standard* (1925a) noted that increased rainfall and higher prices in 1924 had started a recovery from the post-war depression in Montana. Superintendent P.H. Moller also noted that 1924 had been a good year on the reservation, with many farmers reporting wheat yields as high as 40 bushels per acre (Moller 1924b). Moller also suggested that because farmers had learned a great deal from the bust of the late 1910s and early 1920s, farmers would never again experience total failures on the reservation. He was confident that with a few more good years settlers would return to the reservation.

Poplar's Development. During this time Poplar's population did not decline significantly. In 1920 the Sanborn Map Company estimated the population at 1500, which is the same as the business directory estimates for 1918. This may have been due

to Poplar's central location as a trading area and the steady employment at the Indian agency, but Malone et al. (1991) also note that in Montana many failed homesteaders simply didn't have the means to leave.

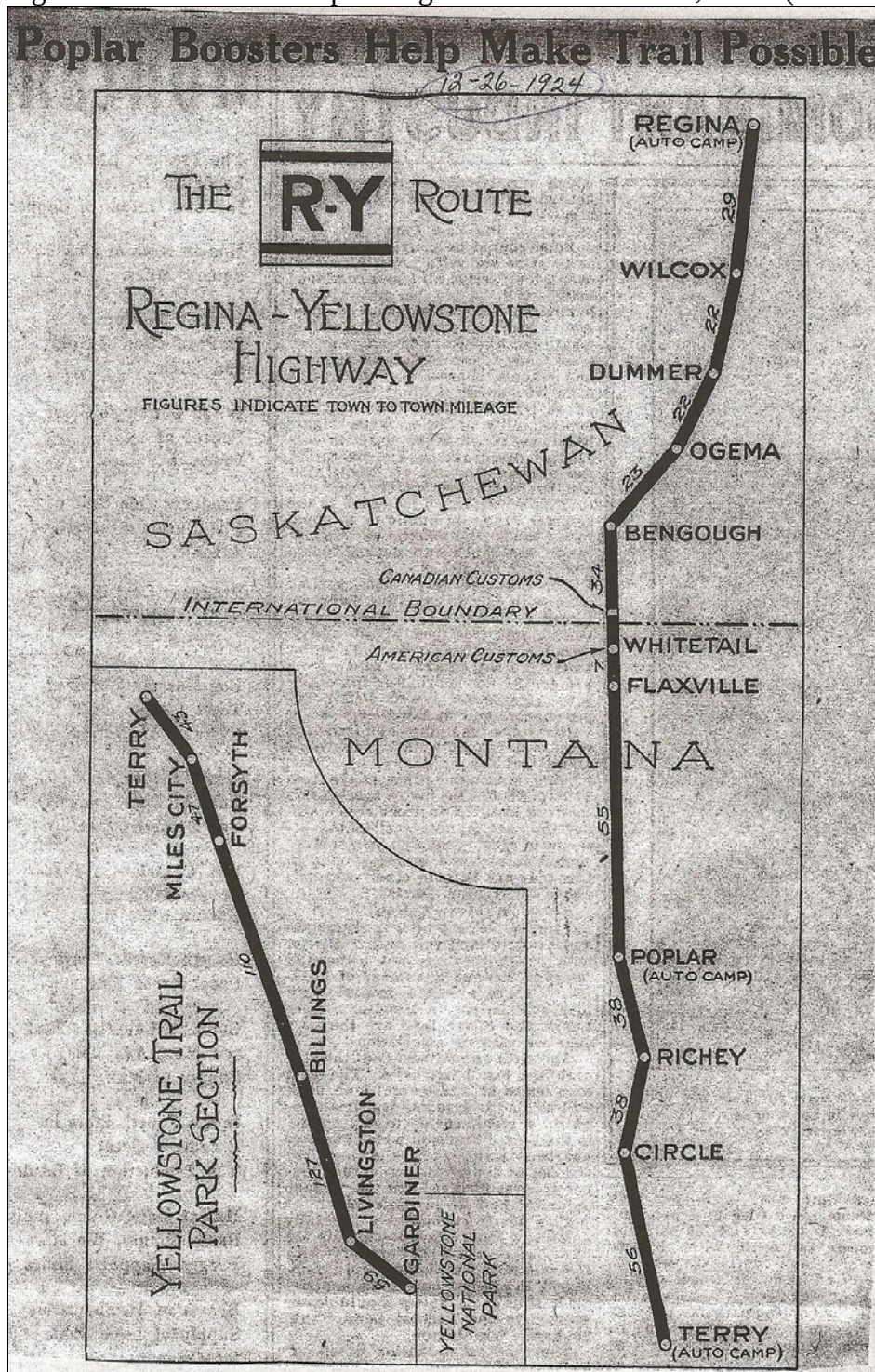
By 1924 a sense of optimism had once again returned to Poplar. A number of events were planned for the years 1924-1926, including a boxing match at the Glacier Theater. A three-day festival was also planned for July 1925, complete with a rodeo and a championship baseball game between semi-professional teams from Scobey, Montana and Omemee, North Dakota (Poplar Standard 1925b).

In the mid 1920s Poplar also tried to attract growing numbers of automobile tourists. Poplar had been a stop on the 1913 Glidden tour to promote automobile travel, and in the 1920s emphasis was placed on developing a north-south route from Regina, Canada to Yellowstone National Park. Named the Regina-Yellowstone Trail, the route crossed the International border north of Flaxville and continued south, crossing the Missouri River at Poplar, then passed through Circle and Terry before turning west to Livingston and ending at Gardiner (Figure 17).

In 1924 a tourist park and camping area was developed along the Poplar River where the present-day Legion Park is located. That same year a dance pavilion was built by A.R. Mitton, but it was later moved to a location just west of town as it stayed open late into the night, keeping campers awake. It became extremely popular in its new location near present-day U.S. Highway 2.

Poplar's success as a tourist destination was short lived. The dance pavilion and the campground ebbed as national economic conditions deteriorated in the late 1920s. By

Figure 17. Promotional Map of Regina-Yellowstone Trail, 1924. (Beck 2007).



1930 the *Poplar Standard* was lamenting the fact that vandalism, abuse, and reduced visitation had tarnished the tourist park (Poplar Standard 1930).

Poplar struggled in the late 1920s as the national economy began to falter. Both the First National Bank and Fort Peck State Bank had closed by 1928, leaving Traders State Bank as Poplar's sole bank. In 1930 Wolf Point challenged Poplar's status as a regional trading hub with the construction of the Wolf Point bridge over the Missouri River. This provided a reliable link to the communities on the south side of the Missouri River and diverted trade to Wolf Point.

The Great Depression, 1929-1939

By the early 1930s Poplar and all of northeastern Montana felt the effects of the Great Depression. Wheat prices plummeted from \$1.56 per bushel in 1929 to \$0.32 per bushel in 1932 (Malone et al. 1991). Low productivity also plagued farmers in Montana as statewide wheat yields fell to 7.4 bushels per acre in 1934 and 2.6 bushels per acre in 1936 (Ward 1975, 25). In 1933 the *Poplar Standard* reported that conditions had deteriorated so much that most companies weren't doing any trading at all (Poplar Standard 1933).

The low yields were caused by a crippling drought which affected much of the Great Plains during the 1930s. In 1937, overworked soil, exposed fields, and powerful windstorms resulted in 1.25 million acres of Montana crops being covered by blowing soil (Vichorek 1987, 35). In 1938 grasshoppers devastated crops in much of eastern Montana, including Roosevelt County (Vichorek 1987).

The early years of the Depression were particularly bad as farmers were left to fend for themselves. From 1930-1932 the Red Cross distributed food, clothing, and fuel to Montana farmers but they were unable to do much good with their limited resources (Malone et al. 1991).

The New Deal. Franklin Roosevelt's presidency in 1933 ushered in changes in federal Indian policy and agricultural practices that affected social and economic conditions across northeastern Montana. The impact of New Deal programs was widespread, as 35 percent of eastern Montanans were on some form of direct relief in 1935, and Montana ranked second overall in the nation in per capita New Deal payments (Malone et al. 1991). This high ranking is partly due to the massive Fort Peck Dam project, but the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the Indian Emergency Conservation Works (IECW), the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), and other agencies assisted in smaller-scale projects throughout the state.

Agricultural practices in Montana also changed as a result of the Agricultural Adjustment Acts (AAA) of 1933 and 1938. With the passage of the AAA, the federal government took a more active role in controlling agricultural prices by encouraging farmers to restrict planted acreages to adjust market supply. New policies implemented through the AAA suggested that increasing efficiency and planted acreage would not necessarily lead to greater profits, as farmers also had to consider market conditions (Ward 1975).

The agricultural landscape reflected important new adaptations to the region's deteriorating environmental setting. Blowing soils convinced farmers to adopt the

Canadian practice of strip farming, which created a landscape pattern now synonymous with the Great Plains. Grain storage bins also became common as farmers stored grain under government programs designed to control the flow of wheat into the market (Ward 1975).

Federal Indian policy also changed significantly during the New Deal. In 1924 Indians gained full citizenship, but a growing reform movement in the 1920s questioned the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the policy of allotment. In 1928 the Brookings Institute released the Merriam Report which criticized federal Indian policies and the inefficiency of the BIA. The report called for including Indians in making important decisions, closing boarding schools, restricting allotments, and developing better land-use programs (Taylor 1980).

Under Roosevelt's presidency John Collier was appointed Commissioner of Indian Affairs and many of the Merriam Report's proposals were incorporated in official policy. Under the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934, tribes that accepted the provisions of the Act could adopt constitutions and form tribal governments. Provisions were also made for tribes to regain land lost during the allotment process. In addition to the IRA, Collier also started the Indian Emergency Conservation Works (IECW) which provided work relief on the reservations during the 1930s.

While New Deal Indian policy was a significant shift from the previous policy of allotment, it had mixed results. For a variety of reasons some tribes, including the Fort Peck, voted not to accept the provisions of the IRA. Despite its rhetoric of self determination, the IRA still required the Secretary of Interior to approve tribal

governments and constitutions. Taylor (1980, xiii) notes that the IRA and other New Deal reforms ultimately "...failed to endure because...they were imposed upon the Indians who did not see these elaborate proposals as answers to their own wants and needs." One positive legacy of New Deal reforms, however, was that they ended the policy of allotment and prevented further rapid loss of Indian lands (Canby 1998).

The Fort Peck Tribes. Problems on the reservation were particularly acute during the Depression. Roosevelt County wheat yields plummeted from 3 million bushels in 1927 to 38,400 bushels in 1937 (Ward 1975, 25). Superintendent John Hunter reported that the Assiniboiné and Sioux in general were "terribly poverty stricken" due to the drought, and that income would have to be provided through government employment (Hunter 1934).

While both Indians and non-Indians struggled during the Depression, Indians were even more dependent on the federal relief programs of the New Deal. Superintendent Hunter noted that the Montana State Security Board was offering support to non-Indians, but had no provisions for Indians as they were considered wards of the federal government (Hunter 1936). The IECW was essential in providing relief to the Assiniboiné and Sioux, and in the 1930s numerous stock ponds, roads, fences and other projects were constructed on the reservation.

The Fort Peck Tribes benefited from work-relief programs during this time, but there was also significant political discontent on the reservation. This discontent had been fomenting since the homestead bust of the 1920s and centered on Indian leaders' complaints that the allotment process ultimately had not led to the promised greater

prosperity for the Assiniboiné and Sioux. Many leaders were also influenced by 1920s progressivism and were calling for self determination (Miller 2008b).

In 1927 the Assiniboiné and Sioux adopted a constitution and codified a system for convening general councils. General councils were essentially meetings where all tribal members (typically mostly male) would voice opinions and vote on matters affecting the reservation. The tribes decided that separate Assiniboiné and Sioux councils would periodically convene in general councils, and late in 1927 a general council elected a twelve-member executive board (Miller 2008b). While this represented a certain amount of autonomy, Taylor (1980) notes that executive boards in the late 1920s were pushed by the federal government to address natural resource allocation issues. The Fort Peck executive board operated as a *de facto* government for the Assiniboiné and Sioux on the reservation, but the BIA exerted a strong influence over the committee and ultimately approved or disapproved all decisions.

Tensions between the Assiniboiné and Sioux also reflected this political discontent. Following patterns established in the late nineteenth century, the Assiniboiné and Sioux occupied different halves of the reservation. The bridge at Tule Creek marked the midpoint of the reservation, with Assiniboines living to the west and the Sioux to the east (Miller 1986). With the agency headquartered in the eastern half of the reservation at Poplar, many Assiniboiné felt the tribal government was controlled by the Sioux. In 1932 Assiniboiné leaders petitioned Superintendent H.D. McCulloch to establish their own autonomous council, which would not be subject to the reservation general council.

Conflict between the two tribes was rooted in the nineteenth century, but these new tensions were recast in the political context of Assiniboiné Republicans versus Sioux New Deal Democrats (Miller 1986). In the 1920s Assiniboiné leaders had generally aligned themselves with the Republican Party, but by 1931 mostly-democrat Sioux leaders had maneuvered within the council to take control of all the seats (McCullogh 1932). After writing a scathing letter criticizing Sioux leaders on the reservation, the Assiniboiné chairman, Joshua Wetsit, was deposed by the all-Sioux council (Miller 1986).

The Assiniboiné leaders felt their needs would not be addressed by this council and objected to what they perceived as radical pro-reform agendas of many Sioux leaders. Superintendent McCullogh sympathized with the Assiniboines and endorsed their efforts to establish an autonomous council. He also sympathized with them politically, describing many of the Sioux council members as “politically minded,” “agitators,” and “Bolsheviks” (McCullogh 1932).

While McCullogh’s labels were probably extreme, many Sioux on the reservation were more enthusiastic toward social change and New Deal policies. In one instance, Rufus Ricker, a full-blood Sioux, joined with a group of non-Indian farmers in Plentywood to demand relief from poverty, equality for Indian and white farmers, and to be treated like “...citizens, and not slaves” (Brensdal et al. 1933).

Echoing national trends, the legacy of the New Deal on the Fort Peck Reservation was mixed. Political tension reinforced historical divisions between the two tribes and further entrenched the east-west division of the reservation. With Poplar being located on

the Sioux side of the reservation, the Assiniboiné continued to feel underrepresented as they were ultimately unable to establish an autonomous council. After a divisive vote, the tribes also decided against adopting the IRA. The political division on the reservation played a large role in this decision as Assiniboiné Republicans generally voted against adoption, but a concerted effort by white business owners on the reservation to foment opposition to the IRA was also a factor (Miller 2008b).

The construction of Fort Peck Dam provided jobs for many non-Indians, but initially Indians were barred from employment. In 1936 this restriction was lifted and as many as 150 Fort Peck tribal members were working on the construction crews, but few of these remained for the duration of the project (Miller 2008b). One of the more positive results of the New Deal for the tribes, however, may have been the reacquisition of some of the lands lost during the allotment period. In 1934 the BIA authorized the purchase of 100,000 acres of sub-marginal land, and in 1935 41,400 acres of land that remained open to homesteading were withdrawn and eventually returned to the tribes (Miller 2008b, 310).

Depression-Era Poplar

Federal money came into Poplar for the improvement of streets, water and sewer lines, and lighting. By 1940 many streets had been oiled and Second Street had been paved through the downtown business district (Poplar Standard 1940a). Sewer and water lines were also extended to the south and east of the agency buildings into Poplar's East End (Poplar Standard 1940b). During this time Highway 2 was also improved through town, and a new highway bridge was built over the Poplar River west of town.

In 1941, Works Progress Administration labor was used to construct Poplar's armory building on C Street between Second and Third streets. The armory building originally housed the National Guard headquarters and city offices, but it came to serve many functions. WPA labor was also used to build a very popular ice skating rink on the agency grounds (Pickett 1941).

A new high school was built in 1931 on the same grounds as the 1915 school, and the high school was expanded in 1935. This addition was built with the help of federal funds, as the closure of the boarding school in 1932 and the enrollment of Indian children at the public school produced overcrowding. Superintendent C.L. Walker, who was instrumental in securing the funds, felt that the project would be especially worthwhile as the Poplar school would become an excellent example of an integrated school (Walker 1934).

This reflected the larger change in Indian policy as the BIA was relinquishing some of its control over Indians. While not necessarily in practice, the integration of the Poplar schools in theory recognized that Indian children should be eligible for the same education as non-Indian children.

In other situations, however, the BIA still maintained strict guardianship over Indians. The contrast between New Deal social liberalism and the continuing oversight of the BIA was especially evident after the repeal of the nineteenth Amendment in 1933. With the end of prohibition, alcohol was again legal in the country, and after some initial uncertainty, it was decided that beer would be legal within the Fort Peck Reservation on non-Indian land. Four bars opened in Poplar as a result (Colgan 2007).

Alcohol was only legal on non-Indian lands, however; possession and consumption of alcohol by Indians remained illegal until 1953. Both city and reservation police strictly enforced this policy, which ultimately failed to prevent alcohol abuse.

Jurisdictional disputes between city and reservation law enforcement remained a problem as well. Indians who committed offenses within the town limits would often be brought before city or county justices of the peace rather than reservation officials. Indian leaders complained that these offenders were often subject to exorbitant fines and sentences (McCaskill 1940). This lack of cooperation further entrenched the separation of Indian and non-Indian institutions in Poplar.

A Second Boom, 1940-1960

World War II stimulated the national economy and helped to end the Depression as new defense industries and increased production created jobs. Combined with a rapidly expanding military, these new jobs resulted in large-scale movements of people as millions relocated during the war. Although the trend would be reversed after 1945, a net out-migration driven by the war lowered Montana's population from 559,456 in 1940 to 470,000 in 1943 (Malone et al. 1991, 311).

As the economy rebounded, however, federal Indian policy was essentially reversed. With the end of Roosevelt's New Deal and John Collier's resignation as Commissioner of Indian Affairs, many of the policies that encouraged cultural pluralism and tribal self-determination ended. Instead, new policies that encouraged rapid natural resource development on reservation land and quick assimilation of Indians were codified

in the termination policies of 1953. Termination sought to end the federal government's trust responsibility to Indians under the guise of promoting equality and eliminating government bureaucracies such as the BIA.

Economic recovery turned into a boom in Poplar and many communities in northeastern Montana in the 1940s and 1950s. Higher farm prices, wetter weather, and high yields increased farmers' profits. Excitement also grew as proposals for large-scale irrigation and flood control projects on the Missouri River renewed prospects of irrigation. The largest impact, however, came from the development of northeastern Montana's oil resources. For Poplar and other towns in the Williston Basin, the 1950s were a boom time as oil discoveries generated an excitement not seen since the initial homesteading era.

Agricultural Recovery

The year 1943 was the best Montana farmers had ever seen, surpassing even the best years of the homestead boom (Malone et al. 1991). High wartime prices, increased yields, and the end of the drought finally brought relief to Montana farmers and ranchers. Unlike the recession following World War I, prices remained high after 1945 as domestic demand increased with the end of rationing and international demand remained high with the rebuilding of Europe (Wessel 1998).

The depression of the 1920s and 1930s, however, made it clear that agriculture on the northern Plains would not support numerous small farmers. Tractors and other mechanized equipment had been available during the initial homestead boom of the 1910s, but by the 1940s it became evident that small, non-mechanized farming operations

simply wouldn't be able to compete. Rural populations shrank as mechanization reduced the need for large numbers of farm workers.

Farming remained essential to local economies, however, and by the mid 1940s officials looked to reclamation as insurance against the droughts of the 1920s and 1930s. Unlike the relatively small projects proposed for the Poplar River and other streams during the allotment period, focus now shifted to large-scale development of the Missouri River.

Large-scale federal projects on the Missouri River began with Fort Peck Dam, but its primary purpose as a flood control structure mainly benefited residents of the lower Missouri basin. Power generating facilities installed by 1943 provided local communities such as Poplar with relatively cheap power, but local officials wanted irrigation water. The Bureau of Reclamation, formerly the Reclamation Service, sympathized with these residents.

Before the Bureau of Reclamation put forth a plan to develop the upper Missouri, however, the Army Corps of Engineers issued a competing plan that emphasized flood control and navigation concerns for the lower Missouri. Threatened by President Roosevelt's suggestion that control of the river be under a separate Missouri Valley Authority, the agencies decided to combine Glenn Sloan's plan from the Bureau of Reclamation with Lewis Pick's plan from the Army Corps of Engineers (Reisner 1993). The resulting Pick-Sloan plan was adopted by Congress in 1944.

Under the Pick-Sloan plan, however, most of the Bureau's irrigation projects fell by the wayside as emphasis was placed on completing the Corps' flood control and

navigation projects (Schneiders 2003). Residents of northeastern Montana who supported the Pick-Sloan plan in hopes that it would bring stability to the region's farmers saw their needs trumped by the flood control needs of more populous communities of the lower Missouri Basin.

For most residents of Montana and North Dakota, the Pick-Sloan plan, therefore, provided little benefit. For Indians, however, it reflected their tenuous relationship with the federal government and the shift in Indian policy toward termination.

The endorsement of Garrison Dam in North Dakota by the Secretary of the Interior and officials in the BIA represented a departure from New Deal Indian policy and an embrace of the principles of termination. Garrison Dam flooded the best winter rangeland on the Fort Berthold Reservation and displaced the Mandan, Arikara, and Hidatsa from their productive communities along the river (Reisner 1993). BIA officials felt that this would ultimately speed the Fort Berthold tribes' assimilation as they would be forced out of the bottomlands and into the towns surrounding the new reservoir (Reisner 1993).

The Oil Boom

Montana's oil resources had been developed as early as 1916 in Elk Basin along the Wyoming border, and significant growth in the industry came with the development of the Kevin-Sunburst and other northern fields in the 1920s (Douma 1957). Montana oil production during the 1930s and 1940s continued on a small scale, but the development of the Williston Basin in 1951 doubled production (Malone et al. 1991, 355).

The geologic structure known as the Williston Basin covers parts of northeastern Montana and northwestern North Dakota. Initial oil discoveries by Amerada Oil Company in North Dakota and Shell in Montana sparked excitement as companies acquired leases and wildcatted across the region. Deep drilling created many producing wells throughout the basin in the early 1950s, but coupled with high transportation costs, profits were relatively low (Douma 1957). The construction of a pipeline connection in 1955 greatly increased the profitability of the Montana portion of the Williston Basin (Sage 2007). In 1968, largely as a result of the development of the Williston Basin, Montana's annual oil production peaked at 48.5 million barrels (Malone et al. 1991, 336).

Termination

The benefit that individual Indians might have gained during the economic boom of the 1940s and 1950s was tempered by federal termination policies. Similar to allotment, termination policies generated support from a variety of interests; including those concerned with ending segregation, proponents of smaller government, companies that wanted to open reservation lands and resources, and those who felt that New Deal policies were simply communistic. A growing movement to free the federal government of its trust responsibilities to Indians led to the establishment of the Indian Land Claims Commission in 1946, and Congress' official endorsement of termination in 1953.

While it recognized past injustices, the Indian Land Claims Commission's purpose was to free the federal government of its trust responsibility by offering monetary settlements for past land takings (Lewis 1998). Termination policies emphasized that Indians should "...be subject to the same laws and entitled to the same

privileges and responsibilities as are applicable to other citizens of the United States...” (U.S. Congress 1953). Despite its egalitarian rhetoric, termination exacerbated Indian poverty and isolation as tribes in Oregon and Wisconsin, for instance, lost what little resources they had.

Termination policies were backed by the relocation program, which attempted to eliminate reservations by encouraging Indians to move to urban areas. The relocation program assumed that once Indians found jobs in the cities they would no longer have an incentive to return to the reservations, and would eventually lose their tribal connections. Philleo Nash, however, noted that this program simply amounted to a “...one-way bus ticket from rural to urban poverty” (quoted in Lewis 1998, 15). After World War II 100,000 Indians left the reservations on their own to look for jobs in the cities, and by 1960 the relocation program had encouraged an additional 33,466 people to move to urban areas (Lewis 1998, 15).

Poplar’s Post-War Evolution

These larger economic and social trends played out in the lives of Poplar residents. George Colgan (2007) reflected on the economic and social changes that came to Poplar in the 1940s. World War II was a pivotal event, and Mr. Colgan remembers how this influenced the community:

World War II-- that made the difference. Before that there wasn’t too much in the line of jobs in this area, outside of working for a farmer or a dairy, or some business that was local here in the stores or what not. But then quite a few of the people here in Poplar and this whole area went to the west coast to get jobs in the defense factories, they were wanting people bad. And there were quite a number of people in this area that left and went mostly to Washington, and Seattle and Portland, and then quite a few to California, wherever they had defense factories.

Once in a while someone would go out to the east coast but most of the time it was the west coast. And some of them came back after the war but a lot of them stayed, stayed out there wherever they went. They were glad to get those paychecks because there wasn't much going on here, and they just couldn't make any money. And then after the war things were just kind of at a standstill for a while, farmers couldn't get any machinery for a while because everything had been tied up during the war years. The machine companies had to put out war products and it wasn't until, about '48 '49 before they could get new machinery. And from then of course [...] prices were up and really the town, the town done pretty good. We had the John Deere, International, and the Case Agency, we had four—three machine dealers for farm machinery, in the late 40s. And now we haven't got any [chuckles], everything is consolidated now.

Of course the war profoundly affected the men and women who served in the various branches of the armed forces. By the spring of 1941, 100 Assiniboine and Sioux from Fort Peck had volunteered for service, more than any other tribe (Rawls 1996, 5). In 1948, with the work of Indian war mothers, a memorial was established along Highway 2 to commemorate Fort Peck soldiers who were killed in action during the war (Poplar Standard 1948).

After the war, excitement grew over the prospects of irrigation with the passage of the Pick-Sloan plan. The Bureau of Reclamation had initially proposed to build a canal across the length of the reservation to provide irrigation water to parts of northeastern Montana and adjacent North Dakota. Part of the larger Missouri-Souris project, the Montana unit would take Missouri River water at a diversion dam planned to be built south of Nashua and carry it to Medicine Lake near the North Dakota border (Great Falls Tribune 1949).

Former Fort Peck superintendent and project manager F.A. Ashbury estimated that 150,000 acres in northeastern Montana could be irrigated using water from the canal (Great Falls Tribune 1949). The *Poplar Standard* was even more optimistic, estimating

that in Roosevelt County alone 160,000 acres might be irrigated (Poplar Standard 1949). However, the Montana portion of the project was cancelled as much of the land was deemed unsuitable to irrigation.

For Poplar the real boom came with the discovery of oil. The potential of the Williston Basin had been explored by 1928 when a dry well was drilled just south of Poplar, but in 1951 C.H. Murphy Oil Company struck oil just north of Poplar in what came to be known as the Poplar Oil Field (Hoye 1976).

Many companies were eager to explore the reservation but a number of conditions initially made this difficult. Many companies objected to acreage limitations on oil leases and the minimum lease price of \$1.25 per acre imposed by the BIA (Asbury 1947a). With the urging of the superintendent the tribes agreed to drop acreage limitations and reduce the lease prices to \$0.25 per acre (Fort Peck Tribal Executive Board 1947).

Allotments on the reservation also complicated oil exploration. The 1908 Allotment Act conveyed mineral rights to allottees, but a 1927 amendment reserved all mineral rights on unallotted land for the tribes (U.S. Congress 1927). Some of this land had been allotted, however, creating a patchwork pattern where some allottees held mineral rights and others did not. In addition, all mineral rights on non fee-patent land were held in trust with the BIA, regardless of whether those rights were with the individual or the tribe. In 1954 Congress addressed the situation by nullifying the 1927 amendment and transferring all mineral rights in trust to allottees (U.S. Congress 1954).

To further complicate this situation, fractionation and subdivision of initial allotments increased the number of interests. Carter-Phillips' bid to lease just over

32,000 acres in the Poplar oil field identified 238 individual interests, 68% of whom owned 40 acres of land or less. The economic benefit of oil development was also not distributed evenly. While Fort Peck tribal members who had oil on their land benefited, most tribal members did not (Miller 2008c).

Tribal members who had oil on their land stood to gain if they were able to collect royalty payments. These tribal members objected to BIA management policies that severely limited the ability of individual tribal members to contract with oil companies. This leasing process was seen by some to be cumbersome and lengthy, and they accused the BIA of incompetence in handling the process (Miller 2008c). A group of tribal members who had oil on their lands lobbied hard to gain more control over the leasing process, although tribal members without oil on their land did not stand to benefit from changing BIA policies (Miller 2008c).

BIA management of funds received from oil leases was also questioned as tribal leaders became increasingly frustrated with complex leasing arrangements and bureaucratic red tape. Oil development was increasing, but the BIA was not appropriating more funds for the Fort Peck Executive board to pay salaries and fund programs (Miller 2008d). In 1953 the Fort Peck Executive Board asked the BIA to conduct a 5 year audit and to appropriate more funds, but they were told that funding restraints and concerns about agency accountability were limiting the ability of the BIA to appropriate funds to a variety of tribes (Miller 2008d).

Nevertheless the Poplar oil field was extremely productive, and in July of 1954 it vastly out-produced all other fields in Montana with a monthly production of 294,641

barrels (Poplar Standard 1954a). On some days during the height of production, the field produced as many as 10,000 barrels of oil (Sage 2007). Development of oil resources in the Montana portion of the Williston Basin also led to the construction of a refinery 15 miles east of Poplar in 1961 (Ashley 1998).

Combined with the upswing in the region's agricultural fortunes, Poplar boomed. On New Year's Day, 1954, the *Standard* reported that high wheat yields and prices and oil production during 1953 made the outlook for 1954 particularly bright (Poplar Standard 1954b). In 1957 the town boasted a population of 2,500 and between 1946 and 1956, 52 new businesses opened and 37 new buildings were constructed (Promotional Pamphlet 1957). Various promotional materials were published in the 1950s and 1960s that touted Poplar's agricultural and oil economy, its modern services, and its proximity to recreational opportunities at Fort Peck Lake.

The town grew to accommodate the increasing population (Figure 18). In 1951 a new grade school was built for kindergarten through third grade, and in 1953 an elementary school was built in part with a federal grant of \$130,000 dollars (Ostlund 1976). In 1957 a new post office was built on B Street between Second and Third Streets with an additional 300 post office boxes (Poplar Standard 1957).

The city constructed the airport in its present-day location along Highway 2 in the early 1950s on land leased from the BIA. The airport was an improvement from the original air field located in the bottom land along the Poplar River, and officials emphasized that it could become a regional stop along a northern transcontinental flight route (Asbury 1947b).

Figure 18. Aerial view of Poplar looking northwest, 1957. Gateway Hotel in center (Poplar Chamber of Commerce).



Poplar citizens also raised the money to construct a new hospital in the former home of local merchant G.A. Lundeen in 1949 (Moilanen 1976). The hospital was funded mostly by local residents, but the ultimate goal for supporters was the construction of a single hospital for both the Indian and non-Indian community (Moilanen 1976).

Separate health care facilities, however, continued to exist for Indians and non-Indians in Poplar at the time as Indian health care was provided through the agency. In 1960 the present-day hospital was built at the north end of town overlooking the Poplar River and provided emergency care to both Indians and non-Indians (Moilanen 1976). Non-emergency medical care for tribal members and non-tribal members remained in separate facilities.

Compared to the 1920s and 1930s, Poplar's economy prospered during the 1940s and 1950s. However, the boom was already beginning to wane by the end of the 1950s. In 1960 The *Poplar Standard* reflected on the economy of the town in 1959 (Poplar Standard 1960). It noted that while overall 1959 had been a year of slow growth as oil production remained steady, hail and searing heat had made for poor wheat yields. The editors noted that the low yields in 1959 had marked the fourth straight year of poor crops.

THE GREAT SOCIETY, THE GROWTH OF NEOLIBERALISM, AND THE
CHALLENGE OF ECONOMIC ADJUSTMENT, 1960-2008

Between 1960 and 1980, Poplar's evolution was significantly impacted by regional and national forces. Nationally, minority groups in the 1960s were beginning to voice discontent with the economic and social policies of the 1950s, and locally the Fort Peck tribes were struggling to assert more autonomy and initiate economic development.

In reaction to an assimilationist sentiment in the 1950s, social reform movements in the 1960s advocated cultural pluralism and greater concern for social issues. As a result, the 1960s and 1970s were marked by an expansion of federal programs aimed at reducing poverty and promoting social equality. Many Indian reservations were targeted for economic development under John F. Kennedy's New Frontier and Lyndon Johnson's Great Society programs, and the policy of termination was officially reversed with the passage of the Indian Self Determination Act in 1975. In Poplar, tribal leaders secured government funds and oversaw the expansion of federal programs that attempted to bring economic development to some of the reservation's poorest residents.

By the late 1970s, however, national sentiment was beginning to shift. Economic recession and social and political unrest contributed to the growth of neoliberal ideologies. The social policies of the Great Society gave way to neoliberalism's embrace of free-market economics and reduced social spending. The 1960s and early 1970s rhetoric of equality through government intervention was replaced by a rhetoric of maximizing individual freedom by reducing the role of government in the economy and social matters.

In addition, the shift to neoliberalism was accompanied by a new wave of global economic restructuring. During the 1980s, and especially after the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s, new markets opened around the world and national economies became increasingly intertwined. Free market policies influenced the growth of an increasingly global economy, and in response many corporations grew in size and established impressive economies of scale. As a result, agribusinesses and large retailers such as Wal-Mart increasingly consolidated control over northeastern Montana's economy. This contributed to the decline of smaller trading centers, as local businesses struggled to compete.

During the 1980s many small towns also suffered as a new wave of farm consolidation, low prices for agricultural goods, and drought triggered a renewed exodus from regions such as the Great Plains (Popper and Popper 1987). By the early 1990s, Poplar's fledgling manufacturing economy also began to decline as government contracts disappeared. Coupled with the ongoing challenges of farming in the Great Plains and improving transportation technologies that have allowed residents to leave the community, Poplar's economy has continued to decline in this most recent wave of restructuring.

The Great Society and the Fort Peck Reservation, 1960-1980

While the oil boom of the 1950s brought new economic opportunities to northeastern Montana and Poplar, most individual Indians did not benefit to a large degree. As a whole the Fort Peck tribes did gain some benefit, but the oil boom was

tempered by the federal government's termination policies and bureaucratic red tape that hindered the distribution of oil revenues.

During the 1950s non-Indian boosters actively promoted Poplar as the Oil City, and the region's non-Indian population grew substantially (Table 2). While Roosevelt County's population in 1950 was at its lowest ever recorded, its 1960 population was the highest ever recorded. Between 1950 and 1960 Poplar's population of over 1,500 approached a level not seen since the initial homestead boom.

Indian populations were also increasing at this time, and tribal leaders expressed frustration that tribal members were not sharing equally in the region's economic growth. In addition to concerns about oil revenue, many Indian leaders also expressed frustration about the continuing dominance of non-Indians in the commercial and agricultural economy. Even as late as the mid 1980s, for instance, non-Indians controlled 82 per-cent of reservation land through a combination of ownership and leasing (Shanley et al. 2008).

Table 2. Population Trends, 1950-1970 (United States Census Bureau 1950, 1960, 1970). American Indian Population is first number listed, total population appears in parentheses.

Year	Poplar	Roosevelt Co.
1950	246 (1,169)	1,715 (9,580)
1960	337 (1,564)	2,733 (11,731)
1970	548* (1,389)	3,110 (10,365)
* Source: Bureau of Indian Affairs 1970. 1950 and 1960 American Indian populations defined in census as “other.”		

At the national level, Indian leaders were voicing their opposition to termination policies and advocating for increased tribal autonomy with continued federal support. Much of the impetus for social change in the Indian community during the 1960s stemmed directly from termination policies of the 1940s and 1950s. The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) began in 1944 in opposition to termination policies, and continued to lobby the federal government to increase social spending on the reservations into the 1960s. The American Indian Movement (AIM), which began in 1968, initially gathered its support from urban Indians, many of whom had moved to cities under relocation programs.

AIM gained notoriety as it organized protests and dramatic takeovers of Alcatraz Island, the BIA building in Washington D.C., and the town of Wounded Knee, South Dakota. AIM sought maximum autonomy for American Indian nations and often

objected to any federal policy which did not have this as its ultimate objective. While there were many Indian leaders who disagreed with AIM's tactics, the organization did help to increase national awareness of Indian rights and the continuing poverty on reservations (Shanley et al. 2008).

Various individuals and organizations advocated for Indian rights during this time as there was not necessarily a unified Indian rights movement with a single goal. During the 1960s and 1970s, a number of Fort Peck tribal members participated in protests and actively lobbied the federal government to improve conditions on the reservation (Shanley et al. 2008).

These social movements changed national perceptions of American Indians and influenced the creation of new federal policies. Federal Indian policy under President John F. Kennedy was tied into the administration's attempts to integrate chronically depressed areas into the national economy. Philileo Nash, Commissioner of Indian Affairs under Kennedy and Johnson, worked to include reservations in national social programs as he felt that the socioeconomic problems facing American Indians were essentially the same problems facing other minority groups (Rawls 1996).

The framework of social programs begun during the Kennedy administration was extended under the Johnson administration's Great Society programs. As a result, the 1960s saw a dramatic expansion of the federal government in promoting social and economic equality. The Area Redevelopment Administration (ARA) began in 1961 to provide assistance to chronically depressed areas of the country and was extended as the Economic Development Administration (EDA) in 1964. The Office of Economic

Opportunity (OEO) encouraged local leaders to establish Community Action Programs and included a separate office to extend benefits to Indian reservations (Rawls 1996). In 1961 tribal governments were recognized by the Public Housing Authority (PHA) as legitimate local governments and allowed to form reservation housing authorities and receive subsidies (Listokin 2006). U.S. Department of Agriculture programs distributed food on reservations and the Work Incentive Project (WIN) was extended to reservations in order to help welfare recipients find employment (Rawls 1996). The Manpower Development and Training Act contained provisions for public works and training programs on reservations (Rawls 1996), and the Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968 extended the provisions of the Bill of Rights to tribal members and ended policies that gave states criminal jurisdiction on reservations (Canby 2004).

In the 1960s all of Roosevelt County and the Fort Peck Reservation was designated an Economic Redevelopment Area and federal funds and programs were made available. Head Start programs began during this time (Limberg 1965), and Volunteers in Service to America workers were credited with increasing the number of Indian students in Poplar High school from 21 percent of the total enrollment in 1964 to 40 percent in 1965 (Area Director of Education 1965). In 1962 the Fort Peck Tribal Council established the Fort Peck Housing Authority (FPHA) to provide housing under the general provisions of the PHA, and by the early 1970s the council had secured government funds and contracts stimulating industrial growth on the reservation.

During this period the Fort Peck Executive Board also asserted more autonomy as a governing body on the reservation. In 1954 the Fort Peck Tribe amended its 1927

constitution, and in 1960 this new constitution was officially approved by the Secretary of the Interior (Fort Peck Tribal Executive Board 1965). The Tribe continues to operate under this constitution, which still contains provisions for convening general councils.

The 1960 constitution also set the one-quarter blood quantum requirement for tribal membership. Prior to 1960 tribal membership was determined by either a one-eighth blood quantum or by direct descent from a tribal member. The 1960 constitution established that full tribal membership would only be conferred on descendants with one-quarter or more Fort Peck Assiniboiné or Sioux blood.

The Nixon administration continued reforms on the reservations and ultimately repudiated termination policies. The administration returned hundreds of thousands of acres to tribes in the West, reestablished tribes that had been terminated such as the Menominee, and established Indian preference in hiring at the BIA (Rawls 1996). Following President Nixon's resignation, Gerald Ford continued these policies and signed the Indian Self Determination Act in 1975. The Act officially reversed termination policies by recognizing the federal government's trust responsibilities to the tribes. It also provided for greater tribal participation and decision-making by authorizing government agencies to enter into contracts with tribes to provide education and other services (U.S. Congress 1975).

The federal money that was provided to reservations during the 1960s and 1970s did have significant impacts. For instance, the EDA provided the basis for industrial development on nearly all reservations (Frantz 1999). Before 1960 only four industrial

plants were located on reservations, but by 1968 that number had grown to 137, and by 1972 there were 225 (Lewis 1998, 21).

While it generated economic benefit, industrial development on the Fort Peck Reservation also represented a new type of assimilation that attempted to turn Indians into industrial workers. While Indian leaders certainly had more control over this form of economic assimilation, it still echoed allotment-era assimilation policies that were aimed at turning Indians into farmers. Nolley (1982, 32), however, notes that industrialization marked an important shift in that it recognized the racial division of the economy:

In large measure, the desire to establish factories represents a recognition of almost wholesale failure of [assimilation through agriculture,] plus an implicit acknowledgement of the resignation of the area's agriculture to local white control.

The federal government's attempt to promote social and economic equality through the various programs of the 1960s and 1970s benefited many, but long-term results were mixed. The idea behind federal grants, loans, and training programs was to give chronically depressed areas the necessary resources to start industries and businesses which would then be able to compete with private firms (Nolley 1982). For many reservations this didn't materialize. Nearly all the industrial plants relied on public sector contracts from the Department of Defense (Lewis 1998), and reservation industries were often unable to secure private sector contracts.

Some Indian leaders also expressed concern that federal money was not providing a long-term fix. Vine Deloria Jr. worried that these new federal programs created a "benign confusion, in which Indians seemed more concerned with funding programs than

sketching out in broader and more comprehensive terms the ideologies and theories that are necessary for sustained growth” (quoted in Rawls 1996, 59).

Poplar’s Economic Development

In 1962, the Fort Peck Housing Authority (FPHA) began building the first housing project on the west end of Poplar, which came to be known as The Bluff. Most houses constructed under FPHA were located on tribal land just outside of Poplar’s official limits. These housing projects fall outside Poplar’s official limits, but they are connected to city water and sewer services and are functionally part of the town. In 1971 a FPHA housing project was built north of the highway in what came to be known as West End, and in the following decades public housing was built along Poplar’s east end.

In Poplar, the Bluff and West End housing projects were built on top of existing Indian neighborhoods (Figures 19-21). Before these housing projects were built, Indian families lived in these areas in substandard houses without adequate plumbing or electricity. Some of these houses were one-room log cabins, with water supplied from communal wells.

Figure 19. Log house from the West End (photo by author). This house was used as a residence until the West End FPHA housing project was built in 1971. Today it is located on the museum grounds.



Figure 20. Location of the West End well (photo by author). This sidewalk depression marks the location of the communal well residents used before the West End project was built.



Figure 21. Map of Poplar showing 1960s and 1970s additions (map by author, image source: Google Earth).



Despite attempts to locate Indians on dispersed allotments in the 1910s, many Indians lived within relatively close distance to reservation towns such as Poplar during this time. Allotments had often been leased, sold, or were subject to highly fractionated ownership, and unlike their white neighbors, relatively few Indians were engaged in large-scale cash-crop farming. Instead, Indians living along the edge of Poplar subsidized their food and income through large communal gardens located near where the industrial park is today. These gardens were cooperatively managed by members of the Indian community, and anyone who helped tend these gardens was entitled to a portion of their produce (Montclair 2008).

The FPHA projects brought much needed housing that made basic water and sewer services available to many Indian families. The housing projects also concentrated Indian populations in suburban-style neighborhoods immediately surrounding Poplar, creating an available pool of labor. This new settlement pattern allowed Indians to easily commute to centrally-located manufacturing plants that were built in the late 1960s and early 1970s. For this reason, Nolley (1982) argues that Poplar's public housing projects were a necessary first step in the industrial growth of the community.

In the mid 1960s Fort Peck leaders began pursuing industrial development through various federal programs. In 1969 the tribal government formed Fort Peck Tribal Industries (FPTI) and secured a Department of Defense contract to repair World War II-era rifles. FPTI located in the armory building that had been constructed during the New Deal and contracted with Dynalectron Company to provide management (Poplar Standard 1969) (Figure 22).

In 1968 the tribal government contracted with C&M Construction Company of Billings to build 50 homes across the reservation under the FPHA (Poplar Standard 1968a). C&M moved its manufacturing operations to the new industrial park, which was constructed immediately south of town in 1969 with the help of an EDA grant of \$370,000 (Nolley 1982). C&M completed its first house in 1969, but it quickly became unprofitable and C&M closed its Poplar factory.

In 1970 a New York company, Multiplex Communications Inc., contracted with the tribes to form West Electronics. West Electronics secured a \$50,000 contract from the Navy to build small electronic parts for radios and moved into the armory building

Figure 22. Fort Peck Tribal Industries, late 1960s or early 1970s (Poplar Shopper). FPTI was located in the New Deal era armory building.



along with FPTI. West Electronics initially employed as many as 40 people, but by the early 1980s the workforce had dropped to fewer than ten (Nolley 1982).

After C&M Construction left Poplar their building was occupied by the Fort Peck Manufacturing Company. Fort Peck Manufacturing was jointly owned by the tribes and the Electric Steel Corporation (ESCO) of Portland, Oregon. ESCO employed workers at its Poplar plant to grind slag off the teeth of large earth moving equipment. The partnership with the tribes came about as ESCO sought to take advantage of subsidies that were granted to companies with a significant percentage of minority workers, but by the early 1980s recession and a declining demand for farm machinery forced ESCO to close its Poplar facilities (Nolley 1982).

Assiniboine and Sioux Tribal Industries (A&S) started in 1974 and quickly became the most prominent manufacturing firm in Poplar. In 1975 A&S contracted with Brunswick Corporation to provide management and secured Department of Defense contracts to manufacture camouflage netting (Figure 23). The nets were assembled at the Poplar plant and finished at Fort Totten on the Devil's Lake Sioux Reservation in North Dakota (Nolley 1982). A&S also built metal chests which were used by the army primarily to carry medical supplies (Figure 24).

A&S was initially successful, employing between 100 and 200 people from its inception to 1982 (Nolley 1982). Department of Defense contracts were extended in the 1980s, and employment at the factory almost tripled. As the sole provider of medical chests for the U.S. military (Whitmer 2007), production at A&S peaked in the late 1980s and early 1990s in concert with the Gulf War. In the late 1980s A&S may have

Figure 23. Sewing camouflage nets at A&S, 1980s (Poplar Shopper).



Figure 24. Building metal chests at A&S, 1980s (Poplar Shopper).



employed up to 560 employees (McFarlane 2001), and by 1992 the factory had expanded to over 185,000 square feet (Vichorek 1993, 47). Shanley et al. (2008) note that employment at A&S contributed to relatively stable economic conditions on the Fort Peck Reservation between 1983 and 1993.

In addition to housing projects and the growth of industry, Poplar also benefited from federal funds in other ways. In 1968 a Housing and Urban Development grant was secured for the construction of a community hall in Poplar, and an EDA grant was used to build the Fort Peck Tribes cultural center (Shanley et al. 2008). During this time the Indian Health Services Clinic was also established, and in 1978 the Fort Peck Community College (FPCC) was officially established.

FPCC was originally opened under sponsorship from Dawson Community College in Glendive. Dawson had been offering extension courses on the reservation since 1969, but in the late 1970s a group of tribal leaders decided to explore the feasibility of establishing a full community college on the reservation. After conducting surveys and gauging community opinion, these leaders initially secured funds through the provisions for minority education under Title III, and the Indian Control Community Colleges Act (McAnally 1988). The old agency building known as “Old Main” became the college headquarters, and the campus grew throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

The Changing Social and Economic Profile of the Fort Peck Reservation, 1980-2008.

Following the boom years in the early 1950s, northeastern Montana’s economy waxed and waned between 1960 and 1980. Farmers continued to experience good and

bad years. Although Montana statewide oil production peaked in 1968 with the development of the Williston Basin, oil profits in Roosevelt County declined by the early 1970s. In the mid to late 1970s, however, northeastern Montana's economy was once again on the upswing. During the mid 1970s the region's agricultural economy boomed and farmland values rose. This reflected a national trend as much of the 1970s were a boom decade for many farmers in the Great Plains and the Midwest. Much of this boom was due to high foreign demand as the United States began exporting grain to the Soviet Union in the early 1970s (Fite 1986). In addition, northeastern Montana's oil economy also rebounded in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as OPEC's embargo made Williston Basin oil more profitable.

By the mid 1980s, however, most of this boom was over. By the late 1970s the agricultural economy was once again in decline, and by the 1980s many were calling the downturn a farm crisis (Fite 1986). Decreasing commodity values and a decline in exports by the late 1970s led to a new wave of foreclosures and farm consolidations across the Midwest and Great Plains (Davidson 1996). Drought in many areas of the Great Plains in the 1980s compounded problems for local farmers (Popper and Popper 1987).

Agriculture in Roosevelt County had faced a general trend toward consolidation since the initial homestead period. As Baltensperger (1987) suggests, that trend in the northern Plains is accelerated during economic downturns. He shows that low commodity prices and drought typically lead to consolidation, while high commodity prices and greater rainfall generates the opposite outcome. Table 3 traces average farm

size, number of farms, and farmland values in Roosevelt County from 1974 to 2002. The trends validate Baltensperger's analysis of northern Plains farming as smaller farms, a greater number of farms, and higher land values characterized the 1970s, while fewer farms, larger farms, and lower land values characterized the farm crisis decade of the 1980s. The 1990s and early 2000s show a modest upswing in the agricultural economy, as once again smaller farms, and a greater number of farms marked the decade, although land values did not dramatically rebound.

Table 3. Roosevelt County Farm Statistics, 1974-2002 (United States Census Bureau 1974, 1978, 1982, 1987, 1992, 1997, 2002)

Year	Average farm size (acres)	Number of Farms	Value of land and Buildings per acre (In 2006 dollars)
1974	2,279	677	572
1978	2,109	703	614
1982	2,348	584	509
1987	2, 281	598	344
1992	2,694	525	277
1997	2,348	609	274
2002	2,111	683	341

The oil economy also declined during the 1980s as OPEC increased exports. A series of struggles plagued the Macon refinery since the closure of Glasgow Air Force Base, and in 1985 the refinery ceased production (Ashley 1998). Northeastern Montana's declining oil economy reflected statewide trends as employment in Montana's oil and gas industry decreased from 7,500 workers in 1981 to only 2,500 workers in 1987 (Malone et al. 1991, 337).

While the 1980s marked a significant decline in the agriculture and oil economies, A&S industries was providing a significant amount of employment in Poplar. Most of the jobs at A&S were held by Fort Peck Tribal members. While non-Indians were employed at A&S, employment opportunities in manufacturing were largely seen to be opportunities for Indians (Nolley 1982).

Incomes in northeastern Montana fluctuated as a result (Table 4). The boom years of the 1970s are reflected in Roosevelt County's relatively high income in 1979, which was almost comparable to Montana's per capita income. By 1989, however, the income gap between Roosevelt County and Montana had substantially widened as Roosevelt County's income fell dramatically. By 1999 Roosevelt County and Fort Peck Reservation incomes had become almost comparable, and both were significantly lower than income for the state of Montana. The dramatic rise in Fort Peck Reservation income between 1979 and 1989 and the coinciding fall in Roosevelt County income for the same time period is most likely a result of a changing definition of those political units. In 1979 Indians were most likely only counted in the Fort Peck Reservation statistic while

non-Indians were most likely only counted in the Roosevelt County statistic. By 1989 it appears that both populations were counted together for both political entities.

Table 4. Per Capita Income in 2006 dollars (United States Census Bureau 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000).

Year	Ft. Peck Reservation	Roosevelt County	Montana
1969	n/a	11,904	12,918
1979	8,595	16,065	17,238
1989	12,396	12,944	17,900
1999	13,150	13,957	21,095

Coinciding with this changing economic picture has been a profound demographic shift (Table 5). Since the homestead boom in the 1910s, non-Indians had outnumbered Indians in the Fort Peck Reservation, Roosevelt County, and Poplar. By 1990 this trend was reversed in the Fort Peck Reservation and Poplar, and by 2000 it had reversed in Roosevelt County.

This was the result of a number of factors. Economic opportunities at A&S Industries provided steady income to Indians during the 1980s, while the decline in the petroleum and agricultural economies resulted in fewer opportunities for non-Indians. As a result, many non-Indians left the region during the 1980s, and this trend continues today. A high rate of natural increase among Indian populations also plays an important

role, but so does an emotional attachment to their cultural homeland. Essentially, the only place where Fort Peck Assiniboiné and Sioux tribal members' cultural identity is socially reproduced is on the Fort Peck Reservation. This creates an additional incentive for Indians to remain on the reservation.

Table 5. American Indian Population and Total Population (United States Census Bureau 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000). American Indian Population is first number listed, total population appears in parentheses.

Year	Ft. Peck Reservation	Poplar	Roosevelt Co.
1970	3,406 (9,898)*	548* (1,389)	3,110 (10,365)
1980	4,422 (9,839)	470 (995)	3,865 (10,467)
1990	5,782 (10,595)	481 (881)	5,355 (10,999)
2000	6,391 (10,321)	580 (911)	6,182 (10,620)
* Source: Bureau of Indian Affairs 1970.			

The changing economy and demography of the Fort Peck Reservation was accompanied by the Fort Peck tribes' increasing sovereignty after the passage of the Indian Self Determination Act in 1975. The Act allowed tribes to take over administration of education, health care, law enforcement, and other governmental duties. Under self determination, the BIA and other federal agencies were supposed to deal with

tribal governments not as a guardian, but rather as an advisor in a government-to-government relationship.

As a result, the Fort Peck government asserted more authority. Most importantly, in the mid 1980s the tribe began to make official its implied water rights to the Missouri River. In 1985 it negotiated with the state of Montana for the right to use one million acre-feet of water from the river annually.

This new sovereignty was far from complete, however, as tribal governments were still subject to significant oversight from the federal government. In addition, Congressional Acts and court decisions in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s limited tribal sovereignty. After the initial growth of gaming on reservation lands in the 1980s, Congress passed the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act in 1988 which required most reservations to enter into compacts with state governments to regulate gaming on reservations (Canby 2004, 306). This Act has given state governments significant control over economic activity, which limits the ability of tribes to make decisions regarding commerce on reservations.

Issues of taxation have also been raised. After initially upholding the ability of tribes to tax non-tribal member activity within reservations, in 2001 the Supreme Court ruled that tribes could not tax non-tribal member activity on non-tribal lands within reservation boundaries (Canby 2004, 279). In matters of criminal jurisdiction, the Supreme Court also established in 1981 that tribal governments had no civil authority over non-tribal members on non-tribal land within reservations (Canby 2004, 280).

As the status quo on the reservation changed in the 1970s and 1980s, however, tensions between Indians and non-Indians heightened. A 1979 Montana Study of Poplar revealed the extent to which this division figured prominently within the community. Non-Indians primarily participated in this study which consisted of a series of discussions on the current conditions and the future of the community. Concern was expressed over the community's ability to stimulate economic growth and the increasing impoverishment of the town. Reasons for why this was occurring were wide ranging, but a number of participants suggested that the Indian/ non-Indian divide was a primary cause. One participant noted that "the division between the two groups has reached its widest point and is not beginning to narrow," and another that the "realization of tribal sovereignty plays a major role in the decline of Poplar" (Montana Study 1979).

In 1976 a number of non-tribal members on the reservation formed a group called Concerned Citizens for Equal Rights, and later that year joined with Montanans' Opposing Discrimination (MOD), which was a group that fought the political and economic power of tribal governments (Shanley et al. 2008). Indian leaders protested a MOD meeting in Wolf Point later that year, which created a feeling of turmoil as tribal leaders expressed concern over the breakdown of communication between the two segments of the reservation (Shanley et al. 2008).

The Growth of Neoliberalism

As political, economic, and social concerns on the Fort Peck Reservation came to a head in the late 1970s, national sentiment was beginning to shift. Recession, inflation, and general economic downturn were giving credence to those who questioned the

government's ability to regulate economic forces for the benefit of society (Yergin and Stanislaw 1998). Harvey (2007, 27) notes that for a variety of reasons "the embedded capitalism of the postwar period...that paid great attention to the social (i.e., welfare programs) and individual wage, was no longer working."

The ideologies that began to influence economic and social policies in the United States and much of the world in the late 1970s and early 1980s have been termed neoliberalism. The persistence of poverty and inequality despite the liberal reforms in the 1960s and 1970s influenced a group of thinkers who felt that government intervention was not the answer to social inequality and poverty. These new liberals, or neoliberals, believed that social welfare would best be served through free markets, entrepreneurship, and greater economic risk-taking (Ferkis 1986).

The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 signaled this shift, which brought changes to federal Indian policy. While these changes were more subtle than the pronounced shifts of the New Deal or Termination eras, they were nevertheless influential. On the Fort Peck Reservation, the 1980s were characterized by a decrease in federal programs as funding was dramatically cut and competition to secure these funds increased (Shanley et al. 2008). While President Ronald Reagan reaffirmed his commitment to Indian Self Determination in 1983 (Canby 2004), the Indian Mineral and Development Act of 1982 was criticized by some as an attempt to simply open reservation resources to outside firms (Ward and Morris 2008). Reagan's interior secretary, James Watt, also linked the continuing poverty on the reservations directly to the "socialist" policies of the federal government in the 1960s and 1970s (Rawls 1996).

Neoliberalism is difficult to define, however, and whether it is an ideology that promotes personal freedom or perpetuates social inequality is a matter of debate. Herbert (2005, 851) suggests that neoliberal ideologies are often reflected in

...shifts in state policy, including limiting state regulation of the economy to allow the market to function in a less impeded fashion; a reduction of trade union protections; a reduction of state obligations for the provision of social welfare, either through eliminating social services or turning them over to private operations; and a strong endorsement of the principles of free trade.

Central to this shift in state policy, Herbert argues, is devolution. In this context devolution describes a process where powers once reserved for the central government are delegated to smaller, local governments. While this may initially seem more egalitarian, devolution also comes with an expectation that local groups take greater responsibility in providing certain services. Herbert (2005, 851) argues that under neoliberalism local groups are simply being told to do more: "...Localized groups can be asked to assume greater responsibilities for the provision of security, charity, and economic development, although often on terms greatly dictated by state agencies."

The institution of neoliberal policies, combined with advancements in communication and transportation technologies, is what drives economic integration and globalization. The new opportunities in this economic system have benefited some, but this system has often worked to perpetuate the lack of opportunity in persistently poor areas (Falk et al. 2003). Regardless of whether globalization is good or bad overall, global economic restructuring has meant that local places have been subject to profound changes. Harvey (2007, 23) has described these changes as "creative destruction:"

The creation of this neoliberal system has entailed much destruction, not only of prior institutional frameworks and powers...but also of divisions of labor, social

relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life, attachments to the land, habits of the heart, ways of thought and the like.

Poplar's Economic Adjustment

Despite the regional economic downturn between 1980 and 2008, Poplar's landscape has continued to change since 1980. During the 1980s a number of FPHA houses were constructed in Poplar's East End, and the Airport Addition was also built during this time. In 1997 Poplar High School was renovated and significant improvements were made to the community's public schools on the western end of town. The tribal headquarters was moved to the new Medicine Bear complex in 2001 from its original location north of Government Row. During this time the Community College built a new library, a new computer and science lab, and expanded into the former tribal headquarters building. The college is also currently building a dormitory on the west side of government row.

These additions, however, have been made under volatile economic conditions. During the 1980s and early 1990s, the effects of the economic downturn, precipitated by the decline of oil and agriculture, were lessened in Poplar due to employment at A&S Industries. However, A&S Industries' ability to employ a large workforce was tenuous. New technologies reduced the need for camouflage netting and metal chests (Whitmer 2007), and the end of the Gulf War made high volume production of these items unnecessary.

The workforce at A&S dwindled during the 1990s, but by the early 2000s hope for a renewal of Defense Department contracts increased employment. By 2003 A&S

employed up to 60 people, but its rebirth was short lived. In 2007 the company was reorganized into A&S Diversified, and now it hopes to fully transition into precision manufacturing of specialized machine parts for the military (Whitmer 2007). In 2007 A&S had only nine employees, and due to the small scale of precision manufacturing, the company hoped to employ only about 30 people (Whitmer 2007).

With oil, agriculture, and manufacturing —the economic base of the town— struggling, the trend of consolidation has affected Poplar’s commercial landscape. Just as new technologies have allowed companies to grow in size, they have also allowed Poplar residents to travel further to shop or do business. The ascendancy of towns such as Wolf Point and Williston, North Dakota, as regional trading centers has resulted in fewer commercial opportunities in Poplar. Many Poplar residents can travel to both of these towns relatively easily, which forces local businesses to compete with large retailers such as Albertson’s in Wolf Point or Wal-Mart in Williston.

For Hi-Line residents in northeastern Montana, the Williston Wal-Mart Supercenter is a powerful draw. Opened in 2006 and employing about 275 people, Wal-Mart draws shoppers from small towns throughout the region. Residents of smaller towns often use a trip to the Williston Wal-Mart for both shopping and recreation, as Williston offers attractions that smaller towns don’t have.

Wal-Mart embodies the growth of the global economy. As a massive transnational firm, it has created an economy of scale that is continually cutting production costs which allows it to offer low prices to consumers. In the case of meat packing, for instance, Breitbach (2007) notes that Wal-Mart has recently reduced the

need for higher-paid butchers in their retail stores as meats are usually delivered to stores precut and prepackaged.

As long as it is feasible for Poplar residents to travel to Williston, local stores will have to compete directly with Wal-Mart. Local retailers can provide necessities that residents might require more frequently than a weekly trip to Williston might allow, and some retailers might be able to carve out a niche market. But ultimately, direct competition is difficult. As a result, Poplar's commercial economy has declined. Since 2006, Bould's Drug Store and Snoozer's Deli have closed, and the few remaining businesses continue to struggle.

In addition to the decline of the commercial retailing landscape, Poplar's role as a trade center for agricultural commodities has also declined. In 2006 Poplar's last grain elevator closed (Colgan 2007), and most farmers today travel to Wolf Point to ship their grain. From Wolf Point, mass shipments of grain are sent out on Burlington Northern Santa Fe trains. In 1968 the first of these mass grain shipments left Wolf Point on a 50-car train equipped with "jumbo" hopper cars capable of carrying 1 ½ times the grain of a regular car (Poplar Standard 1968b). In addition, most of the fuel that farmers use also comes from Wolf Point (Beck, 2007).

As the declining economy has offered fewer jobs, social problems have become acute. Residents complain that criminal activity, including vandalism, arson, and gang violence, has negatively affected the community in recent years. Between 2004 and 2006, about 16 buildings were destroyed in fires attributed to arson (Smoker 2007). This

left a number of charred buildings, which raised questions of jurisdiction, as it was unclear whether the tribe or city should be responsible for clearing the empty lots.

In addition to the stress on families and individuals, substance abuse has strained community services (Figure 25). Alcohol is responsible for about half of the calls the Poplar police department responds to (Montclair 2007a), and three quarters of calls that Poplar's emergency medical services responds to (Montclair 2007b). Substance abuse related accidents and health problems have added further strain on an already over-extended Indian Health Services (IHS). Due to inadequate funding at the federal level, Poplar IHS only refers patients to specialists if they are considered a level 12 case, or at risk of losing life or limb (Montclair 2007b).

For the time being, neoliberalism and the growth of a global economy have not brought greater economic independence to residents of Poplar. The recent decline of agriculture, oil, manufacturing, and commercial retailing has made many Poplar residents more dependent on the federal government. Kenny Smoker (2007) calculates that the head of a family of four would have to earn \$9.60 per hour to equal the subsidies that such a family would receive from welfare, and reflects that "is there a \$9.60 job out here? No...and so in order to live comfortably you should probably get \$12-15 per hour, and we don't have those jobs here."

The reduction of opportunities has spurred some residents to go to work at the Williston Wal-Mart. The tribes agreed to allow a handful of workers to drive a Fort Peck transportation bus to Williston and back each day, a 140-mile round trip. One Fort Peck Wal-Mart employee related that he likes his Wal-Mart job as it keeps him away from

Poplar's negative influences, although before he was laid off at A&S he made over \$10 per hour.

Figure 25. Modified anti-drinking-and-driving sign (photo by author). With the addition of the words "Don't Use Meth," this sign reflects the persisting challenges of alcoholism and new challenges associated with new drugs like meth.



A Landscape Cross-Section

The evolution of Poplar's built environment has forged a complex cultural landscape, and this landscape is full of information about the historical and contemporary development of the community. With an informed historical and geographical perspective, this information can be ascertained by critically analyzing the landscape.

In "Axioms for Reading the Landscape," Peirce Lewis suggests that landscape analysis reveals important clues about the culture and society that created that particular

landscape. He calls the landscape “our unwitting autobiography, reflecting our tastes, values, our aspirations, and even our fears in tangible, visible form” (Lewis 1979, 12). He suggested that we ask questions about the landscape in order to understand what it tells us about the way our society works (Lewis 1979).

Lewis proposed seven axioms and eight corollaries for reading the landscape, and his essay remains an essential guide. However, scholars have added caveats to Lewis’ axioms. They’ve noted that the landscape isn’t as accessible as an open book, and that “there are limits to what we can see in the landscape, and often the landscape hides as much as it reveals” (Holdsworth 1997, 55). As much as landscapes are our unwitting autobiography, then, they can also be very effective in deleting parts of that autobiography to tell a particular story. A landscape, for instance, might invoke heroic and nostalgic images of the history of the American West, while concealing the violent racial conflicts and environmental destruction that was also part of that history.

In addition, the landscape shapes people as much as people shape the landscape. Schein (1997, 676) points out that the form of the landscape works to shape our everyday lives, and that it “...embeds disciplinary constraints and the possibilities for human agency.” The framework of the public land survey, for instance, has disciplined generations to accept the rectangular grid as a normal layout for most towns.

Most recently, Mitchell (2007) has stressed the importance of how the landscape works to obscure certain historical and geographical events, as landscapes are ultimately expressions of power. Landscapes, he argues, are not unwitting expressions of our culture, as they are almost always planned and built with specific purposes in mind. To

accurately read a landscape he argues that we must pay "...close attention to how the landscape is an expression of power and in what ways that power is expressed" (Mitchell 2007, 26).

To illustrate the historical influences, power relationships, and disciplinary constraints in Poplar's landscape, I used Grady Clay's cross-section technique. The cross section isn't a comprehensive picture of the landscape; instead, it represents a sample of that landscape along a particular route. Cross sections gain their "...explanatory strength by revealing adjacencies and contrasts; they set up juxtapositions that spark our awareness and suggest analyses" (Clay 2003, 110). Clay goes on to suggest that "Cross sections are not necessarily straight lines, or even the first lines that one might cut; they require work and experimentation in the choice of the section line in order to gain their revelatory powers" (Clay 2003, 110).

My Poplar cross-section is shown in Figure 26. Photo locations are also labeled on Figure 26. My cross section reflected a pre-planned route designed to sample a varied array of Poplar's cultural landscape features as well as the suggestions of local residents encountered along the way. In particular, Poplar resident Robert Montclair proved to be a critical informant. His local view was invaluable and along the way he introduced me to a number of other Poplar residents who were able to shed light on many of these landscape elements.

Figure 26. Map of Poplar Cross-Section Route (map by author, image source: Google Earth).



Figure 27. Obsolete Landscape and the Town Limits (photo by author).



Poplar's trackside landscape once bustled with activity. The cement platforms of former grain silos, the defunct elevator, and the site of the former train depot beyond the elevator are relics of a time when the railroad was a center of commercial activity (Figure 27). The train depot was removed in the late 1970s, and Poplar's last elevator closed in 2006.

Across the tracks sits A&S Industries, which is itself a relic of the social liberalism of the 1960s and 1970s, and of Cold War era defense spending which kept many Poplar residents employed during the 1980s. Today, the large manufacturing plant employs only a handful of people, in contrast to the 565 employees that worked there during the height of the Gulf War in the early 1990s.

Both A&S and the commercial district along the tracks were made obsolete by economic restructuring and changing technology. Massive trains are loaded with grain in Wolf Point, making Poplar's elevators redundant. The changing needs of the military and improved infrared and plastics technology have made the camouflage nets and metal chests produced at A&S obsolete.

As the economy has changed, so has the meaning of this landscape. Trains rumble through here on their way to Wolf Point, Williston, and more distant population centers, passing groups of people who congregate along the tracks to socialize and drink beer. The palettes stacked on the second silo platform are a convenient place to gather, and here I met a group of nine Poplar residents. Most were former employees of A&S, but today most are only occasionally employed.

Their reason for gathering here, however, is hardly by their choice. They explained that the Poplar police have recently cracked down on public drinking, which has encouraged groups of people to come down to the sliver of space between the official town limits and the railroad tracks where they are free from the jurisdiction of the city. Suggesting the complicated jurisdictional boundaries between reservation, county, and city law enforcement, this photo also suggests something of the power of authority to contain undesirable activity in unseen and marginal space in the community. Even though the town limits may in fact include these former grain silo platforms, the activity of these residents is properly contained in an out-of-sight area. While this policy has its advantages for law enforcement, the group of residents that morning worried that a less

careful, or less sober, individual might wander too close to the tracks where the trains speed through town.

Figure 28. Fortified Spaces (photo by author).



The Legion is an important community center for many residents in Poplar and one of the community's few remaining commercial landmarks (Figure 28). Its weekend dinners are excellent, and in 2007 it hosted the Spikes and Spurs charity event which raised money for community health care.

Like many buildings in Poplar, it is also a heavily fortified space. Very real fears of vandalism and burglary have prompted some residents and business owners to put up barbed-wire fences, install "reservation screens" (metal window screens), or to simply avoid the problem by eliminating windows. The Legion has done that, with the only

indication that this is a part-time restaurant being the Lounge-Dining signs above the doors.

The Legion is an important community center, but it isn't a community center for the entire population. One individual referred to it as the white man's last bastion, and its formidable appearance makes it seem as though it is being besieged.

Many other businesses in town have a fortified appearance. While providing necessary protection against petty vandalism, these defenses also tangibly represent the maintenance of economic power among the community's typically non-Indian business elite. Fewer economic opportunities in the community have led to high crime rates, which directly threatens the power of business owners through vandalism and burglary. In reaction to this, businesses owners go into further retrenchment and the police crack down on undesirable elements of the community. In Poplar, the fortified defenses of commercial businesses suggests a tangible struggle to maintain power in a place that offers few means of survival.

Figure 29. The Gateway Hotel, c. 1917 (Poplar Shopper) and 2008 (photo by author), respectively.



The nearby Gateway Hotel was constructed during Poplar's homestead boom by Superintendent Lohmiller and his associates and served as one of Poplar's finer lodging choices (Figure 29). The 1917 image shows, from left to right, the Gateway, the Strand Theater, a restaurant, and the Trader's State Bank building in the background. In the contemporary photo, all that is left are the Gateway and the bank building. This image suggests the persisting imprint on the landscape of the early boosters, such as Lohmiller, who were active in shaping the initial development of the town.

But the meaning of the Gateway has changed. During its prime, the Gateway provided lodging to would-be homesteaders and others passing through town or visiting the agency on business matters. As such, Lohmiller and his associates intended for the hotel to be a profitable venture, emulating the finer hotels of larger cities. Today, the Gateway still evokes a feature of larger cities, but it's no longer a feature of urban luxury. Owned by the city of Poplar, it now provides low rent housing to individuals and families in need. The building remains on the landscape, but its meaning has changed along with the declining commercial district of which it is a part.

Figure 30. Second Street Commercial District, looking south (photo by author).



Poplar's original commercial district illustrates the centrality of the railroad in the town's early development (Figure 30). Just before the Fort Peck Reservation was opened to homesteading, Poplar was platted on a grid, with its main commercial streets running perpendicular to the railroad. This echoed the original north-south axis of the town, as the agency buildings of government row were originally laid out perpendicular to the region's earlier east-west transportation corridor, the Missouri River. The arrival of the railroad reinforced this north-south axis, as goods and people would have unloaded from the depot and filtered north through the town. Today, Poplar's original commercial district is still oriented to the railroad, even though the trains no longer stop.

In addition to historical continuity, however, this photo also suggests a more recent phenomenon. This commercial landscape has suffered as other, more distant

commercial landscapes have flourished. The Wal-Mart Super Center in Williston and even the strip malls of more-distant Billings siphon business away from Poplar's original business district. A mix of better transportation technology, free-market ideologies, and global economies of scale has allowed Wal-Mart to make Poplar's local businesses redundant. While local residents will shop at local stores for frequently needed necessities, they will continue to travel to Williston as long as the Wal-Mart price break makes the trip feasible.

Figure 31. The Water Tower and the Neighborhood (photo by author).



Many of views of west Poplar are dominated by the water tower (Figure 31). In the early twentieth century water towers were a symbol of modern technology and economic and civic progress, and they dominated the skylines of many small towns

(Wyckoff 2006). This water tower is a more recent addition to Poplar's skyline, as suggested by its modern technological design. This water tower replaced the previous tower in the 1980s that harkened back to an earlier time, not just in its physical appearance, but in its proclamation that Poplar was "the Oil City" (Figure 32). The "Oil City" slogan was omitted from the new water tower, reflecting the decline of the oil economy. The main door to the city office still carries the "Oil City" slogan, but few of Poplar's younger residents would today use that nickname in reference to their town.

Figure 32. Replacing the "Oil City" Water Tower, 1980s (Poplar Shopper). The "Oil City" tower is no longer there.

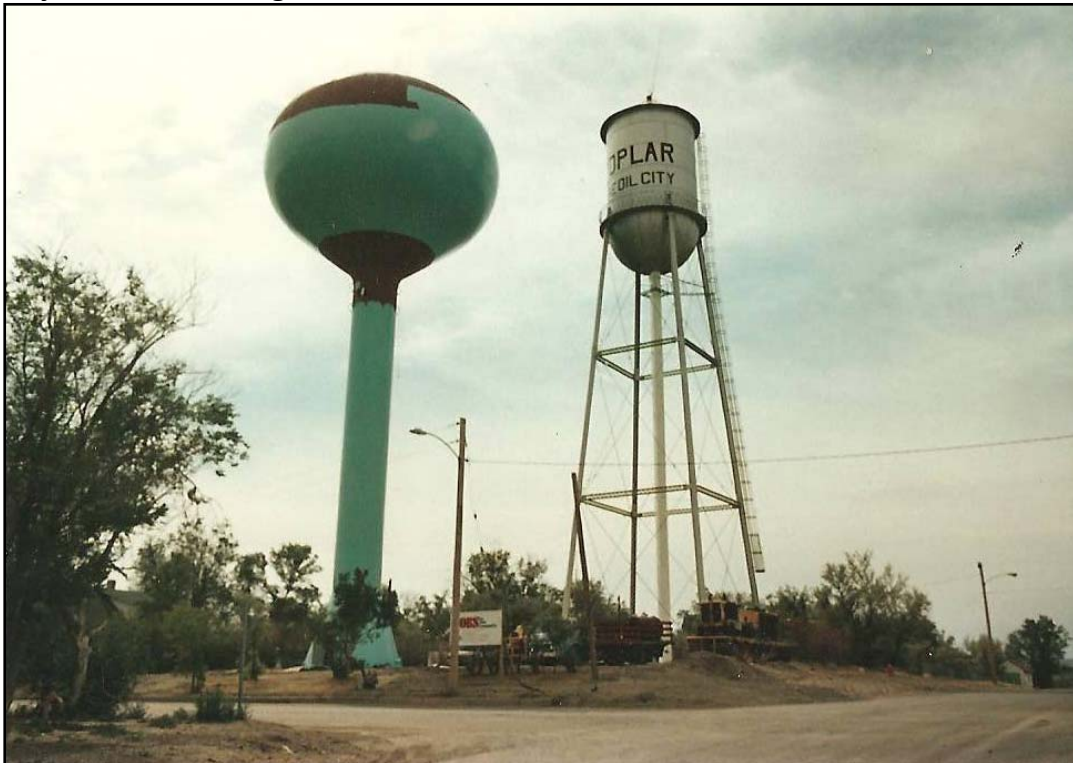


Figure 31 also shows the residential neighborhood immediately west of the Second Street business district. This is one of Poplar's older neighborhoods, as this area was one of the original residential districts during the homestead boom. Although few, if

any, residential structures remain from that period, this is still considered Poplar's nicest neighborhood.

Traditionally, this is where non-Indians lived. Although many residents suggest that the line between Indians and non-Indians has blurred, and there are certainly tribal members who live in this neighborhood, there is still residential segregation that is rooted in the historical development of the town. The sidewalks, mature trees, manicured lawns and shrubs, and peaceful appearance illustrate the persisting divide between Indians and non-Indians, as well as the reconfiguration of class lines as more tribal members move into this area of town.

Figure 33. The Bluff (photo by author).



Immediately west of the water tower and just outside Poplar's town limits, the Bluff, as this neighborhood is called, was the first public housing project constructed in the town in the early 1960s (Figure 33). Situated on the bluff overlooking the Poplar River bottomlands, this neighborhood differs dramatically in appearance to the older, more established neighborhood to the east (Figure 31). The Bluff development deviates from the grid pattern of the original town plat, and its layout resembles a pattern more common to a suburban subdivision.

Most obvious, however, is the exterior condition of the homes and the neighborhood infrastructure. While individual families often work hard to maintain their homes, much of the public housing in Poplar is in some state of disrepair due to a general lack of public funds. This has left streets, sidewalks, and driveways in a state of considerable disrepair. Contrasting sharply with the middle-class houses in Figure 31, the Bluff's state of visual disrepair is no doubt a contributing factor to some residents' feelings that this is a particularly rough neighborhood.

But this photo also tells the story of larger ideological shifts. The money for this and other housing projects came from PHA and HUD funds to provide adequate housing initially for some of the reservation's poorest residents. The same ideology that promoted opportunity in chronically poor areas and that led to the development of industry in Poplar also led to the construction of these public housing projects. As that ideology has now been largely replaced by neoliberalism, reduced funding has left many of these homes in disrepair.

Figure 34. The West End (photo by author).



The West End housing project was built in the early 1970s, and similar to the Bluff, this area provided much needed housing for local residents (Figure 34). The striking feature of this photograph, however, is the prominence of satellite dishes on both of these houses. This is a very common landscape element throughout the town, as satellite dishes dot the outside walls of many buildings.

While Poplar has always been largely characterized by its physical isolation, these satellite dishes suggest the degree to which Poplar is exposed to outside cultural and social influences through television as well as the internet. Satellite T.V., the internet, and cell phones have affected Poplar as much, if not more, than larger cities. Particularly for Poplar's younger residents, the internet, with its social networking sites, blogs, and instant messaging, provide an important social outlet.

Scholars such as Robert Putnam (2000) have studied Americans' retreat from public life as involvement in community groups and traditional social clubs has ebbed. This has also happened in Poplar, as there are few active community organizations today. Some Poplar residents worry that these new technologies have destroyed communal bonds within the town, as young people are seemingly more content to sit in front of a computer than attend a community meeting. The internet often seems dangerously ephemeral, where identity is particularly fluid and changing your personality is as easy as changing the photo on your MySpace profile.

But the landscape of the internet is not simply an ephemeral place separate from the real world of Elks Clubs, Girl Scouts, and bowling leagues. Often it becomes an important sounding board where people are more comfortable expressing concern over very real community issues. The Fort Peck Tribal Members' blog on the Billings Gazette website, for instance, is fertile ground for expressing discontent and concern over civic issues. But along with the anonymity that characterizes internet use, this blog often becomes a sounding board for particularly vicious and derogatory personal attacks. Regardless, the communities and social networks of cyberspace have become a vital component of the overall picture of Poplar's contemporary landscape.

Figure 35. Welcome to Poplar (photo by author).



The inconspicuous “Welcome to Poplar” sign hangs behind a formidable fence on the north side of Highway 2, greeting travelers from the west (Figure 35). While it is certainly a welcome sign, its placement behind barbed wire conveys a more ambivalent message. The commercial district along the highway here also speaks to the continuing influence and power of non-Indians in town, as most businesses along this stretch of Highway 2 are non-Indian owned.

The highway is also the third major east-west transportation corridor connecting Poplar to the rest of the world, the first being the Missouri River and the second the railroad. As such, the highway has significantly reconfigured the town, creating a new commercial district along its prominent east-west axis. In contrast to the former north-south axis (Figure 30) that grew north of the central railroad depot, the highway creates

many entry points along the length of the town, stretching the flow of people and goods along this east-west axis. The highway also suggests the ease with which local residents can leave the community. Williston is about an hour to the east, and on weekends many locals eagerly make the trip for shopping and entertainment.

Figure 36. Spotted Bull Treatment Center (photo by author).



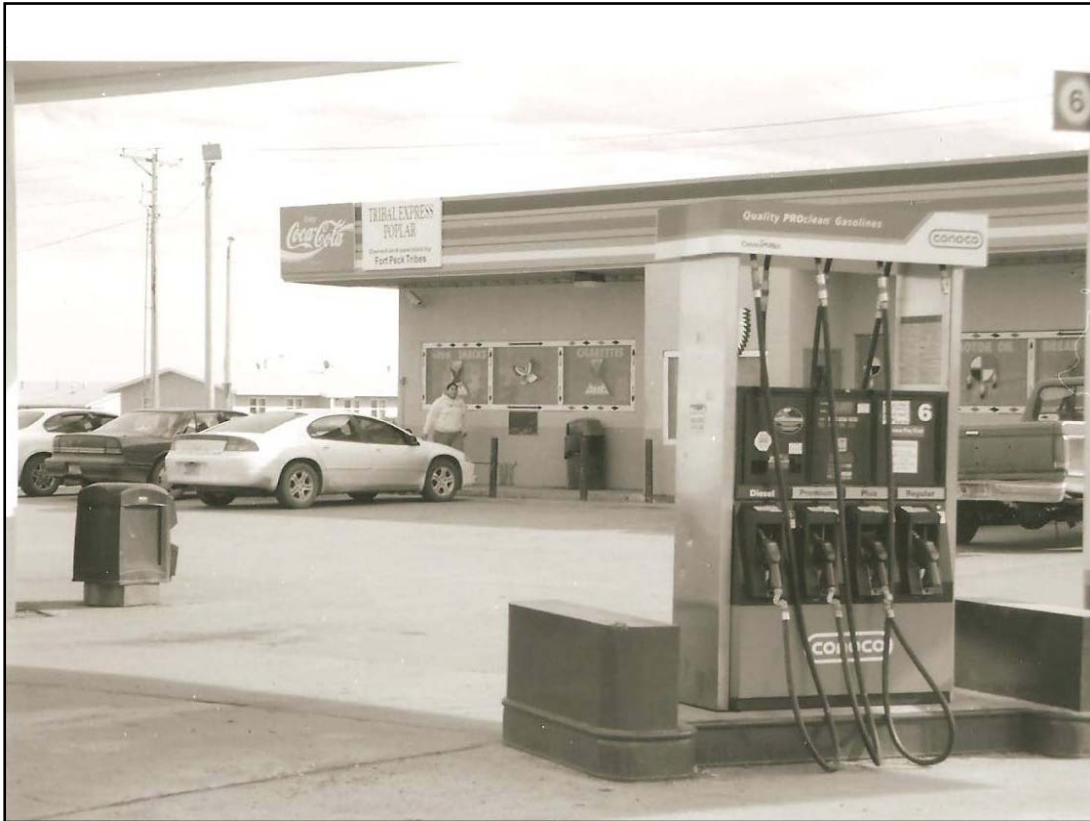
Looking west from the north side of the highway, Figure 36 shows (from right to left) Spotted Bull Treatment Center, a tribal office building, the tribal cultural center, and the college administration building. Spotted Bull began in 1972 as the Alcoholism treatment center for the reservation after Congress passed the comprehensive Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation Act (Shanley et al.

2008). Spotted Bull eventually became an independent entity controlled by the tribes, and they have expanded their services to treat all forms of substance abuse.

Northwest of Spotted Bull is the tribal court, juvenile detention center, and transitional living unit, a reminder that the landscape of this part of town reflects earlier government institutions that were located in this area. Historically, this part of town was the location of BIA offices, the boarding school, and the army post which dates back to the 1880s.

The message of this contemporary landscape is ambivalent. At one reading, this landscape of government institutions, tribal treatment centers, and the college suggests autonomy and control by the tribal government. A different reading, however, suggests the continuing influence and often dominance of the federal government, as many of these services must compete for federal funds and grants to continue operations. The landscape suggests both autonomy and dependence, a central issue that all tribal governments must negotiate carefully.

Figure 37. Tribal Express (photo by author).



Tribal Express, the gas station and convenience store, is owned and operated by the Fort Peck Tribes and is located on the east side of town along Highway 2 (Figure 37). The “reservation screens” on the windows may not be the most inviting, but its prime location attracts Hi-Line travelers coming from the east.

It represents economic development, although not at the same scale as A&S Industries. Tribal Express only employs a handful of people, but it represents a significant move by the tribes into the town’s commercial landscape. Most commercial businesses in Poplar are owned by non-Indians, but Tribal Express has been successful in siphoning some of this business away.

While the commercial landscape is still dominated by non-Indian owned businesses, Tribal Express suggests that may be changing. Its presence on the landscape challenges the traditional pattern in which non-Indians controlled all commerce within the town. It's a very small step for the tribes, however, and an increasingly uncertain proposition as opportunities for all of Poplar's commercial businesses continue to shrink.

Figure 38. Airport Addition (photo by author).



AP refers to the Airport Addition, Poplar's public housing project built in the 1980s northeast of the Airport (Figure 38). Like the West End and The Bluff, Airport Addition is a FPHA housing project that offers low-rent housing to residents. Airport Addition is physically separated from the town by the airport and the highway, which isolates it from the rest of the community. For those who don't live here, or have friends

or family to visit here, there are few reasons to visit Airport Addition, which further adds to its isolation.

The prevalence of graffiti and tagging around Poplar evokes a more urban culture that seems out of place in small-town Montana. No doubt influenced by images that arrive in Poplar through the internet and satellite T.V., this traditional expression of inner city life has residents concerned about another urban phenomenon, gangs.

While graffiti is not in itself necessarily gang related, the different neighborhoods are often delineated by tagging. The East End, Airport Addition (AP), and West End neighborhoods have distinct tagging and graffiti that indicates when you've crossed into those neighborhoods. The graffiti on the walkway between the Airport Addition development and Highway 2 marks an invisible line which delineates the neighborhood. These territorial lines are an important landscape element, as they further divide the community into distinct spaces.

Figure 39. Paths (photo by author).



The fence that surrounds the Poplar Airport has been cut, presumably by residents of Airport Addition, to allow more direct access to town (Figure 39). This path crosses the little-used runway, goes through a second opening in the south fence, then crosses the highway to rejoin the official pedestrian walkway connecting Airport Addition with the town. This impromptu thoroughfare is only one in an elaborate network of footpaths that crisscross the town.

These paths take direct routes, cutting across the town's grid of streets and sidewalks. But the paths also suggest the different economic classes in town, as those who have access to cars almost always drive, even for short distances. Those who don't have access to cars walk, and they travel on this largely separate network of routes that link streets, alleys, and footpaths. For many residents these routes are the ones they use

in their daily commutes. Often just as heavily trafficked as some streets, these routes reveal a landscape that goes unseen from behind the car window.

Poplar's landscape cross-section has illustrated some of the social, economic, cultural, and historical factors that have shaped the town. The role of transportation in forming the commercial axes of the town, the persisting divide between Indian and non-Indian institutions, the impact of economic restructuring, the influence of the federal government, and other factors are revealed in Poplar's cultural landscape. But the landscape "...hides as much as it reveals" (Holdsworth 1997). It does not in itself offer a complete picture of Poplar. To more fully understanding Poplar's historical development and its contemporary situation, an attempt should be made to see the community through the eyes of its residents.

THE INSIDER'S PERSPECTIVE

Poplar's historical narrative and contemporary landscape cross-section have shed light on the social, economic, cultural, and historical forces shaping the town. But to understand how these forces shape Poplar as a place requires asking residents how they see their own local history, geography, and community. Interviews and focused conversations with local residents were used to elicit this experiential knowledge, which in turn sheds light on how residents ascribe meaning to their place.

Place refers to more than just a physical location; it is a center of meaning based on experience (Tuan 1975). In *Mapping the Invisible Landscape*, Kent Ryden (1993) argues that without the insider's perspective, the complete meaning of a place remains invisible. Ryden (1993, 61) asserts that "...no narrowly focused study will do full justice to the meaning that a place holds for its people."

This meaning can be positive or negative, and many Poplar residents often have ambivalent feelings about their community. Relph (1976, 41) notes that "...the places to which we are most committed may be the very centers of our lives, but they may also be oppressive and imprisoning." In contrast, other scholars have shown how people become deeply attached to their places despite serious socioeconomic challenges. Marsh's (1987) study of declining Pennsylvania coal-mining towns, for example, showed that despite economic decline, many residents developed strong attachments to their community.

This is particularly true for Poplar, where place attachments take on additional meaning. While both Indians and non-Indians expressed strong attachments to Poplar, Assiniboine and Sioux residents who want to maintain their cultural heritage must remain

in Poplar and the Fort Peck Reservation. Off the reservation their everyday connection to that heritage is severed, and their Fort Peck Assiniboiné or Sioux identity is often lost.

In addition, the insider's perspective offers a humanistic look at the concerns of Poplar's residents. Economic restructuring may be a vague concept, but residents who experience the closure of a downtown business confront the reality of this phenomenon. To truly understand how Poplar is affected by larger economic and ideological shifts, we have to consider how these shifts play out in the lives of residents. The insider's perspective keeps Poplar's story grounded in the reality of these everyday lives.

Finally, the voices of local residents are an important part of understanding how to improve communities such as Poplar in the future. Any assessment of a community's evolution, character, and prospects benefits from the perspective of its residents. In *The Image of the City*, Kevin Lynch (1960) argues that the ways in which residents' differentiate space within a community and identify that space "...adds to the depth and poetry of human existence" (Lynch 1960, 127). He suggests that the image that residents have of their place and their experiential relationship to that place are absolutely necessary considerations when planning for the future.

Sources and Methods

To elicit the insider's perspective I conducted 29 interviews between March 2007 and March 2008. Of these interviews 17 were recorded and transcribed, while detailed notes were taken for the remaining 12. These 12 were not recorded for a variety of

reasons, including the fact that they were often impromptu interviews, or that the respondent asked not to be recorded.

Respondents were primarily chosen using a snowball sampling technique where each respondent identified other residents as potential interviewees. The sample grew with each interview and I soon had a long list of potential respondents. Individuals who were mentioned frequently were given a high priority for interviews, but others on this list were never interviewed. To expand my sample I also interviewed people who were not on the list. These were typically business owners, city or tribal government officials, or other community leaders.

Most interviews lasted about 40 minutes. Initially each interview followed a questionnaire consisting of 11 questions, with an additional three question supplement for community leaders (see Appendix). The questions were designed to elicit responses about distinct spaces within the community, important landmarks, socioeconomic issues, and changes over time. It quickly became clear, however, that the questionnaire was too rigid, and for most of the later interviews it was used more flexibly as a general guide. Interviews became more open-ended and more interesting as a result.

The open-ended nature of the interviews was important, but there was often an underlying assumption about what would be discussed. Most interviews focused on the socioeconomic conditions of the town and what many residents considered to be their community's decline. This is understandable, as Poplar's socioeconomic challenges are often the defining element of life in the community. But the tone of the interviews was also influenced by how I presented my research to respondents. When asked why I was

researching Poplar, I typically replied that I was interested in the changing economy of eastern Montana and how this played out in a culturally diverse place such as Poplar. In this context the interviews weren't completely open-ended explorations of Poplar's full meaning as a place; instead, they were focused on the socioeconomic conditions of the town. Still, there was the opportunity to diverge from this theme, and respondents occasionally did.

After compiling notes and transcripts from the interviews, I organized respondent comments and statements into 43 themes. Following Dunn (2005), these themes were identified after several readings of the transcripts, and respondent comments were coded in relation to their most appropriate theme. After several readings of this coded material, I then identified four sub headings to organize the data into more general categories: Life in Poplar, Life on the Fort Peck Reservation, Life in an Economic Hinterland, and Addressing the Challenges. Following Gilbertz's et al. (2006) inventory of cultural values along the Yellowstone River, I then selected quotes from the data sets that most clearly illustrated key issues related to each of these four categories and included them here.

Material organized into the "Life in Poplar" section focuses on place attachment, the socioeconomic conditions of the town, and places of meaning within the town. Responses categorized into the "Life on the Fort Peck Reservation" focused on how Poplar's location on the Fort Peck Reservation impacted residents' everyday lives. This material included comments on how the unique legal status, politics, and continuing Indian/ non-Indian challenges of the reservation impacted Poplar residents' sense of

place. The “Life in an Economic Hinterland” material focused on how Poplar’s position within the regional, national, and global economy influenced place attachments. Finally, the “Addressing the Challenges” material included residents’ attempts to describe potential solutions that included stimulating economic development and promoting social change.

Quotes from respondents were edited for false starts and vocal pauses, but the tone and meaning were left unchanged. Standard punctuation was used in transcribing; however, an ellipsis indicates a long pause in the conversation while an ellipsis in brackets, [...], indicates an editorial deletion. Deletions were typically of tangential material and aside comments, which did not alter the meaning of these quotations. Parentheses indicate an action made by the respondent, such as pointing to a particular area on a map, or further explanation of a term or acronym used by a respondent.

Life in Poplar

Residents have a powerful sense of place that permeates their discussion of Poplar. Rather than impassionate analyses, their descriptions of the town are colored by personal histories, emotions, feelings, and experiential knowledge of the community. The experiences they have in Poplar are important in shaping their personal identity, as personal identity and place are mutually constitutive (Casey 2001). Ryden (1993, 39-40) elaborates:

We commonly and casually define ourselves in terms of geographical labels, as being Midwesterners or New Yorkers; more important, if we feel that our present selves are inextricably bound to our pasts—that our lives have historical

continuity, that we are the products of our past experiences— and if we tie memory to landscape, then in contemplating place we contemplate ourselves.

Personal identity is linked to a sense of place, and many residents expressed that Poplar is important because it's where they feel their identity is complete. Judy, Joanne, and Jackie expressed a common sentiment about this feeling of completeness regarding place and family. For the past 35 years Jackie lived in Las Vegas, but she recently decided to return to her hometown:

Judy: Well, on the whole it is a good community and why people find it hard to leave is because there is a certain sense of family here. A lot of people say you can't beat the people here, they're good hearted people.

Interviewer: A sense of family then...

Judy: Yeah... go ahead and say it!

Joanne: That's why [Jackie] moved back [...]

Jackie: Vegas— for as many years as I was there, I was a loner, I had a lot of acquaintances, but I was really a loner.

In addition to family ties, residents also identified with Poplar's physical environment. Ample rain and tall prairie grasses during the month of June prompted Denver Atkinson to remark that Poplar was, in fact, "God's country" (Figure 40). Louis Montclair also expressed attachment to the beauty of Poplar's physical environment:

The sunset is the most beautiful of anywhere I've ever seen it, because well, its big sky country, basically. There's a certain beauty too that you can only find in this part of the state. And I don't know, maybe I'm crazy but I can see those things. But there's a certain beauty that keeps the town going [...]

This beauty, however, is not always initially apparent. At least two long-time residents remembered the stark, treeless landscape when they first arrived in Poplar. The harsh climate is also a powerful element of Poplar's physical setting, as winters can be extremely cold and summers can be extremely hot. Boone Whitmer subtly expressed an attachment to the region by relating a story about northeastern Montana's frigid winters:

I talked to an Eskimo when I was up in Nome for the Iditarod and he asked me where I was from, and I said Wolf Point, Montana. He said, well I know that place; I've never been so cold in my life. I was stationed in Glasgow Air Force Base and that wind blowing across there, I've never been so cold in my life, and I never want to go back.

Respondents also identified with Poplar's annual festivals. Pow wows are important community events that draw visitors from around the West, and Poplar's annual pow wow held in September was cited as a particularly meaningful event. This pow wow began in the 1950s to commemorate the discovery of oil on the reservation, although today the discovery of oil is no longer a central theme. Wild West Days, held in June, was also cited as a meaningful event that remains popular (Figures 41, 42). This celebration includes parades, street carnivals and dances, and a rodeo.

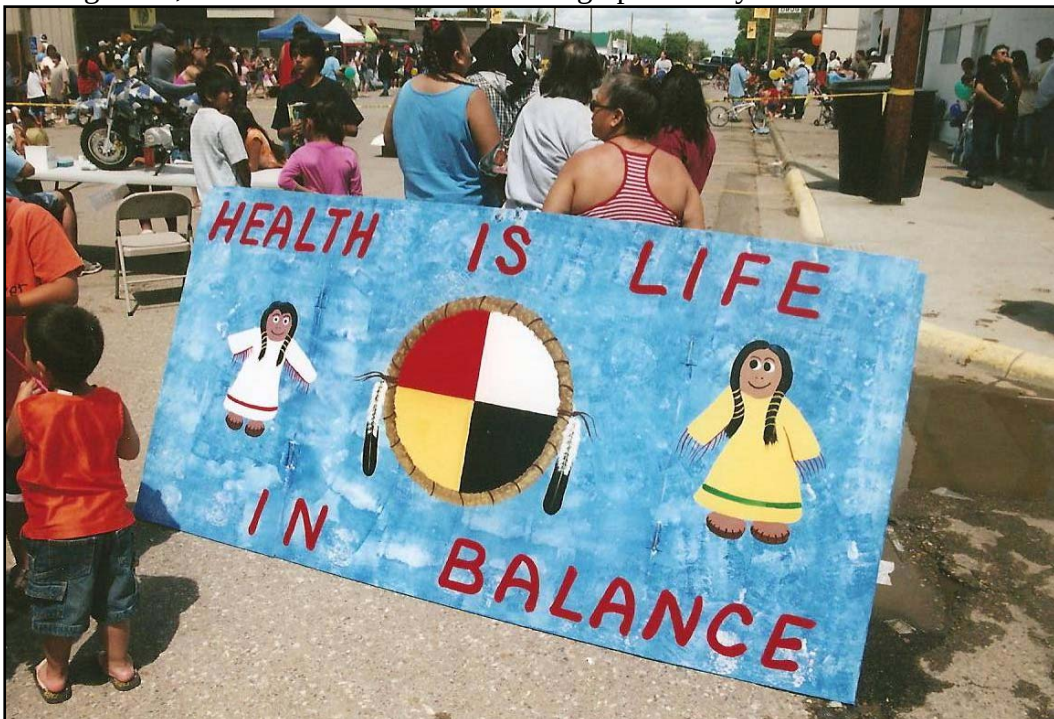
Figure 40. "God's Country" in Spring. Fort Peck Reservation about twenty miles north of Wolf Point, 2007 (photo by author).



Figure 41. Wild West Days street carnival, 2007 (Photo by author). Second Street looking south.



Figure 42. Wild West Days street carnival, 2007 (photo by author). Second Street looking north, “Health is Life in Balance” sign painted by Denver Atkinson.



Place attachments elicited strong feelings for respondents, but so did responses about Poplar's socioeconomic conditions. A number of residents remarked that crime had created a heightened sense of fear in the community. The crime rate was often attributed to substance abuse and gang violence, and certain areas of the town were identified as particularly dangerous. Airport Addition, the East End, Bluff Drive, and alleys in general were often identified as crime-prone places. Along with the Bluff Drive area, Legion Park was also cited as an area where drug deals were common. Residents also noted that criminal activity heightened after dark. Paulette Leinen explained:

My nephew, he's a criminal investigator. And he asks me, why do you guys leave all the time? And I say, there's nothing to do. And he says, well you should come to town around 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning, this town comes alive.

Substance abuse also remains a central concern among residents. Poplar Police Chief Chad Hilde estimates that about half the calls the police department receives are alcohol related (Montclair 2007a), and between July 2006 and May 2007 Poplar's ambulance responded to over 70 calls per month, most of which were alcohol related (Montclair 2007b).

Crime rates on the Fort Peck Reservation have also been relatively high since the 1990s with the decline in economic opportunities. In 1995, for instance, the reservation had a per-capita murder rate that was twice that of New Orleans (New York Times 1998). Local newspaper reporter Louis Montclair, who provided the data on ambulance and police calls, feels that:

Poplar's gone downhill the past 20 or so years. It's for the worst I guess, the change has been. There's been more drunks on the street, there's been more homelessness than I've ever seen, there's been more murders, violence, government's getting a little more corrupt each time. The health care quality has

dropped a lot. [...] Drugs have been a big change, especially meth, it's really hurting the community now.

Many respondents were quick to point out Poplar's crime and substance abuse as important socioeconomic issues facing the town, but few residents were quick to point out issues of race and racism. One of Poplar's defining characteristics, and often a source of tension, has been the existence of both Indian and non-Indian communities in the town. Fort Peck Community College counselor Terry McAnally notes that issues of race are often expressed subtly:

You know there's a subtle classism that white people tend to carry because we've never really been discriminated against, you know, the world's kind of always been ours. [...] So if you want to be accepted into the Indian community that has to go, you have to live in equalness and you can't pretend it, you can't fake it, it really has to be real. Because one thing that Indian people are really good at is recognizing those non-Indians who still carry that, even if it's unconsciously.

The continuing existence of dual societies within the town is visible in the landscape, but changing attitudes and the simple fact that there are fewer non-Indians in Poplar today led many to suggest that the Indian/ non-Indian divide has lessened in recent years. Some respondents noted that racial divisions in town have been replaced to some extent by class divisions. Ms. McAnally explains:

That is one thing that has really changed since I've gotten here. [...] There used to be a very black and white division between where Indians lived and where non-Indians lived. And now, especially in the upper class, or the employed class, that line is very blurred now. A lot of employed Native Americans live in what were, when I first came in the 1970s, were considered white neighborhoods. And now it's very blurred. Now it's separated out in true economic divisions. Not very many well-employed Native Americans want to live out in Indian housing if they can help it.

In addition to these distinct neighborhoods, residents identified a number of key places of meaning in town. Poplar residents were often quick to talk about the

community's socioeconomic challenges, but not always quick to talk about the important community centers of meaning. This is partly due to the content of the interviews which focused on the socioeconomic conditions of the town. In his study of the American city, however, Lynch (1960, 2) notes that residents are quick to point out the ugliness, dirtiness, chaos, and monotony of their communities, but they often forget "...what a setting can mean in terms of daily delight, or as a continuous anchor for their lives, or as an extension of the meaningfulness and richness of the world." Lynch suggested that understanding the various settings in this way would change residents' image of their city, which would ultimately help to improve the city itself.

In Poplar, buildings that have a particularly long history such as the Gateway Hotel, Old Main, and the town museum were identified as historical landmarks. Lynch (1960) suggests that landmarks such as these are not usually entered into; instead they are used as a means to distinguish from the surrounding area. The Gateway Hotel, for instance, no longer serves a functional purpose as a place for community members to meet as it did when it had an upscale restaurant. To those who live there now, and to those who nostalgically remembered its earlier incarnation, it does have an intimate meaning. Most residents, however, saw it as a landmark that visually stood out from the surrounding landscape of the town.

The college was repeatedly identified as a powerful center of meaning. Many respondents identified the college as important as it provided an opportunity for residents to obtain higher education without having to leave the community. While both non-Indians and Indians attend the community college, the importance of being able to remain

in the community and still receive an education took on extra meaning for Assiniboiné and Sioux respondents. Formal education in the form of a community college is in many ways an acculturation process into a larger American culture. But being able to remain on the reservation where Assiniboiné and Sioux cultural identity is strongest allows residents access to both a larger American culture and their traditional culture. Stein (2003) explains that this duality was a central concern among the pioneers of American Indian colleges in the 1960s:

The founders knew that most, if not all, of their people must be able to understand and compete successfully in two worlds. It had to be that way if their people were to survive, to retain some semblance of their true identity, and to protect what they had retained of their homelands and sovereign rights into the [twenty first] century.

Various other localities in the community were mentioned. Some respondents noted that the Cultural Center provided a key community focus for social gatherings and memorial services. The High School was seen as particularly important as a meeting place and a source of community pride, especially in matters of sporting events. The basketball courts, swimming pool, and the Poplar community center were also identified as important meeting points and activity centers in the town. Many residents half-jokingly identified any businesses in town as a landmark as they are becoming increasingly rare. In particular they noted the two grocery stores as important commercial centers in the community.

Poplar's meeting places, activity centers, commercial centers, and the college and high school reflect Lynch's (1960) description of community nodes. Nodes, he argues, are the intensive foci to and from which a resident might be traveling and often form the

central point in different community districts. Both grocery stores, for instance, function in this way. Residents often travel to and from these businesses, and they form the core of the downtown commercial district (Figure 43).

Commercial businesses such as the grocery stores are centers of meaning as they engender a sense of community cohesiveness by functioning as nodes of activity. As local businesses close, however, that sense of community cohesiveness is often lost. Poplar's loss of its last grain elevator in 2006, for example, had profound social consequences for the community.

Similar to other Great Plains communities, Poplar lost its grain elevator as larger elevators in Wolf Point and new transportation technologies have increased the distance that farmers travel to load their grain. This has made many of the towns that grew as trading centers in the early twentieth century redundant. Hudson (1985) notes that farmers in early twentieth century North Dakota, for instance, typically preferred to make trips of no more than 10 miles to trading centers. As a result, he notes that one railroad company had adopted the strategy of placing "...all the towns on the line that the country will stand" (Hudson 1985, 55).

Figure 43. Map of Important Spaces and Places within Poplar (map by author, image source: Google Earth).



While the placement of these towns and the construction of grain elevators were primarily economic concerns, the loss of these towns and their grain elevators is both an economic and a social concern. Poplar's development is in many ways different from towns that were solely created by the railroad from scratch, but Jackie Hagadone describes how the loss of the elevator (Figure 44) has a devastating impact on residents' sense of community:

The elevator closing—you wouldn't believe how many little old men were hurt because that's where they went to have coffee in the morning. Because that was their life, they looked at the wheat boards, grain boards to see what wheat was doing, there's nothing, there's nowhere for them to go. [...] Once that center is gone, people are just cut adrift.

Commercial businesses, public activity centers, and historic buildings are generally agreed to be important centers of meaning. But other spaces in town often have contested meanings. While most members of Poplar's employed class derided vacant buildings and even occupied buildings that were in disrepair, others recognized many of these as important places that served essential functions. "Dollar Bill's" store, for example, on the corner of First and C Streets, was condemned and demolished by the city as it was considered unsanitary and unsafe. However, "Dollar Bill's" was an important landmark and source of income for many of Poplar's unemployed and homeless residents, as Bill would buy scrap metal, aluminum cans, and other items.

Vacant buildings also provide essential shelter for many of Poplar's homeless residents, particularly during the long winters. Three small vacant houses adjacent to the post office on the corner of First and E Streets were also recently torn down by the city as they were considered by many to be fire hazards and sites of illegal activity. One

homeless resident, however, noted how he and others regularly used one of the houses to keep warm until they were abruptly told to leave by a city wrecking crew.

Figure 44. Poplar's last grain elevator, 2006 (photo by author).



Life on the Fort Peck Reservation

Many respondents reflected on the problem of crime in Poplar. But they often added that issues resulting from crime, such as gang violence, are national concerns that are not unique to Poplar. They also noted that because Poplar is on the reservation, reports of crime are often exaggerated. Teresa Murray relates the experience of two travelers in Culbertson:

About a month and a half ago a woman and her husband were asking about [Poplar], and they stayed in Culbertson which is bordering the reservation. The hotel people told her, don't stop in Poplar, don't stop on any Indian reservation

because they'll rob you. And [my husband] said, no, they won't rob you. [...] But that's the impression they're giving people who are passing through.

Misperceptions about the reservation held by non-Indian outsiders are a source of contention, but tension between Indians and non-Indians who live on the reservation often surfaces in issues of politics and economics.

Originally from Kansas, Teresa Murray is enrolled in the Pottawatomie tribe. When she first came to Poplar she worked at a variety of jobs, including A&S Industries and Fort Peck Manufacturing. Today, in addition to being a teacher, she volunteers her time as Poplar's elected mayor. She related how local politics can become racialized over issues of property taxes:

For political office they say that Indians don't pay taxes so they shouldn't be able to run. I've faced that too, but I pay taxes. What they mean is property taxes. Every Indian pays every tax except [property taxes] because if you live here (pointing to tribal trust land on map) then it's in trust. But I live here (pointing to area within city limits), I pay property taxes because I choose to. I could take our property out of taxes because my husband is a tribal member, but I want to be able to sell my property if we leave.

The issue of property taxes is particularly contentious as the property tax-paying base of Roosevelt County continues to shrink. While many non-Indians cite the issue of Indian non-payment of property taxes as unjust, tribal leaders point out the fact that the reservation represents a distinct political space recognized by the federal government. As such, it does not fall under the jurisdiction of county or city governments.

This creates distinct political spaces within Poplar. While the housing projects that fall immediately outside the city limits are functionally part of Poplar, they are not directly represented in city government. Also, enrolled tribal members can take property

within the city limits off the tax rolls by having it placed in trust. The issue of property taxes remains a central point of contention in this, as Mayor Murray explains:

But we pay every tax that everyone else does, that's the only tax that they gripe about because [Indians] don't pay the property tax. But that's a gripe in any Indian country in Montana. If you run for city council you have to live in city limits. Some people weren't able to vote because they didn't live in city limits.

Jurisdictional disputes between the town and tribal government can also be problematic. Ms. Murray stressed the fact that most of the time the tribal government and the city council do work together. Several important large-scale projects, such as a new water treatment plant, are examples of city and tribal cooperation. The city and tribal governments, however, sometimes have opposing views on issues such as law enforcement. Ms. Murray notes that tribal courts are typically more lenient with criminal offenders: "That way it's frustrating for us, the fines and the enforcement, what do you call it? The consequences aren't that much. [Offenders] might be fined a little bit, but they should make it worthwhile and enforce it."

City and tribal ordinances can also be in direct opposition to one another. If Poplar's city ordinances aren't the same as reservation ordinances, then the city ordinances are often impossible to enforce. Ms. Murray illustrated this with the example of fireworks: "We're not allowed to sell fireworks anywhere here in the city limits, but if you go out here to Tribal Express everyone from the town goes and buys them and brings them home."

Poplar's location on the reservation also puts it in a unique position to secure grant money from various federal and private agencies. Federal grants, however, are by no means guaranteed, and increased competition or reduced funding can put an abrupt

end to community programs. Judy manages the community wellness center on Second Street which gives local residents affordable access to exercise equipment, fitness classes, and other health services. She explained how she sees the importance of federal money and local community programs:

Something that's made a big impact on our community is this war with Iraq, because we are a town that writes a lot of grants, and a lot of money has been appropriated over to the war instead of to the grants. [...] We used to have a Project Choice that used to teach kids about abstinence; it's no longer there. [They] used to have a huge controlled substance abuse program at the school that's no longer there, [...] there used to be a day-care to encourage the girls that got pregnant to continue on with their education, that's no longer there. [...] So you wouldn't think that in these small areas that Iraq would affect us, but it has really affected the rez.

The lack of funding available for Indian reservations nationwide has directly impacted health care as well. Poplar's Indian Health Services is simply overloaded and under-funded, so care is given on a selective basis. Jackie and Joanne, who were visiting Judy at the wellness center, related how this lack of funding has combined with substance abuse issues to negatively affect Poplar residents:

Jackie: Well that's just like Indian health here.

Jackie: You have to be a [level] 12, to—

Joanne: High risk.

Jackie: Life and death situation, to be sent out.

Joanne: To be sent out with any medical problem, like to Billings.

Interviewer: And is that something they just recently started?

Jackie: Well it's been for a while now, I think since Iraq got worse.

Joanne: No funding.

Jackie: There's no funding available, and there's so much alcohol accidents.

Joanne: Meth, drug treatment.

Jackie: Instead of helping the people that are really sick, they have to help the ones who are on death's doorstep with the drugs and alcohol.

Judy: And that's really sad because that's why we're losing people. Because life or limb, well they're actually trying to help people but they actually should be seeing a specialist, so they have to wait until they're almost dead before they can fly them to Billings so they can get help.

The money Poplar does receive for social welfare programs can also have unintended consequences. While most residents feel that federal funds for programs such as alcohol counseling are essential, some expressed concern that the expansion of social services has created an extensive bureaucracy that makes Poplar and the reservation more dependent on the federal government. Boone Whitmer recognized this difficult situation, noting that the Fort Peck Reservation is

In other words, a welfare state. One of the big problems on the reservation is the fact that if you do away with the need for welfare then a lot of the jobs would go away. If you eliminate crime then you don't need alcohol counselors, you don't need community counselors, you don't need a lot of high commodity programs. And so therefore you don't need a lot of these high paying jobs that Indian people now have, and so you have to substitute them with something else. And so what's that going to be? There's no infrastructure in place to take over those high paying jobs.

The socioeconomic conditions of Poplar and the continuing influence of welfare capitalism on the reservation are often evident in the local schools. Mr. Cook, Poplar's former elementary school principal, relates how these socioeconomic issues play out in the lives of Poplar's youth:

Well, alcohol and drugs are a big issue. You know that has a significant impact on the town and on the children's education, so a lot of our students come to school with a lot of baggage. [...] They're coming from homes that have been affected by alcohol and so sometimes they haven't had the proper nourishment, they haven't had educational stimulus, someone reading to them or other readiness skills, cutting with scissors or coloring with pens, that sort of thing. And so some, there's nutritional issues, there's emotional issues, there's abuse issues that they come to school with.

Mr. Cook feels that addressing these issues requires strong parental involvement.

For a variety of reasons, however, it has often been difficult to make a connection

between parents and the school. The history of schooling on the reservations, Mr. Cook suggests, continues to color residents' image of the community's schools:

Traditionally, many Native Americans don't trust the school system. [...] Because of things that have happened with boarding schools and that type of thing. [...] We still don't have as many parents involved in the education process with their child, so I think that's a big issue that we deal with. You know they're not sitting down, doing as much homework, or reading with their child as they should be, or those activities with their children, so that's something we try to work on.

Many respondents worried that Poplar's youth have few options other than crime and drugs. Some respondents expressed concern that in issues of juvenile crime too much emphasis is placed on law enforcement instead of treatment. Lisa Perry notes how the institutional landscape of youth social services has changed (Figure 45):

Back when I grew up we had a [youth] detention center but it wasn't like this big giant, you know this is like a prison. It's totally like a prison. And they spend all this money on this detention center and it's not really solving anything, it's just locking them up and not trying to deal with the problem. They just lock them up and hope they get better.

Ms. Perry is the former editor of the *Wotanin Wowapi*, which until recently was the official newspaper of the Fort Peck tribes. Having lived in Poplar all her life, and having worked as a freelance journalist and photographer, she noted that creating a healthy community reservation-wide for youth is a continuing concern. But she noted that tribal politics often hinders change. Ms. Perry expressed how the rhetoric of leaders often falls short of action:

With our youth right now, this administration all wants to, and this is just a spiel every two years when there's tribal elections, you know they always want to bring up our elders and our youth, and the youth are the future of the reservation. Then as you get into serving your term you get into all these other things, that the kids just kind of get pushed to the wayside. And they're the most important thing.

And I think it's not just this administration, it's all the administrations that have to blame.

Figure 45. Fort Peck Youth Services, 2007 (photo by author).



Many respondents noted how tribal politics permeates reservation life. Politics on the Fort Peck Reservation are often highly participatory and democratic, but they can also cement factionalism in the community. Allison (2007) recognized how the “hyper democratic” political structure on the Crow Reservation in Montana, for instance, amplified factional disputes rather than providing a guiding consensus. In a continuing dispute over whether or not to open Crow lands to coal development in the late 1970s, he relates how the impeachment of the Crow Tribal Chairman was intertwined with long standing disputes and factionalism. The Crow impeachment resolution contained “...various charges ranging from claims of excessive drinking to treacherous attempts to fire crow attorneys working on behalf of the coal authority and willful violations of

Tribal Council Resolutions,” but he notes that his impeachment was “...clearly a referendum on whether coal development should occur on the reservation” (Allison 2007, 35).

Tribal politics in Poplar and the Fort Peck Reservation have recently echoed the factionalism and long-standing disputes that marked the Crow Reservation in the late 1970s. Contentious debates and divisive factionalism characterized Fort Peck politics during the administration of Tribal Chairman John Morales and were most obviously expressed in the circumstances that led to the creation of *The Fort Peck Journal*.

In 2006, Ms. Perry’s predecessor at the *Wotanin*, Bonnie Red Cloud, was fired by Morales, who cited her failure of a drug test as the reason for her termination. But many residents recognized a history of tension between the two, noting that Red Cloud authored a series of articles that was critical of Morales and his questionable use of tribal funds to pay for trips.

Red Cloud started an opposition paper, *The Fort Peck Journal*, which was highly critical of Chairman Morales. The *Journal* also ran stories on socioeconomic issues facing Poplar and the reservation, and its readership quickly surpassed the *Wotanin* (Figure 46). Many residents felt that the *Wotanin* did not offer a particularly critical perspective on important socioeconomic issues and that it was too heavily influenced by the Morales administration.

After the election of Rusty Stafne in late 2007 as Tribal Chairman, the *Wotanin* continued to lose readers and influence to the *Journal*. By early 2008 the *Wotanin*’s

decline in readership led to its closure, and the new tribal government expressed interest in making the *Journal* the official paper of the Fort Peck Tribes.

Many residents recognized the competition between the *Journal* and the *Wotanin* as a conflict between Morales and the political opposition. As Ms. Red Cloud's niece, Ms. Perry was largely able to avoid this conflict personally, but the *Wotanin*'s association with the Morales administration became a liability after his defeat in late 2007. The pro Morales/ anti-Morales politics on the reservation were embodied by the *Journal*, which in turn illustrated how tribal politics were a defining element of life for Poplar residents.

Figure 46. *Fort Peck Journal* reporter Louis Montclair, Second Street, 2008 (photo by author). Montclair is a photojournalist by training, and his stories have included exposés on Poplar's homeless, issues of substance abuse, and a host of other socioeconomic issues facing the town.



Life in an Economic Hinterland

Poplar's role in the regional, national, and global economy has a powerful influence in shaping residents' sense of place. Most respondents recognized the loss of businesses as a prime example of their community's economic decline. Terry McAnally describes how Poplar residents' shopping patterns are intertwined with the declining community:

A lot of people carpool, or they go to Williston, or Glasgow. Williston is the first choice because it's got Wal-Mart. Sidney and Glasgow are second choices because there's Pamida. But a lot of people, you know, they get their money the first of the month, or on payday, and they go over there. It's like it's recreation besides going shopping. It's like what people in a city, they might say let's go have pizza tonight, [...] well a lot of people use Williston, [...] but also Sidney and Glasgow for an outing, besides getting their groceries or whatever. So the only people who are left are those who have very little resources and not much money. And they're the ones that still go to the stores.

Williston, particularly the Wal-Mart Super Center, benefits from Poplar's declining commercial landscape. But many residents remember when Poplar was a more powerful trading center, itself benefiting from the decline of even smaller communities.

The ascendancy of Williston, then, represents larger, ongoing processes of change in northeastern Montana. New transportation technologies and the consolidation of businesses makes smaller trading centers redundant, which for a time benefits other communities as business is rerouted through neighboring towns. Eventually these towns themselves succumb to economic decline, as new technologies and a new wave of consolidation benefits an even-more-distant town. Shortridge (1997, 125) noted that this process on the Great Plains began in earnest in the 1950s: "Merchants in the county-seat towns, who had smiled as their superior size and facilities had lured customers away from

country stores, now began to wince as their own trade was pulled away to even larger emporia.” Jackie Hagadone described this process in northeastern Montana as a domino effect:

So we’re just dominoeing in on ourselves, Poplar is the next one up and Wolf Point can’t understand the same thing is happening to them. You go down the streets and you see that their stores are closed and there’s nothing there. [...] Wolf Point is just experiencing this but they’d like to put their head in the sand a lot longer, [because] it can’t happen to them because they were bigger; they aren’t any bigger in a way than Poplar.

Agriculture, the mainstay of Poplar’s economy, is recognized by most residents as a defining characteristic of the place. But farming has increasingly become a difficult proposition, as more land and larger investments are required in order to stay profitable. In addition, some respondents expressed frustration that farmers have so little control over their operations. They noted the influence of the federal government in managing food prices, and the monopoly of the railroad as keeping farming profits low.

Poplar is a resource producer in the national economy, and as such it has little control over its own economic destiny in this larger system. DeVoto (2005) recognized that the West in general was essentially plundered by resource exploitation, and Garreau (1981) recognized that much of the Great Plains and the Intermountain West was an “empty quarter” where resources could be extracted and wastes could be dumped. More recently, Wyckoff (2002) termed areas such as the Great Plains and much of eastern Montana the “Waning West,” where traditional economies based on resource extraction have for a variety of reasons been unable to sustain communities. Boone Whitmer described the challenges he sees that have resulted in Poplar’s marginal place in the economic hierarchy:

So the tribes have tried a lot of things, the white men have tried a lot of things, but basically the bottom line is it's natural resource exploitation. And world politics have a great deal to play in this. And so we in Poplar, Wolf Point, northeastern Montana, because all our wheat goes to the export market, to the Pacific Rim countries, we're very much aware of any agriculture policy that is developed in D.C., and we're very much aware of agreements that are made in world trade. And so [...] we become exploited by large mega-corporations. Whether it be the Bungees, or the Continentals, or the Cargill, or the ADM (Archer Daniels Midland), just a few people trading those commodities and so we become price takers, rather than trying to impact what we get for our production. [...] Consequently this area's never been able to capitalize on any market opportunities. Number one because of policy from Washington D.C., and our distance to the markets, and the railroads because they continue to raise freight rates to keep us into a very low profitability.

Mr. Whitmer lives south of the Missouri River and comes from a ranching family.

In 2007 he was on the board of directors of A&S Diversified and was pushing to remake A&S into a small-scale producer of precision machine parts. He described how northeastern Montana's hinterland status affects local residents' sense of place and culture:

In other areas of the United States they make a big deal about a museum. Well they come out here and they steal our T-Rex's and they put them in a museum in New York. They steal all our artifacts and they put them in a museum in Washington or New York. They won't build a museum here to honor their culture, what we have, those natural resources we have.

Poplar's hinterland status, Mr. Whitmer argues, is cemented by the distribution of capital and votes:

I think there's rules and regulations in place, but the problem [...] is that capital isn't there so that the local communities can build a cultural museum to tell the people what has been done. It comes back to capital and our democratic way of voting. Capital is allocated to the most voters [...]

These relationships are ultimately difficult to change, since they benefit areas that have more voters and more political influence. Poplar and other communities in

northeastern Montana, then, have little control over this larger economic system. Mr.

Whitmer continues:

There's no business people in town, I mean Budweiser doesn't have an influence here except to sell their beer. You go into St. Louis and you've got Busch Gardens, you've got Busch Stadium, well they've made millions and millions of dollars available to the people of St. Louis. Well we have subsidized St. Louis here, and then we subsidize them with paleontology. We subsidize them with our Indian artifacts, we subsidize them with [...] our barley and our wheat and all that. And so they feed off of us and they don't want to change that relationship and that's the bottom line. That's a profit to them, its not profit to us, and they're not going to change because they have the votes.

Addressing the Challenges

Poplar's socioeconomic conditions are a defining element of life for residents.

But the conditions don't necessarily define residents' place identity in terms of being victims of larger economic, political, and social forces. For instance, despite the challenges that Poplar faces in attempts to develop its economy, most respondents felt that the community retains a high degree of agency in addressing these challenges. As such, a number of individuals and agencies are actively engaged in addressing Poplar's socioeconomic challenges.

However, many respondents felt that the various agencies in the community and their sometimes competing interests hamper efforts to address issues holistically. Tina Strauser, who coordinates many of Northeast Montana Health Services' outreach programs, notes that in order to address key issues such as substance abuse Poplar has to

Continue with the community involvement groups, [...] building bridges. This community is so disconnected. You have tribal government, you have city government, you have NEMHS (Northeast Montana Health Services), you have

the BIA, and you have the college. How many of those, that employ the majority of the community, work together on projects? [...] Very few.

There are some attempts to coordinate the diverse interests in the community.

One of these attempts is the Fort Peck Tribes' Journey to a Healthy Community program. Journey to a Healthy Community coordinator Kenny Smoker identified four categories of community agencies that his program works with: law and justice, school and youth activities, jobs and economy, and health and social services. Representatives from agencies that comprise each of these four categories meet periodically and try to complete weekly tasks.

Recently, Journey to a Healthy Community has been working with Poplar High School students to identify ways to curb substance abuse among young residents. Mr. Smoker relates how students largely identified the needs of their peers:

Looking at substance abuse and some of the problems, students have said, well, we need something to do. Something to keep ourselves busy, [...] and they came up with a number of different things through this survey through the Journey to a Healthy Community. They put on two leadership conferences and at the first one the students said there were 3 questions asked: What would you like to see in your community? What would you like to become involved in your community? And would it save lives? [...] The thing they wanted to see in their community is a movie theater, a skate park, and an indoor recreational complex. And since that time we're going to have a skate park here.

The survey led to a number of spin-off projects including a community cleanup day, which sparked the interest of a visiting group of philanthropic chiropractors calling themselves the New Renaissance. The New Renaissance is a non-profit group of chiropractors that donate labor and money to economically depressed communities around the country in support of specific community goals. Mr. Smoker explains how this partnership came about during one of the cleanup days:

During that time, when the students were cleaning up, there was a group of chiropractors who came in and saw this and said we want to be a part of this movement. And so they said well what other project is there? And they said they wanted a movie theater and an indoor recreational complex. And so they didn't say anything, but they came back a week later and said well we've got 40 people coming and we're going to work on the theater project. And so they came in and did 160 hours of work in there and they cleaned it up and painted the outside. [...] And they came back at the end of May and [...] they sent 5,000 dollars to fix the seats [...].

The movie theater, which is on the site of the original Glacier Theater, was restored and movies were shown for the community. This theater, the skate park, and the potential recreation complex may become important centers of meaning in the community. But Mr. Smoker notes that dealing with the complex issues in the community requires focusing on more than just economic development and creating recreational opportunities for the youth. Mr. Smoker hopes that forging a connection to traditional Native American values will restore a sense of community to Poplar and the reservation:

Unemployment is just a small part of the problem, but a big part is that we've lost our values, because [...] a lot of people haven't been taught to do the right thing. And those values that our elders have identified are that we are a very spiritual people and that spirituality and prayer are very important things. It paves the way for everything. The other value is responsibility, you need to become responsible for yourself and your environment, you need to be responsible for your family, your immediate family and your extended family, and also your tribe, but nowadays it's your community. And the other is respect. You need to respect yourself; if you respect yourself you would be healthier and you wouldn't do harm to others and you'd respect your environment. You'd clean it up and take care of it. The other values are discipline, caring and sharing. [...] But the last one, and its part of the one above, but it's that everyone raises the children, you see a child with some problem and you need to correct them. [...] It's mainly showing respect.

Interviewer: And how do you think the non-Indian community fit into that?

Mr. Smoker: It's universal. You look at these values, everyone can be guided by them, it doesn't matter.

Journey to a Healthy Community works to address socioeconomic challenges on the Fort Peck Reservation and in Poplar, but the challenges resulting from larger economic forces are daunting. Poplar residents' place identity continues to be shaped in complex ways by the reality that its economy is based on resource extraction.

Challenging this relationship, as Mr. Whitmer points out, is unlikely due to the distribution of votes and capital. Instead, Mr. Whitmer hopes that small-scale local economic development will benefit northeastern Montana's regional economy. He explains that ultimately this can engender a better understanding of the region:

My main thrust has been to develop an agriculture research station at Sidney, Montana. We were successful at going to Washington and getting that facility built up to do research in alternative crops. High value crops, not just wheat and barley, or corn, but peas and lentils. Sugar beets, potatoes, sunflower, safflower. [...] We got some 20 million for this Sidney agriculture station, that's just one small step. We pushed center pivot irrigation, that's just one small step. We now have Anheiser Busch in Sidney, Montana buying malt barley, where we never had that before. We have the potential for an ethanol plant in Williston and the potential for one [in Poplar]. We have the Fort Peck Dam interpretive center and that was a \$7 million project, and we saved a T-Rex from going to the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. We're going to have the Montana Cowboy Hall of Fame in Wolf Point. [...] These are just small little steps to build an infrastructure for people to come and see and learn about our area and what we have, and hopefully we can generate some income that way.

Most of these respondents were passionate about their place. Their complaints about Poplar and its socioeconomic challenges were often tempered with a strong attachment to the community and concerns about improving conditions. Despite the challenges, and because of the challenges, most of these respondents had a particularly strong sense of place.

Residents expressed a powerful attachment to their community, but a common theme through most of these interviews is a perception that Poplar is declining. The lack

of job opportunities in the community and a lack of extracurricular activities for youth were two primary concerns of interview respondents. They felt that Poplar's current socioeconomic conditions are largely a result of these two factors, which seem to be more even more acute now than they have been in the recent past.

Residents see working together as a key to addressing the problems resulting from crime, substance abuse, and continuing economic decline. Most of these respondents saw the need to build consensus among the various factions in the community as central to addressing these challenges. Many respondents felt the various social groups, governmental institutions, and political factions need to communicate in constructive ways if Poplar is to address these challenges.

The insider's perspective is particularly valuable in a community such as Poplar where there are so many seemingly disparate groups. The voices of local residents can offer a glimpse into that diversity, while suggesting the common concerns of most residents. By recognizing the diversity of place identities, the community consensus that most respondents identified as necessary can begin to take shape.

CONCLUSION

The challenges that residents of Poplar face are significant. A complex set of historical and geographical factors has played out in a way that has currently put the community at an economic disadvantage. In many ways, its story of an economy in decline is all too familiar on the Great Plains. But its location on the Fort Peck Reservation complicates this larger regional narrative, as Shortridge (1997) notes that life on the reservations of the northern Plains "...differs from that norm in being vastly more isolated, dependent and victimized."

Shortridge (1997) aptly describes Poplar's historical development and its contemporary challenges. Poplar's initial founding as an agency post was an extension of Federal authority and control over the Assiniboiné and Sioux. Its growth as a regional trading center and the expansion of its agricultural economy during the homesteading period was optimistically seen as creating a stable economy, but instead it ushered in an unstable boom and bust economy based on resource extraction. The gains made in tribal self-determination and economic development in the 1960s and 1970s have been tempered by shifting ideologies and a declining economy since the 1980s. The growth of large commercial businesses such as Wal-Mart, and the consolidation of agricultural infrastructure such as grain elevators, has continued to place control of the regional economy into the hands of distant corporations. Continuing factionalism within the community frustrates residents and subverts local attempts to develop the economy and make meaningful social change.

Poplar's current challenges are rooted in the larger economic system of capitalism, which benefits some communities and puts other communities at a disadvantage. Liabilities and benefits under capitalism are not distributed equally in time or space, and Robbins (1994) notes that capitalism in the West has created new modes of production while simultaneously destroying older modes. In eastern Montana, for instance, many of the towns and commercial retailing districts that were initially created by capitalism during the homestead boom have been made redundant by the continuing restructuring of capitalism. This constant restructuring has created "...winners and losers, and pain and suffering" (Robbins 1994, xiii).

Poplar is challenged by this constantly evolving economy, which in large part has contributed to the ongoing demographic shift in the town. Once predominantly non-Indian, Poplar is now predominantly American Indian. The decline of economic opportunities has encouraged much of the non-Indian community to leave, while the cultural and social significance of the reservation has encouraged many American Indians to stay.

The decline of the non-Indian population also poses the question of what role the remaining non-Indian residents will have in the future of Poplar. They are a minority, but they still retain a high degree of influence in the local economy and politics. This is a critical question in a community that has historically been marked by factionalism and the existence of dual Indian and non-Indian communities. Some residents note that the divisions between Indians and non-Indians are breaking down, but they also note that this traditional division is being recast along economic class lines. Poplar's historical Indian/

non-Indian divide was based on race *and* class, however, and this is important to realize when considering the breakdown of racial boundaries. The racial divide may in fact be blurring, but the fundamental divisions in class may not be. This division in town persists, and it is evident in the landscape of fortified spaces in the community and the differences between public housing neighborhoods and the more-established neighborhoods in west Poplar.

The importance of race in shaping Poplar is significant. Despite the differences in Indians' and non-Indians' experiences, however, there are important commonalities among the contemporary experiences of both groups. Larger ideological shifts play out in the lives of all Poplar residents, particularly shifts in social policy. While shifts in social policy are perhaps obvious in federal Indian policy, Wessel (1998) notes that changes in social policies also influence agricultural policies. The New Deal for instance, brought both profound changes to Indian policy and agricultural policy, which affected all of Poplar's residents.

The small town, rural character of Poplar also offers a common experience. Lewis (1998, 28) relates how non-Indian agriculturalists and American Indians living on reservations have an identity forged in opposition to growing urban areas:

They face the same problems of isolation, environment, and market forces beyond their control. They share a sense of place and oral history with the land, of cultural as well as physical stewardship and ownership through generations. They both rely on and distrust government. They work the land and then work other jobs in order to keep working the land. They share a pride in their choice of livelihood and a hope for improvement even as they watch kin move to cities. As Iverson sees it, they respectively have become "native to their lands" as they have become marginalized by urban society.

The historical-geographical perspective is particularly useful in understanding the complex picture of Poplar's socioeconomic conditions. Understanding the historical development of the town provides the necessary context in which to understand its contemporary situation and future development. Poplar's current economic decline, for instance, has to be understood in its historical context, as this current decline could simply be a bust between booms.

Landscape analysis gives important insight into the continuing influence of historical forces and how larger ideologies actually contribute to material changes in the community. Changes in ideologies aren't tangible in the same way that changes in the landscape are (Mitchell 2007). Therefore, the landscape tells much about whether or not the rhetoric of ideologies actually fits with the on-the-ground reality (Breitbach 2007). For instance, neoliberalism espouses greater personal freedom, independence, opportunity, and a more prosperous economy as a result. But Poplar's landscape doesn't reflect this. The housing projects in need of repair, the defunct grain elevators and manufacturing facilities, the closure of commercial businesses, and the continuing presence of buildings and institutions influenced by the federal government all challenge that rhetoric.

Finally, the insider's perspective gives a more complete picture of the community through the eyes of local residents. It is a reminder that these larger historical and ideological forces ultimately have profound impacts on the lives of individuals. Their perspective not only colors the larger narrative of the town's development but it suggests how to proceed in the future. The diverse meanings that residents ascribe to their place

should be considered in planning for the future. For instance, while it may have been unsanitary and a blight on the landscape to some, Dollar Bill's store had a different meaning for others as it served an important function in buying scrap metal and cans. These diverse meanings should be taken seriously, particularly as Poplar residents consider ways to develop the town's economy and its downtown commercial district.

This work may be valuable to Poplar's community leaders, since considering the larger ideological, political, and economic forces at work in shaping the town is essential in thinking of ways to develop the economy. But the insider's perspective may be most useful to Poplar's leaders in planning for the future of their community. Everyday decisions about local businesses, landmarks, community centers, and public space in general should consider the various meanings that residents ascribe to these places. In addition, a better understanding of the ways that residents see race, class, poverty, and factionalism in the community can inform the decisions of local leaders.

Poplar's story is also not entirely unique. There are several communities throughout the American West where allotment and homesteading of Indian Reservations created a complex social geography. The economies of many of these places are based on resource extraction, and as such they face many of the same challenges as Poplar. This historical-geographical approach can be helpful in understanding the challenges in culturally-diverse reservation communities throughout Montana, the northern Plains, and the West in general. In particular, the insider's perspective can be especially valuable for these places, as it gives community leaders a better sense of residents' complex relationship with their place.

While the historical-geographical approach can be useful in understanding commonalities among reservation communities throughout the West, it can also be useful in understanding the unique situation of each community. While recognizing that many of the same forces have shaped these communities, this approach can also be useful to show how each of these communities is unique. The larger ideological, political, and economic forces may be the same, but they play out differently in each community. This is particularly important to consider when planning for the future of these communities. The historical-geographical approach suggests the value of seeing each of these communities as not only part of a larger system, but also unique in their specific experiences.

Ultimately, Poplar residents are familiar with the challenges facing their community, as well as many of the larger forces that have worked to shape their town. They have always faced the challenges of economic restructuring and they do not generally consider themselves to be simply passive observers, or for that matter, victims of a larger system. Residents consider the best path for the future lying in building consensus among the various groups within the town and taking small steps toward economic development. Most Poplar residents, both Indian and non-Indian, have a strong sense of place which makes them both love and sometimes deride their community. Perhaps this place-attachment can help to forge the necessary community consensus to make small steps toward change.

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APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

Name:

Date:

Interview location:

Folder and Number:

How long have you lived in Poplar? What do you do for a living? Do you have family in town? What part of town do you live in?

What types of work have you done?

What is your mental image of Poplar?

What did Poplar used to be like?

Are there any businesses in town that you go to on a regular basis?

Who are the community leaders?

What is the most important issue facing the community today?

Other contacts:

Community leaders:

How do you see addressing the key issues facing the community today? What are the solutions and challenges?

How well does the community work together?

What kind of community will Poplar be ten years from now?