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Meatpacking and the Transformation of Rural Communities: A Comparison of Brooks, Alberta and Garden City, Kansas*

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Abstract North America's meatpackers have relied upon immigrants to staff their plants from the earliest days of the industry in the late nineteenth century when packinghouses were located in urban areas adjacent to stockyards. A hundred years later the industry remains dependent on an immigrant labor force, but now most of its plants are located in rural areas. This means rural communities are transformed with the arrival of immigrants to staff their plants. But Canada and the United States have different immigration policies, which means they draw upon different immigrant sources. Canada favors the recruitment of highly skilled labor while the United States emphasizes family reunification. This paper examines whether this difference affects the labor force composition of a Canadian and U.S. meatpacking plant, and the associated transformation of the plants' host communities.

At the beginning of the twentieth century meatpacking plants were scattered across North America's urban landscape. Cattle and hogs were transported by rail to stockyards where they were purchased by meatpackers and slaughtered in nearby packinghouses. One hundred years later, most urban packinghouses have been demolished along with the stockyards. Beef processing has moved its plants to the High Plains close to supplies of fat cattle and in the process has brought thousands of jobs to rural areas. Toronto, Chicago, and other Midwestern cities have been replaced by Garden City, Liberal, and Dodge City, Kansas; Lexington, Grand Island, Schuyler, and Norfolk, Nebraska; Greeley and Fort Morgan, Colorado; Amarillo, Friona, and Plainview, Texas; and High River, and Brooks, Alberta as the centers of a newly restructured beefpacking industry. Unlike a hundred years ago when packing plants could rely upon an almost endless supply of urban immigrants to staff their plants, small towns on the High Plains lack large pools of surplus labor. Soon after a new plant opens the packers

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recruit workers from outside the local area, and this process creates many of the conditions associated with a ''boomtown.''

Although most rural meatpacking towns fail to meet the 15 percent annual population growth rate required to be classified as a boomtown (Malamud 1984), the model provides a useful means of understanding the socio-economic transformation of packinghouse towns (Broadway 1990, 2000; Broadway and Stull 2006; Stull and Broadway 2001). Boomtowns are common throughout western North America and are usually associated with mining coal or oil in isolated rural areas. Typically, a company's recruitment efforts or word of mouth results in young adult single male workers moving to a town. Accompanying the often welcomed population growth are increases in crime, drug and alcohol abuse, depression, and juvenile delinquency—the so-called Gillette Syndrome, named after a town in Wyoming that was the site of coal mine and power plant expansion (Kohrs 1974). Rural meatpacking communities in the United States have experienced similar social changes, but with two significant differences. First, meatpacking wages are generally much lower than the mining and construction sectors so, when there is a slowdown in production, workers and their families become the working poor and are eligible for social services. Second, the industry is reliant upon a mostly Latino immigrant labor force for its line workers, which means communities end up providing services to non-English speaking residents (Broadway and Stull 2006; Donato et al. 2007; Stull and Broadway 2004).

Canada's meatpackers do not have a relatively porous border with a poorer southern neighbor from which to draw their labor force and, as such, they are heavily dependent upon legal sources of immigrant and refugee labor. But unlike the U.S. immigration system that favors family reunification, Canada's system emphasizes the recruitment of young highly skilled economic migrants—with about 60 percent of entrants falling into this category (Rekai 2002). Thus, the two countries rely upon different immigrant sources. Between 2000 and 2005, 41 percent of all U.S. legally-admitted immigrants came from Central and South America, with most from Mexico (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2006); while the corresponding figure for Canada was just 8 percent (Citizenship and Immigration Canada n.d.). These differences in immigrant sources and immigration policy are likely to produce different meatpacking labor forces in the two countries and different community impacts. This paper considers this proposition by comparing meatpacking's role in the transformation of a Canadian and a U.S. town. First, the structural changes in North American beefpacking behind the shift in plants to rural areas are outlined along with the

reasons for the industry's historic dependence upon an immigrant labor force. Then, the boomtown model is reviewed to create a framework within which to compare and analyze community changes between the two study sites in the second half of the paper.

Structural Change in North American Beefpacking

The shift in meatpacking from urban to rural areas can be attributed to a series of cost-cutting innovations, commonly referred to as the ''IBP revolution'' (Stull and Broadway 2004). IBP's first plant in 1961 revolutionized the industry. Instead of locating it at a railroad terminal site, it was constructed in a cattle producing region of northwestern Iowa. This reduced the shrinkage and bruising associated with shipping cattle long distances. The company purchased cattle directly from producers, thereby eliminating stockyard middlemen. The plant, unlike older facilities, was devoted solely to cattle slaughter and consisted of a single story, which allowed the incorporation of a disassembly line with workers responsible for a single step in the preparation of the carcass. This ''deskilling'' was then used to justify paying workers lower wages and avoiding the terms of the existing industry-wide master contract.

In the late 1960s, the company introduced boxed beef. Instead of shipping a carcass, it is fabricated into smaller cuts and then vacuum packed. This innovation appealed to IBP's customers since they would no longer need their own butchers, while IBP's transport costs were lowered with the removal of fat and bone. Other meatpacking companies quickly emulated the company's methods by using economies of scale and constructing large slaughter capacity plants close to supplies of fed cattle. Unit costs are 20 percent lower in a plant slaughtering 300 head of cattle per hour than in one slaughtering 50 head (Duewer and Nelson 1991). Thus from 1974 to 1997 the number of packinghouses employing more than a 1000 workers doubled from 24 to 48. During the same period, plants employing less than a 1000 workers dropped by over 900, and total industry employment fell by nearly 21,000 workers (US Census Bureau 1977, 1999). Most of the industry's new plants opened in small towns across the High Plains close to where cattle were fattened. Kansas exemplifies these trends. Old inefficient plants closed in the state's large urban areas of Wichita and Kansas City, and new plants were constructed in Garden City, Liberal, and Dodge City in the rural southwest. These towns all had a population of less than 20,000 people before the packers arrived.

Union efforts during and after World War II produced a master contract for meatpackers with industry-wide work standards and wages

15 percent *above* the average manufacturing wage in 1960. Faced with a lower-cost producer, IBP's competitors broke union contracts, sought pay cuts through collective bargaining, or went bankrupt. The net effect was a steep decline in meatpacking wages, and by 2002 they had fallen to 25 percent *below* the average manufacturing wage (U.S. Department of Labor 1994: various years).

In Canada, IBP's cost cutting strategies were initially ignored. An oligopoly, consisting of Canada Packers, Burns Meats, and Swift Canadian dominated the industry. Wages were high and were maintained by a master contract. In the post-World War II period per-capita Canadian red meat consumption soared, and the industry expanded by constructing packing plants across the country. The publication of studies linking diets high in cholesterol to heart disease in the late 1970s led consumers to reduce beef consumption. This drop coincided with an increase in U.S. meat imports and led to an industry-wide overcapacity problem. And with industry wages 10 percent higher than U.S. competitors, Canadian firms embarked on a cost cutting strategy involving wage reductions and plant closures. Workers responded by striking plants in Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario (Forest 1989). In Brooks, Alberta, the United Food and Commercial Workers union struck Lakeside Packers, and the plant became non-union when replacement workers took the place of striking workers at wages 30 percent below the union rate, a cut of $3 to $3.80 an hour (Noël and Gardner 1990).

In the late 1980s, U.S.-based Cargill applied the lessons of IBP's cost cutting practices with the construction of a boxed beef plant in High River, Alberta about 45 minutes south of downtown Calgary. Boxed beef lowered the company's shipping costs and allowed it to supply Canada's largest consumer market in southern Ontario with beef from Alberta (Canadian International Trade Tribunal 1993:21). Cargill was lured to the province by its status as the center of Canada's cattle feeding industry and a provincial government grant for the construction of the plant's wastewater treatment facility (Cybulski 1989). The plant opened in 1989 with a non-union labor force, paying wages at $3 to $4 an hour less than its competitors. The introduction of a lower cost producer led Canada Packers to close all its facilities in western Canada within two years of the plant's opening (MacLachlan 2001:193–4).

Meatpacking, Immigrants and Working Conditions

Meatpacking has always been marginally profitable and dependent upon immigrant labor dating back to the early days of the twentieth

century and Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*. In the early 1900s meatpackers attempted to increase productivity by lowering wages and increasing output. They did this by replacing skilled butchers with unskilled workers. Philip Armour, the founder of one of America's largest meatpacking firms at the turn of the 20th century, acknowledged his company deliberately attempted to deter unionism by replacing experienced workers—who might be disillusioned—with newly arrived immigrants. But rather than target a specific nationality, the company preferred hiring immigrants from many different countries so as to hamper communication between workers. When strikes did occur, African Americans were recruited as replacement workers (Halpern 1997). In 1911, the U.S. Immigration Commission estimated that foreign-born workers accounted for about 60 percent of meatpacking's labor force (Purcell 1953:29).

A hundred years after *The Jungle,* packinghouse work remains labor intensive and dangerous, which makes line work unattractive to most North Americans. The work requires no preexisting job skills or knowledge of English, and the industry continues to recruit immigrant and refugees to staff its production lines. In the old plants work varied between hog and cattle slaughter, and workers split their time between the kill floor and processing (Novek 1989). But modern plants slaughter a single species, and most line workers now stand shoulder to shoulder making the same cuts over and over with the result that repetitive motion injuries are commonplace (Stull and Broadway 1995). In the United States, meatpacking's reported occupational injury and illness rate hovered between 30.4 and 36.9 per hundred full-time workers from 1975 to 1985—around three times the average for manufacturing overall. The injury and illness rate peaked in 1992 at 44.4 per 100 (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics: various years). Reported rates have subsequently fallen due to the industry's efforts to improve ergonomics and changes in injury reporting procedures (Stull and Broadway 2006). In Alberta the situation is no different. Meat processing workers have the highest probability of a disabling injury or disease among all manufacturing employees in the province, with a rate more than double the manufacturing average (Alberta Human Resources and Employment 2005).

Low wages and an unpleasant work environment contribute to high employee turnover. For its first 21 months of operation, *monthly* turnover among line workers at IBP's Lexington, Nebraska beef plant averaged 12 percent (Gouveia and Stull 1995:98). When IBP opened its Finney County, Kansas plant in 1980, turnover reached as high as 60

percent a month (Stull, Broadway, and Erickson 1992:48). But the industry average for established plants is around 6 to 8 percent a month, which means that at least 72 to 96 percent of a plant's workforce comes and goes each and every year (Gouveia and Stull 1995:98). To meet their insatiable appetite for workers packers recruit immigrants and, in the process, transform packinghouse towns into boomtowns.

Packers and Boomtowns

Rural sociologists studying North American energy boomtowns in the 1970s noted sudden population growth was accompanied by increases in a variety of social disorders. Studies of Fort McMurray in northeastern Alberta documented increases in crime rates, mental illnesses, divorce, and alcohol and drug abuse (Gartrell, Krahn, and Sunahara 1981; Graham Brown and Associates 1975; Hobart et al., 1979; Riffel 1975). Similar findings from U.S. communities were challenged on the basis of inadequate data and methodological considerations (Wilkinson et al., 1982), prompting a vigorous response from supporters of the boomtown social disruption hypothesis (Finsterbusch 1982). By the late 1980s a consensus emerged that social disruption did occur, but only in some places, at certain time periods, and among some segments of the population (Smith, Krannich, and Hunter 2001). Sudden population growth was also found to lead to a breakdown in local services. Among the first problems to appear is a housing shortage, which sparks an increase in rents and home prices. Next, medical care providers, schools, and law enforcement complain of increasing service demands that lag behind increases in the local tax base (Krannich and Greider 1990).

The theoretical basis for explaining increases in social disorder is found in the sociological literature dealing with modernization and urban disorganization (Wirth 1938). According to this perspective, pre-boom communities are characterized by social cohesion and stability. Social control and support is maintained by a ''high density of acquaintanceship,'' i.e., the proportion of a person's fellow community members that are known to a person (Freudenburg 1986). A sudden influx of persons is presumed to reduce this number, lowering social interaction and watchfulness, while anonymity and social disorder increase. Under this scenario, informal social controls are replaced with formal ones.

Social isolation has been identified as a key variable in explaining child abuse and neglect among boomtown newcomer families (Camasso and Wilkinson 1990). Neglectful families have fewer relation-

ships with formal groups and fewer informal contacts with neighbors. This lower level of support is exacerbated by high levels of residential mobility, which is endemic to boomtowns, but which also reduces watchfulness and surveillance. These factors combine to isolate newcomers, and for some families this leads to child abuse.

A high level of transience among young adult single males is a factor behind increases in boomtowns' rates of substance abuse. The absence of a stable family environment and the acceptance of drinking hard liquor as part of the frontier experience foster an environment that encourages substance abuse. Preventing abuse is hampered by high turnover, which also facilitates drug trafficking and makes enforcement difficult (Milkman et al. 1980).

Critics of these studies note it is impossible to link the causal mechanism of increasing population, decreasing social interaction, and increasing social disorders since the studies occur *after* the boom (Krannich and Greider 1990). But despite the weak theoretical underpinning of the boomtown model, there is widespread empirical evidence documenting social disruption with sudden population growth.

Study Sites

Although Garden City, Kansas and Brooks, Alberta are separated by 1300 miles of prairie and an international boundary, they share similarities in their physiography and historical development. Like many Plains towns on either side of the border the early European settlers were drawn to the region by the prospect of farming. But rainfall in each community averages less than 18 inches a year, and occasional droughts make farming a risky business, so ranchers turned to raising cattle. Each town grew to a be a regional service center in part because of their location on a major east-west railroad route—the Santa Fe route from Chicago to Los Angeles for Garden City, and the transcontinental Canadian Pacific route for Brooks.

Irrigation transformed both communities, as it enabled the cultivation of improved pasture land and feed grains to support a cattle feeding industry. In the early 1900s the Canadian Pacific Railway became interested in developing irrigation to promote colonization and railroad traffic on the three million acres of land it owned between Brooks and Calgary (Palmer 1990:120–121). By 1914, it had constructed a major dam on the Bow River and the Brooks Aqueduct, with the result that settlers slowly moved into the area. Brooks' population grew from 499 in 1921 to 4,010 in 1971. In 1966, Lakeside Industries, the company

that would transform Brooks, was born. It began its existence as a cattle feeding operation with a feedlot just west of town. A few years later it constructed a meatpacking plant across the highway from its feedlot. The company specialized in supplying carcasses to other companies for further processing. By the early 1990s the widespread adoption of boxed beef meant this market was disappearing. Lakeside realized it needed a processing side, but it lacked the necessary capital and expertise, and so it welcomed IBP's takeover in 1994 (Altwasser 2006). Within days of the deal being sealed, IBP announced it would increase the plant's slaughter capacity and add processing and rendering facilities. For this new plant to be fully operational by 1997, about 2,000 new employees would have to be found in a town of 9,925, where official unemployment stood at just over 300 persons in April 1996 (Statistics Canada 1999).

1300 miles southeast of Brooks, the adoption of deep-well turbine pumps and center-pivot irrigation systems in the 1960s allowed southwestern Kansas farmers to access the vast underground water resources of the Ogallala Aquifer and cultivate feed grains. An abundant supply of feed attracted the cattle feeding industry, and by 1980 two million cattle were being ''finished'' within a 150 mile radius of Garden City (Stull and Broadway 2004:99). Like many other small towns on the High Plains in 1980, Garden City was predominantly Anglo (82%). The descendents of Mexican Americans who had been recruited to work as field hands for the area's sugar beet industry and on the railroad in the early 1900s formed the town's only sizable minority (16%). But that would change with the opening of IBP's Finney County plant 10 miles west of town in the small hamlet of Holcomb in December, 1980. The company selected the Holcomb site on the basis of a plentiful high quality water supply from the Ogallala Aquifer, since the plant needed about 800 gallons of water per slaughtered animal (Broadway 1990). Three years later, a beef processing plant that would eventually be owned by ConAgra opened on Garden City's eastern edge. Together these plants would employ about 5,000 workers in a sparsely populated region with little surplus labor.

Labor Recruitment

Packing companies have a publicly stated policy of recruiting workers locally. In the year before IBP opened its Holcomb plant, average unemployment in surrounding Finney county amounted to just 400 persons, yet the plant would require over 2,000 persons for it to be fully operational. The 1983 opening of the ''ConAgra'' plant increased the

demand for more meatpacking employees. The need to hire so many workers, coupled with employee turnover that exceeded 100 percent in 1990 (Cultural Relations Board 2001:14), forced IBP recruiters to travel as far as Alabama, New Mexico, and Texas to recruit workers. In addition to these sources, the company was able to attract a Southeast Asian labor force from Wichita, 200 miles east of Garden City. In the early 1980s Wichita contained Kansas' largest concentration of refugees, but layoffs in its meatpacking and aircraft plants, a national recession, and a federal policy that promoted refugee self-sufficiency combined to ''push'' many Vietnamese and Laotians from Wichita to Garden City, where they obtained meatpacking jobs (Stull et al. 1992). Chain migration and recruiting incentives led Southeast Asians from as far away as Alaska and Hawaii to move to Garden City, so that by the mid-1980s more than 2,000 Southeast Asians, primarily Vietnamese, had settled in the town (Broadway 1985). Once this source had been exhausted the packers turned to Mexicans.

IBP had always recruited in borderland cities by advertising on radio stations that could be heard in Mexico. But in the mid-1990s the company, with the blessing of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, established a labor office in Mexico City and offered to pay recruits' bus fares to the United States (Cohen 1998). The program helped boost Hispanics' share of IBP's Finney County labor force from 58 to 77 percent between 1990 and 2000, while the equivalent figures for the ConAgra plant were 56 and 88 percent respectively (Cultural Relations Board 2001). Not surprisingly, these changes were reflected in Garden City's ethnic composition, with Hispanics increasing their share of the population from 25 percent in 1990 to 44 percent in 2000, while non-Hispanic whites declined from 68.7 to 49.8 percent (U.S. Census Bureau 1993; 2002). Within the Hispanic category, most traced their ancestry to Mexico, followed by El Salvador and Guatemala.

In Brooks, Lakeside's expansion was initially met by recruiting from locally available labor supplies in southeastern Alberta, but a small pool of surplus labor and high turnover meant workers were inevitably recruited from further and further afield. The collapse of the Northern Cod fishery in Atlantic Canada earlier in the decade produced unemployment rates in excess of 50 percent in some coastal communities and provided fertile ground for the company's recruiters. In January 1998, the author picked up a Lakeside employee hitch-hiking into town from the plant. He was from North Sydney, Nova Scotia and was the only one left out 15 people who had been recruited from the town to work at the plant, the rest had all returned home. But enough Maritimers stayed to support a fish and chip shop that had moved from Marystown on

Newfoundland's Burin Peninsula to Brooks (Sillars 1998). Today, many ''Newfies'' remain in town, but few are at Lakeside; they have moved into other sectors of the local economy (field notes 1/17/06).

Beginning in 1998 it was apparent that domestic labor sources would be insufficient to meet Lakeside's staffing needs, and the company targeted immigrants. Working with Immigrant Aid Societies, recruiting videos were translated into Arabic and shown to potential recruits at Calgary's Catholic Immigration Society (field notes 1/5/98). Employees in 2000 were paid a $1000 (Canadian) bonus for referring friends and family members who stayed beyond a minimum period (Lakeside n.d.). This strategy is commonly used throughout the industry (Human Rights Watch 2004); it promotes chain migration and the emergence of immigrant enclaves in packing towns (Fink 2003; cf. Grey and Woodrick 2002), and Brooks would prove to be no different. By 2006, immigrants and refugees grew to account for about 60 percent of Lakeside's labor force (Altwasser 2006), and an even higher percentage among its line workers.

Lakeside, from the outset, recognized the importance of its immigrant labor force. In Fall 1998, they provided on-site space for Medicine Hat's SAAMIS Immigration Service to provide employees with assistance in filling out immigration forms; most dealt with family reunification (field notes 9/22/98). By 2002, the demand for such services was such that Global Friendship Immigration Center was incorporated in Brooks to meet newcomer needs. Its annual reports provide a snapshot of an emerging multicultural community. In 2003, nearly 90 percent of the Center's 413 clients were refugees. The leading source countries were Sudan (199), Ethiopia (48), Pakistan (33), Somalia (30), and Afghanistan (21). Other sub-Saharan countries represented were Burindi (4), the Democratic Republic of Congo (8), Liberia (2), Tanzania (1), and Sierra Leone (1). Most were secondary migrants who had moved to Brooks from elsewhere in Canada to work at Lakeside (Global Friendship Immigration Center 2004, 2005).

A further twist to Lakeside's labor situation occurred in October 2005 when workers struck the plant in an effort to obtain a union contract. The strike had a strong racial dimension. Many of the plant's African line workers supported the walkout, while the plant's predominantly white clerical and maintenance staff opposed the strike by crossing the picket line and petitioning the province's Labour Relations Board to decertify the union. During the strike there were several violent confrontations between picketers and employees, with the Royal Canadian Mountain Police (RCMP) arresting picketers for intimidating strike breakers. Two Ethiopian men died in a car accident returning

from manning the picket line, and the Union leader's car was run off the road outside the plant by Lakeside managers (Brethour 2005; McGinnis 2005). The strike lasted three weeks, but it strained relations within the plant and led to a change in the company's recruitment policy. A long-time employee explained,

> Now they have a bunch of guys working who a couple of weeks were calling each other every name under the sun and banging on their cars as they crossed the picket line and now they are supposed to act as a team. No wonder the morale out the plant is so bad. Management is particularly upset at the support provided to the strike by the Africans (field notes 2/3/06).

Concrete evidence of the company's disenchantment with their African labor force was provided in 2006 when Lakeside announced it would bring 250 temporary workers from China, the Philippines, El Salvador, and Ukraine to staff the plant under a new provincial government labor recruitment program that attempts to address Alberta's chronic labor shortage (Nicholson 2006).

Economic Changes

Meatpacking creates many jobs. In Garden City and its surrounding county[1], over 12,000 non-farm jobs were created between 1979 and 2000. Nearly 5,000 of them were in meatpacking. The sector with the next largest number of jobs created was services, followed by government and retail trade. Many of these newly created jobs in services and retailing provide only part-time employment and pay poorly. As a result, the average wage per job in Finney County fell from 92 percent of the Kansas average in 1980 to 85 percent in 2000 (Table 1). During the same period, the number of persons living in poverty rose from 8.5 percent of Garden City's population in 1980 to 14.3 percent in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau 1983; 2003). Another indicator of impoverishment is provided by the number of students in Garden City public schools that receive free or reduced price lunches: this number has risen inexorably, so that in 2005 over 62 percent of students qualified for the program (Kansas State Department of Education n.d.).

Brooks, like Garden City, has enjoyed an economic boom since Lakeside's expansion, with the city approving building permits valued at close to $200 million (Canadian) between 1996 and 2005 (City of

[1] Finney County provides the unit of analysis, since Garden City accounts for 75 percent of the county's population.

Table 1. Finney County and Kansas Average Earnings/Job (in U.S. $) Selected Years

Year	Finney County	Kansas	Finney County Percent of Kansas
1980	11,753	12,705	92
1990	17,142	19,791	87
2000	24,139	28,766	84
2003	26,162	30,893	85

Source: Kansas Center for Community Economic Development 2006.

Brooks n.d.). New construction has meant hiring even more workers. Census data indicate that between 1996 and 2001 the number of employed persons in Brooks went up by over 1400, while labor force participation rates increased for men and women (Statistics Canada 1999; 2004). But despite employment growth and increased labor participation, the number of persons falling below the low-income cutoff increased during this same period by 175, and average earnings fell relative to the rest of the province between 1996 and 2000 (Table 2). This is in line with Garden City's experience as many of the other newly created jobs in the service sector (e.g., retail, restaurants, and hotels) are relatively low paying and part-time.

Rising poverty also means an increase in the demand for supplementary services such as food assistance. Garden City established Emmaus House in 1979 to provide temporary shelter and meals for indigents drawn by the construction of IBP's plant and a power station. Dependent upon donations and volunteers, the number of persons sheltered and fed has steadily increased. Between 1986 and 1997 the number of people fed went from 32,352 to 43,006, and the number of food boxes distributed went from 7,870 to 10,496 (Emmaus House n.d.). The number of participants in the federal government's Food Stamp program rose steadily during the 1990s until peaking at the time of welfare reform in the mid-1990s and subsequently dropping (Table 3). In Brooks, applications for one time transitional assistance payments (for shelter and food) from the provincial government's

Table 2. Brooks' and Alberta Average Earnings of Persons with Reported Income 1996 and 2000 (Figures in current Canadian dollars)

Year	Brooks	Alberta	Brooks % of AB
1996	$27,217	$26,138	104
2000	$30,461	$32,603	93

Sources: Statistics Canada 1999, 2004.

Table 3. Number of Finney County Residents Receiving Food Stamps (Selected Years)

Year	Number
1990	2,256
1993	2,722
1995	2,322
1997	1,942
2000	1,338

Source: Kansas Center for Economic Development 2006.

Alberta Family and Social Services agency increased 820 percent between 1996 and 1999, while the number of transients receiving assistance increased by 300 percent (Broadway 2001:47). The Brooks Food Bank opened its doors on October 1, 1998 and has grown ever since. In 2002, it served 1746 adults and 1638 children; by 2005, the equivalent figures were 2412 adults and 1595 children.[2]

Social Changes

The population growth accompanying the recruitment of workers (and their families) produced familiar boomtown problems in both communities including housing shortages and rising social service demands. Garden City's housing shortage in the early 1980s was solved by the simple palliative of rezoning land for the construction of a mobile home park; the park eventually housed nearly a tenth of the town's population (Broadway 1990). Brooks' town council initially resisted efforts to expand housing, leaving many workers to look to the town of Medicine Hat, seventy miles east of Brooks, for shelter. Lakeside then provided a direct bus service for workers from Medicine Hat to the plant. The company also established on-site housing in trailers for up to 160 workers. The goal was to provide temporary accommodations for single adults; the longer a person stayed the more rent they paid. By early 1999, the city council approved the construction of two major housing developments at the east and west ends of Brooks. These new single family homes were purchased by existing town residents leaving older homes and rental accommodations to filter down to newcomers.

In the decade following the opening of its two meatpacking plants, enrollment in Garden City's schools increased by over a third, and local

[2] Changing managers at the Food Bank has meant changing systems in the way records are kept. In the late 1990s, records refer to the number of families served, while later records refer to the numbers of adults and children served, which make comparisons impossible. I have elected to use comparable date for the longest time period.

Table 4. Brooks' Public Schools[1] Grade Structure 1996/7 vs. 2005/6 Academic Years

Grade	1996/7	2005/6	Difference
K	153	222	+69
1	177	229	+52
2	191	173	−18
3	187	179	−8
4	177	180	+3
5	195	190	−5
6	202	190	−12
7	192	190	−2
8	212	184	−28
9	182	185	+3
10	200	224	−24
11	197	194	−3
12	223	223	0
Total	2488	2563	+75

[1] The schools are as follows: Brooks High, St. Joseph's Collegiate, Brooks Junior High, Eastbrook, Griffin Park, Central and Holy Family Academy.
Source: Alberta Education n.d.

citizens approved separate bond issues for the construction of three new elementary schools. In the early 1980s, with the influx of Southeast Asians, local funds were raised to support an English as a Second Language (ESL) summer camp for Southeast Asian children (Stull 1990), while a more formal ESL program was established for the increasing numbers of Latino children in the school district. Over a third of the school district's teachers enrolled in classes to learn Spanish. In 1999, the school district, in partnership with the local Community College, established a separate Intake Center for non-English speakers. It provides adult basic education, ESL, family literacy, preschool, work force development programs, and information about community services available to newcomers. Survival English language is also provided for children in grades 5–12 before they enter the regular classroom.

Unlike Garden City, enrollment increases in Brooks' public schools have so far been minimal, just 75 students between the 1996/7 and 2005/6 academic years. But in kindergarten and first grade enrollment is up sharply (Table 4) due to the easing of the housing situation and an increase in the town's birth rate from 17 per 1000 in 1996 to an estimated 19 per 1000 in 2005.[3] In absolute terms the number of babies born to women with a Brooks home address during the same period

[3] No census has been taken in Brooks since 2001. The birth rate is calculated on an estimated population of 12,800 provided by the City Manager.

Table 5. Grasslands School District Percentage of ESL Students by Selected Grade Level 2005

Grade	Percentage
K	19
1	20
2	17
3	17
4	13
5	14
6	10
9	3
12	2

Source: Grasslands School District n.d.

went from 165 to 247—a 50 percent increase (Alberta Government Services: various years; Linda Sorensen personal communication 2/6/2006).

The influx of refugee children has meant a doubling in the demand for ESL instruction for the Grasslands School District, which includes Brooks, from 138 in 1999 to 303 in 2005. ESL students now account for 9 percent of the student body,[4] with much higher proportions in the early grades (Table 5). Local schools have also encountered some unique challenges posed by the estimated 100 different languages and dialects spoken in the town (field notes 2/2/06). Many adult newcomers lack a basic knowledge of English; some are illiterate in their own language, and many have never attended school. School officials acknowledge routine communications with refugee parents are difficult. Sending notes home in English serves little purpose for some. Translating them into the major refugee languages of Arabic, Dinka, Nuer (Sudan), Amharic (Ethiopia), Somali (Somalia), and Oromo (Eritrea) and then back-translating them into English to ensure the original intent was conveyed (Stull and Broadway 2004:128) is not a viable option, given the numbers of parents involved and the difficulty of finding translators.

Garden City and Brooks have experienced increases in their respective crime rates, due primarily to high population mobility and an influx of young single males with less than a high school education—the demographic group with the highest incidence of criminal activity. Garden City's crime rate rose steadily during the early

[4] Data on ESL numbers by individual school were unavailable. But in discussing these data with Grassland School District Administrators, they stated that most ESL students resided in Brooks.

Table 6. Garden City Police Department Criminal Activity and Enforcement 1990–2003

Year	Total crime index[a]	Offenses/10,000 persons[b]	Adult arrests
1990	2226	922	2252
1991	2694	1101	1951
1992	2501	1007	2302
1993	2416	986	2206
1994	2948	1140	2520
1995	2649	981	2287
1996	2734	959	3170
1997	1951	656	3137
1998	2179	729	2977
1999	2385	788	2815
2000	2679	939	2601
2001	2746	977	2654
2002	2538	911	2749
2003	2481	923	3300

Source: Garden City Police Department n.d.
[a] Crime index includes: murder/manslaughter, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, theft, auto theft and arson.
[b] Rate computed on the basis of population projections provided by Garden City Planning and Development Department.

1990s before peaking in 1994 and falling to its lowest level in a decade in 1997 and then rising again (Table 6). Perhaps more significantly, the number of arrests in the town rose by over a third during the 1990 to 2003 period. Brooks' reported crime rate went from 131 per 1000 persons in 1996 to 257 per 1000 in 2004; prior to Lakeside's expansion the crime rate was relatively stable (Table 7). In the late 1990s, the town experienced an explosion in alcohol-related incidents. The number of persons detained by the RCMP because they were a danger to themselves tripled—from 128 in 1996 to 398 a year later. Persons detained for other provincial liquor-act violations doubled—from 165

Table 7. Brooks Reported Crimes 1995–2004

Year	Crime rate/1000 persons	Crime/officer
1995	130	102
1996	131	103
1997	130	109
1998	185	156
1999	211	177
2000	180	161
2001	232	192
2002	210	174
2003	233	193
2004	257	213

Source: RCMP Brooks Detachment n.d.

to 308—during the same period (Broadway 2001:48). Lakeside's recruitment practices contributed to these problems by targeting young men in areas of high unemployment in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. Men between the ages of 18 and 24 have the highest frequency of heavy drinking, while single persons are three times more likely to have alcohol-related problems than married persons, and Atlantic Canada has the highest proportion of persons reporting alcohol-related problems (McKenzie 1997).

Further evidence of social dislocation in both communities is provided by an increase in reported cases of child abuse and neglect. Between 1980 and 1985 the rate of confirmed cases of child abuse and neglect tripled in Finney County, while the state rate increased by only 50 percent (Broadway 1990:340).[5] Caseloads at Brooks' Alberta Child and Family Services office have increased so much since 1999 that the staff doubled from 6.5 persons to 13 in 2005. The case load at the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission jumped from 127 patients in 1995/6 to 230 in 2004/5, which resulted in hiring additional counselors (field notes 2/14/06). Staffs in both agencies acknowledge their increasing caseloads cannot be attributed solely to Lakeside's recruitment strategy but is related, in part, to the existing presence and influx of less educated persons into Brooks. Partial support for this explanation is provided by comparing 1996 and 2001 census data; these show the number of persons residing in Brooks who failed to graduate from high school increasing by 745 during this period, while their share of the population aged 15 and over increased from 41 to 43 percent (Statistics Canada 1999; 2004). By contrast, during the same period, the equivalent population declined from 48 to 40 percent in the nearby town of Taber (2001 population 7671), which is in line with provincial trends (Statistics Canada 1999; 2004).

Population increases have also strained health cares services in both communities. In Garden City, access to health care services is the primary issue, due to the proliferation of low-paying jobs with few benefits and the meatpacking industry's six month eligibility criteria for health care benefits. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Finney County continued to rank in the worst 10 percent of Kansas counties for children lacking immunization, teen pregnancies, and lack of prenatal care (Kansas Department of Health and Environment 1999). United Methodist Western Kansas Mexican-American Ministries Care Centers

[5] In 1986 the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services changed their reporting procedures and determination of child abuse and neglect making comparisons with later years impossible.

and Health Clinics (or MAM) is the region's primary health care provider for persons without medical insurance. Founded in 1987, MAM recorded 6,000 primary care medical care visits in 1990; by 2000 this number reached 22,207. The Clinic serves people regardless of their ethnic or religious background and provides its services in Spanish or English.

Like other small towns in rural areas, Brooks is short of physicians. Population growth has only exacerbated this trend and made scheduling routine doctors' visits difficult, so newcomers use the local hospital's emergency room (E.R.) to obtain care. A nurse explained the problem this way:

> A Lakeside employee who works the B shift will come home late at night and take a look in on their children and if one doesn't look quite right they will take them to the E.R. at 3.00 am. This makes little sense from our perspective, since follow-up visits are usually called for and the patient ends up seeing another doctor who then has to become acquainted with the original diagnosis. And it of course overloads the E.R. (field notes 2/5/06).

The proliferation of different languages in Brooks led the local hospital to subscribe to U.S. based Language Line, which advertises itself ''as providing fast, accurate, confidential language interpretation in 150 languages.'' But this service, which requires the patient and staff member to each wear a headset, is not really suitable for emergency situations where decisive intervention maybe called for. An E.R. nurse noted patients sometimes resort to miming their symptoms, leaving nurses and doctors to guess the ailment (field notes 2/5/06).

Conclusions

Despite the recent construction of large slaughter capacity plants and development of the disassembly line, the nature of meatpacking remains largely unchanged from a hundred years ago. It is still labor intensive, physically demanding, and unpleasant work performed by a mostly immigrant labor force. The only significant change is *where* this work occurs. Under the ''IBP revolution,'' North America's beefpacking plants have relocated to be near supplies of fed cattle on the High Plains. And while the economic logic behind this move is clear—it lowers production costs—it also means that companies must undertake extensive recruitment efforts to staff their plants. For Garden City and Brooks the consequences of this process have been the same: influxes

of immigrants and refugees, housing shortages, rising demands for social services, increases in various social disorders, the creation of lots of relatively low-paying or part-time jobs, and relative falls in income levels. But despite these similarities, the two communities have undergone different cultural transformations. In Garden City, the meatpackers initially targeted Southeast Asian ''boat people.'' Once this pool was exhausted they turned to Mexicans who helped transform the town into Kansas' first majority-minority community. Twenty five years after IBP opened its Finney County plant, Latinos comprise over half the school district's population, and Spanish is fully embedded in the community with Mexican restaurants, grocery stores, bakeries, and clothing stores now part of the town's cultural landscape (Stull and Broadway 2007).

Brooks, by contrast, has been transformed into a more complex multicultural community with immigrants and refugees from a multitude of countries in Africa and Asia working at the plant. African entrepreneurs have opened grocery stores, hairdressers, a music shop, and a nightclub, and enriched the community by their presence. But the refugee newcomers also provide a unique set of challenges to social service providers. Among children, school teachers note negotiating skills and basic ''manners'' are not yet part of some refugees' social skills (field notes 2/2/06). Refugee children will quickly resort to fighting to obtain or protect something, a legacy that others attribute to their camp experience where competition for resources was an everyday occurrence (Reynolds 2004). Cooperation among newcomers is difficult, oftentimes reflecting longstanding rivalries that originated in Africa. Some newcomers' limited knowledge of English is an obstacle to day-to-day communication, while cultural differences between the host community and newcomers create different sets of expectations in terms of service delivery. Over time some of these barriers will be reduced as newcomers acquire English language skills and adjust to life in Brooks. But as with any adjustment process, it will be much easier for younger persons than the old.

The role of the meatpacking industry in the transformation of small towns in the United States has been well documented (Stull and Broadway 2004; Stull, Broadway, and Griffith 1995). In the United States, the packers have recruited a predominantly Latino labor force. In Alberta, Lakeside has been unable to recruit from a poorer southern neighbor; instead it has turned to Canada's population of Sub-Saharan and Asian refugees. This difference is attributable to Canada's immigration policy which emphasizes recruiting highly skilled immigrants and, by default, the packers resort to hiring refugees. Lakeside's most

recent success in persuading federal and provincial authorities to allow it to recruit temporary workers from China, the Philippines, El Salvador, and the Ukraine is a testament to Philip Armour's strategy of a hundred years ago, when his company used this strategy to hamper communication between workers and prevent them from unionization efforts.

In sum, there are many similarities in the boomtown experience of meatpacking communities on either side of the 49th parallel. But different immigration policies and proximity to a significantly poorer southern neighbor from which to draw labor are critical to explaining differences in the social impact of newcomers upon meatpacking communities in Canada and the United States. Geography still matters.

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