

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE IMPACT OF SETTLER COLONIALISM ON
BLACKFOOT FOOD SECURITY AND SOVEREIGNTY: A LANDSCAPE AND
POLICY APPROACH**

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Bachelor of Arts, University of Alberta, 2020

A thesis submitted
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

ANTHROPOLOGY

Department of Anthropology
University of Lethbridge
LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA, CANADA

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The University of Lethbridge acknowledges and deeply appreciates the Siksikaitapii peoples' connection to their traditional territory. We, as people living and benefiting from Blackfoot Confederacy traditional territory, honour the traditions of people who have cared for this land since time immemorial. We recognize the diverse population of Indigenous Peoples who attend the University of Lethbridge and the contributions these Indigenous Peoples have made in shaping and strengthening the University community in the past, present, and in the future.

ABSTRACT

The thesis examines how the destabilization of food security and the diminishment of food sovereignty occurred for the Blackfoot Peoples in Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty) territory between 1877 and 1913. Using an ethnographic archival approach, I analyze documents from Library and Archives Canada and the Galt Museum. The study focuses on three areas: the criminalization of the Sundance as a disruption to food sovereignty, the use of rations to destabilize food security, and the imposition of agriculture, ranching, and industries as tools of assimilation as an impact on food security and sovereignty. The archival documents indicate that the destabilization of Blackfoot food security and the decline of food sovereignty were influenced by colonial land and assimilation policies. These policies disrupted ceremonies and restricted mobility under the guise of promoting self-sufficiency and civilization. While the impacts of policies varied across reserves, the policies consistently disrupted land-use practices. In short, the thesis demonstrates that food was central to colonial governance, used to dismantle Blackfoot destabilization of food security and the diminishment of food sovereignty by attempting to replace them with settler economies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to begin by thanking my supervisors, Dr. Andrea Cuéllar and Dr. Tara Million, for their endless support, guidance, and patience throughout this project. Through their encouragement and feedback, they made the thesis process far less daunting than it would have been without their help. For them, I am deeply grateful.

I am also grateful to my committee members, Dr. Yale Belanger and Andrea Amelinckx, for their thoughtful feedback and guidance. Their insights and suggestions encouraged me to view my research from new perspectives and helped me strengthen this thesis. I would also like to thank Elder Francis First Charger for taking the time to share his knowledge and guidance during this project. Additionally, I appreciate and thank the Blood Tribe Governance Committee for the time they took to discuss the project as well as their feedback.

Lastly, I would like to thank my friends and family for their patience and support, which encouraged me to take breaks and motivated me to keep going. A special thank you to my sister, who kept me accountable and sat with me on long writing days.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
IFSN	Indigenous Food System Network
LAC	Library and Archives Canada
TRC	The Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

CONTENT WARNING

The thesis discusses themes of settler colonial violence, including the weaponization of rations, starvation, restrictions on movement, and the criminalization of Blackfoot ceremonies. Before engaging with the text, readers must be aware the thesis examines colonial archival documents authored by colonial officials, such as Indian Agents, between 1877 and 1913. In these documents colonial officials discuss the application of policies and events, including acts of violence, that reflect ideologies of cultural superiority. Additionally, the colonial officials describe events using language that is racist and dehumanizing, which was used to create damaging historical narratives. Therefore, the content warning for the thesis is to inform readers that this research includes and replicates the language used in the archival documents for research and analytical purposes. These materials are presented without censorship in order to critically examine the historical narratives and justifications used by colonial settler policies to enact acts of violence towards the Blackfoot People (Younging, 2025). While the thesis uses this type of language for research and analytical purposes, it should not be understood as acceptable terminology for describing Indigenous Peoples, communities, or cultural practices today.

INTRODUCTION

The research in this thesis originally stems from experiences during my professional career as a heritage interpreter working for Alberta Parks. During presentations about *iniskim* stones, bison hunts, the disappearance of the bison, and the making¹ of Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty)², I would get questions from the public about how these elements are connected. At the time, I was not able to answer these questions, which led to the topic of my thesis on Blackfoot food security and sovereignty. Specifically, I became interested in how settler colonial land and assimilation policies destabilized Blackfoot food security and diminished Blackfoot food sovereignty between 1877 and 1913.

Leading up to the making of Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty) around 1877, there was a large-scale starvation resulting from the decimation of bison and other game animals due to the fur trade. The decline of the game, and by extension, the decline of food sources, and the increase of settlers moving west pushed the Blackfoot Confederacy towards treaty negotiations. After the negotiation of Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty), the Dominion of Canada began imposing additional policies, like the Indian Act and the reservation system, which impacted Blackfoot Peoples' ability to continue their land-use practices, including hunting and gathering. An overarching theme within this narrative is the impacts of settler colonialism on food insecurity and sovereignty.

Therefore, in this master's thesis, I examine how food insecurity and the diminishment of food sovereignty occurred for the Blackfoot Peoples in Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty) territory

¹ The "making of Treaty 7" will be used for this thesis rather than the "signing of Treaty 7" as an acknowledgement and understanding that the Blackfoot People did not sign the treaty, as signing agreements like treaties was not a part of Blackfoot tradition. Rather, consistent with their Treaty-making traditions, the Blackfoot Confederacy entered into Treaty with the Crown through an oral agreement.

² The thesis will use the term "Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty)" as this is the preferred term of the Blackfoot Confederacy to reference the agreement.

between 1877 and 1913. Specifically, I investigate how colonial policies and settler economies impacted Blackfoot cultural, social, and land-use practices. Although the conditions created by settler colonial policies destabilized Blackfoot food security and sovereignty, this outcome was naturalized by colonial narratives, which continue to the present day. For this thesis, I examine the impact of colonial policies on Blackfoot food security and sovereignty through the lens of colonial documents, which means the content in this thesis is not representative of the communities' experiences. Rather, this thesis is centred around colonial narratives about food security and the role of settler colonial policies in destabilizing the structures that supported Blackfoot food security, thereby diminishing Blackfoot food sovereignty. While disruption and dismantlement of Blackfoot sovereignty and socioeconomic practices by colonial policies have long been known to Blackfoot Elders and community members, this thesis illustrates how these practices were intentionally destabilized by colonial officials as shown in their own administrative documents.

Colonial narratives about food security, agriculture, and development are often framed through a hierarchical lens that positions agrarian societies as the pinnacle of progress (Morgan, 1877). For instance, agriculture is presented as the “first impression of the possibility of an abundance of food” (Morgan, 1877, p. 24). The association between surplus, stability, and agriculture creates a narrative that hunter-gatherers “were always subject to feast or famine” (Carter, 2014, p. 17). Therefore, food insecurity, hunger, or starvation are often normalized in discussions of non-agrarian food systems. Additionally, in Morgan’s (1877) linear categorization of human societies, he also associates different food systems with stages of social evolution—what he termed savagery, barbarism, and civilization. Within this framework, food systems were not only indicators of societal development but also the method by which different stages are achieved. Morgan (1877) argued that “a permanent increase of food [was key] in ameliorating the condition of mankind” (p. 24). These ideas contributed to the naturalization of agriculture as the ideal model,

casting Indigenous hunting and gathering economies, like that of the Blackfoot, as primitive and inherently unstable.

Morgan's framework on social evolution and development is reflected in the reports of colonial officials such as Indian Agents, as both were contemporary during the time period this thesis examines. As colonial officials began producing and implementing land and assimilation policies centred on altering Blackfoot land-use practices and economic systems, the replacement of Blackfoot food systems became intertwined with colonial assimilation policies. In particular, the replacement of hunting-gathering economies with agriculture as a method of civilization, which was often framed by colonial officials as an attempt to accelerate process social evolution (as Morgan's framework depicted).

For my thesis, I use the landscape approach and settler colonialism as the two theoretical perspectives to shape how I address the topic of the destabilization of Blackfoot food security and the diminishment of Blackfoot food sovereignty. The first theory, or the landscape approach, draws from the field of historical ecology. Within the perspective of historical ecology, landscapes are legacies or artifacts of past human activity on the land, and through their relationship with the land, humans transform landscapes (Balée, 2006; Clement & Cassino, 2018; Cuéllar, 2024). The landscape approach emerges from the Amazonian context as a response to adaptationist theories, which often depicted Indigenous people as unable to modify their environments. In contrast, the historical ecology perspective on landscapes focuses on how human activities mould the environment to fit their sociocultural, economic, and spiritual needs, and thus generate anthropogenic landscapes.

The landscape approach helps frame Blackfoot food security and sovereignty as deeply interwoven with human land use and relationships to the landscape. To understand how these relationships were disrupted, my thesis uses a second theoretical framework, which is settler

colonialism from settler colonial studies. I draw on Wolfe (2006) definition, which characterizes settler colonialism as “an inclusive, land-centred project that coordinates a comprehensive range of agencies...with a view to eliminating Indigenous societies” (p. 393). From this structural perspective, settler colonialism works by eliminating or replacing the sociocultural and economic systems that sustain food security and sovereignty. In the context of this thesis, colonial policies functioned to eliminate and replace Blackfoot sociocultural and economic systems, thereby destabilizing the foundations of Blackfoot food security and sovereignty.

Both these theories, the landscape approach and settler colonialism, revolve around the relationship of land, human land-use, and social structures. These components are important in discussing the destabilized Blackfoot food security and diminished Blackfoot food sovereignty, as these social conditions do not occur naturally but are socially and politically engineered through settler colonial practices. Using both theoretical lenses provides the basis for examining food security and sovereignty as extending beyond food itself, since the destabilization of these structures encompasses not only food systems, but also Blackfoot land-use practices and sociocultural and political structures interwoven with the landscape.

While these theoretical frameworks structure my analysis, my engagement with this research is also informed by my own lived experiences with colonial relationships, both personally and professionally, across Treaty 6 and Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty) territories. Throughout my academic and professional career, my lived experiences as a woman of colour who is the granddaughter and daughter of refugees displaced by neocolonialism have greatly shaped my journey. My positionality influences my role as a researcher in this project, specifically, my desire to understand the impact of colonialism within Canada. I am not an Indigenous or Blackfoot researcher, nor do I claim to represent those perspectives. Instead, I am entering this project with a background in Western academics, my own experiences with colonialism, and the desire to create

a foundation for future research about how colonial policies and settler economies impacted cultural, social, and land-use relations for Indigenous Peoples during the establishment of Canada.

By using these theories and frameworks, I begin the process of examining how colonial policies and settler economies destabilized Blackfoot food security and diminished Blackfoot food sovereignty by disrupting land-use practices, cultural practices, and economic systems. Chapter 1 begins with a literature review that outlines key concepts related to food security, Indigenous food sovereignty, historical ecology, and settler colonialism. Chapter 2 focuses on the research methodology. In this chapter, I discuss the role of contemporary archives in the creation of historical narratives, the ethnographic archival approach, and how the research was conducted. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 form the core of the analysis and discussion, with each chapter examining a key theme identified within the archival documents related to Blackfoot food security and food sovereignty: the criminalization of the Sundance (Chapter 3), the use of rations and food distribution (Chapter 4), and the imposition of agriculture, ranching, and other industries as tools of assimilation (Chapter 5). The final section is Chapter 6, or the conclusion, which summarizes the findings as well as addressing limitations and future avenues for research.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

The destabilization of food systems through the implementation and impact of colonial policies is well-recorded within the social science literature (Coté, 2016; Logan, 2020; Pottier, 1999; Wilson, 2017). While the utilization of terminology such as food security and food insecurity in a historical context is a relatively recent development, the study of colonial policies, food systems, and land-use is not. For this section, I begin by providing a foundation for discussing the destabilization of Blackfoot food security and the diminishment of food sovereignty by discussing key definitions and concepts, as well as providing context for specific colonial policies. First, I define food security, food insecurity, and Indigenous food sovereignty. Next, I discuss the theoretical lenses I used to address my thesis question, which are historical ecology and settler colonialism. Together, these provide the foundation to understand food insecurity and sovereignty in the Blackfoot context between 1877 and 1913.

1.1 FOOD SECURITY, FOOD INSECURITY, AND INDIGENOUS FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

The concepts of food security, food insecurity, and Indigenous food sovereignty are central to understanding the wider colonial impacts on the cultural, social, and spiritual practices involving Indigenous food systems. These three concepts are typically shaped, defined, and applied through the lens of contemporary food rights and systems, as there is a gap within the literature regarding the development of historic definitions for food rights, including food security, insecurity, and sovereignty. Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, I have chosen to use contemporary definitions and apply them to historical contexts. As a result, this section of my thesis will focus on discussing the definitions of food security, food insecurity, and Indigenous food sovereignty.

1.1.2 FOOD SECURITY AND INSECURITY

The commonly accepted definition for *food security* by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) states, “when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO, 1996, p. 43). The importance of the FAO food security definition lies in its emphasis on “all people,” as it reinforces the notion that food security cannot be achieved by individuals alone, but rather, the concept of food security is achieved through collective efforts. The definition emphasizes that food security is beyond individual responsibility and rooted in structural features. Additionally, the FAO highlights four pillars of food security: availability, accessibility, utilization, and stability, which draws attention to the various barriers to food security. For instance, the concept of food availability stresses the need for the collective to have a supply of food, which aligns with their dietary or cultural preferences (Alonso et al., 2018; FAO et al., 2024; Shafiee et al., 2022). Accessibility, on the other hand, focuses primarily on the collective’s ability to access food through farming, hunting, gathering, or buying food from a market (FAO et al., 2024; Shafiee et al., 2022). Utilization centres around having safe food, as well as the capacity to prepare food (Alonso et al., 2018; Shafiee et al., 2022). Lastly, stability refers to having a constant source of food.

By establishing the four pillars of food security, the focus shifts away from viewing food security as only an issue of economic access and consumption (Patel, 2009; Prosekov & Ivanova, 2018); instead, the definition frames the concept as a multilayered issue stemming from underlying socio-political structures (FAO et al., 2024; Logan, 2016; Sen, 1981). Therefore, failing to meet any of the four pillars established by the FAO constitutes *food insecurity*. While the contemporary

food insecurity literature does not frequently engage with the FAO's definition of food insecurity, as it is difficult to quantify, it often uses household food insecurity as a proxy (Tarasuk et al., 2023).

Household food insecurity is defined as a person's economic ability to access safe and healthy food without skipping meals (Statistics Canada, 2024; Tarasuk et al., 2023). Despite its use in social science literature, the concept inadvertently creates the perception that food insecurity is solely an issue of economic access rather than an ongoing collection of socio-political decisions, as the focus is placed primarily on the individual. Major structural drivers of food insecurity include conflict, changes to climate, economic disruptions, lack of access to affordable and healthy food environments, and inequality (FAO et al., 2024). In the context of my thesis, many of these structural drivers are present throughout Canada's settler colonial project and influences the ongoing destabilization of Blackfoot food insecurity and sovereignty.

Additionally, the discussion of *Indigenous food security* adds another lens of complexity in defining the concept. Settler colonial projects within Canada and in other regions in the world have led to the disruption of land-use linked with Indigenous foodways, including the ongoing disruptions to sociocultural practices entwined with land-use (Natcher et al., 2016). Although there are no commonly accepted definitions for Indigenous food security within Canada, frameworks developed by Indigenous scholars and organizations in other settler-colonial contexts offer valuable insight. For example, Elm-Hill et al. (2023) from the First Nation Development Institute in the United States define *native food security* as an achievement that can only occur when communities "return to ancestral foodways that restore balance and harmony to the entire food system" (p. 2). While this U.S.-based framework is not commonly cited in Canadian literature, its emphasis on restoring land-based practices and sociocultural relationships echoes themes in Canadian scholarship (Domingo et al., 2021; Natcher et al., 2016; Shafiee et al., 2022). In the

Canadian context, scholars frequently attribute Indigenous food insecurity to settler colonialism, particularly policies that disrupt intergenerational knowledge transmission and sever land-use through imposed economic activities (Baskin et al., 2009; Carr-Stewart & Preston, 2010; Cidro et al., 2015; Natcher et al., 2016).

1.1.3 INDIGENOUS FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Discussions concerning the rights of Indigenous food systems, food security is inseparable from food sovereignty, and both concepts are inseparable from the land (Indigenous Food System Networks, n.d.; Morrison, 2011). Through the implementation of settler colonial policies and changes to land use, Indigenous sociocultural and political systems that upheld food systems are destabilized. These inequitable power relations and land relations between Indigenous Nations and settler states are emphasized in Indigenous food sovereignty movements within Canada. Therefore, understanding the concept of Indigenous food sovereignty is crucial to recognizing the role that colonial land and assimilation policies played in disrupting land-use.

The concept of *food sovereignty* traces back to La Via Campesina, which is a human rights movement that arose from peasantries and rural organizations fighting for the right to determine, develop, and maintain their own food production (La Vía Campesina, 1996; Martínez-Torres & Rosset, 2010). According to La Via Campesina, food sovereignty is a "precondition to genuine food security" (La Vía Campesina, 1996, p. 1) attainable with agrarian reform, sustainable management of natural resources, fair trade, regulation of transnational corporations, democratic decision-making, and social peace. La Via Campesina's 1996 definition emphasizes the structural components of food sovereignty, focusing on agrarian reform. This highlights the negative impacts on land use, which can affect food security and foodways.

Moreover, a commonly referenced model for *Indigenous food sovereignty* within Canadian literature is the Indigenous Food System Network (IFSN). The IFSN definition of Indigenous food sovereignty centres around the concept that food is sacred and is a right that is upheld through “nurturing healthy, interdependent relationships with the land, plant and animals” (Indigenous Food System Networks, n.d., para.3). The IFSN recognizes four components to achieving Indigenous food sovereignty: sacred and divine sovereignty, participation, self-determination, and policy. Similarly to La Via Campesina, IFSN centres food sovereignty as an issue of human rights and self-determination; however, Indigenous food sovereignty also emphasizes that the “land and food [are] alive and sacred” (Settee & Shukla, 2020, p. 4), highlighting the importance of revitalizing reciprocal human-environmental relationships disrupted by historical and ongoing settler colonial actions (Mihesuah & Hoover, 2019; Morrison, 2011; Robin et al., 2021).

In the Blackfoot context, the push for food system revitalization centres around initiatives aimed at strengthening the previously nurtured human-environment relationship and alliances alongside other inhabitants of the land. For instance, initiatives such as the Blackfoot Well-Being project emphasizes that the "Blackfoot lifeway situates Indigenous well-being, with the needs of the individual contextualized within the inherent responsibilities of and accountability to collective well-being" (Paul et al., 2023, p. 207). The concept of collective well-being between humans and non-humans is central to the concept of Indigenous food sovereignty, as it highlights "the cultural responsibilities and relationships Indigenous peoples have with their environment" (Coté, 2016, p. 1) and the right to continue and revitalize food-centred practices.

1.2 HISTORICAL ECOLOGY AND BLACKFOOT-LANDSCAPE RELATIONSHIPS

According to historical ecologists, landscapes are cultural artefacts transformed and managed through human activities (Armstrong et al., 2017). Colonial narratives often portray

Indigenous food systems, particularly hunting and gathering economies, as inherently characterized by hunger and scarcity; however, the literature presents a different perspective (Balée, 1989; Clement & Cassino, 2018; Cuéllar, 2024; Lepofsky et al., 2021; Logan, 2020; Wise, 2023)). To comprehend the process and impact of settler colonization on Indigenous food security, it is essential to acknowledge Indigenous contributions to landscape domestication and transformation through land-use practices. The study of anthropogenic activities such as landscape domestication is a growing field of literature in Canada.

In the context of the prairies, anthropogenic activities often centre around the bison, particularly the disappearance of the bison and the restoration of their range (Barsh & Marlor, 2003; Levesque, 2005; Oetelaar, 2014; Oetelaar & Oetelaar, 2006; Wise, 2023). Historically, the bison ranged through approximately "180 million acres" (WWF, n.d) between Canada and the United States in the Great Plains region. While the exact historical population of bison is unknown, estimates from accounts in the 16th century suggest there were between "25 to 30 million bison" (Phillips, 2018, p. 25). Large bison populations, resulting in a thriving bison-hunting economy on the prairies, did not occur without human land management practices (Levesque, 2005; Oetelaar, 2014). In Blackfoot and Blackfeet³ territories, landscape management practices such as prairie burning and tobacco horticulture were utilized to create conditions necessary for maintaining sociocultural and spiritual relationships with the land (Barsh & Marlor, 2003; Levesque, 2005; Oetelaar, 2014; Oetelaar & Oetelaar, 2006; Wise, 2023). Prairie burning, or the act of burning sections of grasslands to promote regrowth (Levesque, 2005), was vital in attracting bison to certain areas, as the regrowth areas would grow the bison's preferred vegetation (Bastien, 2004; Oetelaar

³ Blackfeet (Amsskapipiikunniwa) refers to one of the four nations within the Blackfoot Confederacy located below the 49th parallel in Montana, United States. Blackfoot refers to the other three nations (Siksika, Kainai, and Piikani), which are located above the 49th parallel in Canada.

& Oetelaar, 2006; Wise, 2023). In addition to attracting bison to specific locations, a successful bison-hunting economy and maintaining food security require ceremonial preparation, which includes practices such as tobacco cultivation (Wise, 2023). Although the literature on tobacco horticulture is sparse, Wise (2023) mentions the Blackfeet¹ would stow tobacco seeds from bundles along riverbeds in the winter months, and the seeds were periodically checked on by women. Generally, after the initial planting, the tobacco seeds were left under the supervision of the supernatural world until the Blackfeet returned in the fall to harvest (Wise, 2023). These practices would pave the way for a successful hunt; however, to ensure a stable food supply throughout the year, food preparation was essential. That said, the use of landscape management practices extends beyond the maintenance of food systems as Bastien (2004) explains, the “Siksikaitsitapi organize themselves according to their observations of the natural world and the understanding of their relationship with the environment” (Bastien, 2004, p. 12). Therefore, the establishment of alliances and relationships through mutual reciprocity with other beings allows the Blackfoot can gain knowledge of land (Bastien, 2004; Wise, 2023). In other words, through ceremonies and acts of reciprocity the landscape is transformed to meet the sociocultural, political, and spiritual needs of the Blackfoot, including food security.

While Blackfoot anthropogenic activities are recorded, there are limited academic studies that extensively examine archaeological anthropogenic activities related to Blackfoot land management. Predominantly, the extent of discussion on Blackfoot anthropogenic activities and land management prairies are often broad mentions of various types of activities, such as creating micro-niches of plant life and prairie burnings to influence bison movements (Amundsen-Meyer, 2013; Levesque, 2005; Oetelaar, 2014; Oetelaar & Oetelaar, 2006; Wise, 2023). This in mind, there is detailed research into Indigenous landscape management of the Northwest Coast, specifically the Northwest Coast clam gardens. The gardens are “intertidal rocks-walled terraces,” (Jackley et

al., 2016, p. 2) created by Indigenous Nations on the Northwest Coast to expand the suitable habitats for clams through land-use practices. For example, Deur et al. (2015) noted Oral Traditions highlighting that harvesting bigger clams allowed for the population of smaller or younger clams to flourish, and without the thinning clams, they would not be able to survive well in the gardens. Other examples of maintaining the gardens include periodically disrupting the substrate of the clams and not harvesting clams at a “rate that exceeds their reproductive capabilities” (Deur et al., 2015, p. 203). Through land-use management techniques of nurturing human-environmental relationships created reliable and predictable food sources that would not have existed without Indigenous management practices (Deur et al., 2015; Jackley et al., 2016; Lepofsky et al., 2021). For instance, when the Indigenous communities were unable to tend to, or were removed from areas they have managed for generations, locations once seen as areas of *natural* food abundance began disappearing. In the context of the clam gardens, the inability to manage landscapes is seen in the presence of more substrate and the decrease in clam populations (Lepofsky et al., 2021). Therefore, the colonial process of removing people from traditional lands or creating barriers to the transmission of knowledge is a direct assault on Indigenous food security and sovereignty. Both barriers that continue to impact Indigenous food security and sovereignty within communities.

While I have yet to encounter a case study about Blackfoot land-use practices that mirrors the details of studies on the clam gardens of the Northwest Coast, the impact of colonialization on the clam gardens provides a foundation for examining the destabilization of Blackfoot food security and the diminishment of food sovereignty, such as the impact of colonial policies on food security. For instance, the knowledge and authority on the different elements of food security is passed down through gendered practices (Anderson, 2011). The division of labour and expertise, which are involved in different elements of Blackfoot food production, are encapsulated in the story of *Aakiipisskan* (Old Women’s Pisskan/Bison Jump).

The story of *Aakiipisskan* (Old Women's Pisskan/bison jump) goes as such.⁴ Before men and women lived in camps together, there were separate camps of women and men. Both held valuable knowledge. Women were "skilled butchers and tanners and could make beautiful robes from tanned hide" (Barsh & Marlor, 2003, p. 578). Men, who were "strong, had obsidian knives, and used *aki* (piles of dung) to mark the drive lanes of their *pisskan*" (Barsh & Marlor, 2003, p. 578). After living in a men's camp, Náápi suggested combining the camps, so men and women could share their skills and knowledge. From this point, *Aakiipisskan* is often referred as being the site where "Náápi initiated the first marriage between men and women" (Chambers & Blood, 2009, p. 261).

The story illustrates the differing skills reflected in leadership roles, such as women's responsibility in the creation and maintenance of lodges (Conaty, 1995). More importantly, for this discussion, the gender dynamic concerning the authority of different elements of food procurement. For instance, men were responsible for hunting animals (The Blackfoot Gallery Committee, 2013), and women were responsible for harvesting berries and producing goods from the bison, such as pemmican and clothing (Anderson, 2011; Beck, 2016; Conaty, 1995). Both bison meat and berries were staples in Blackfoot diet, and by extension food security, as pemmican was essential for the winter months (The Blackfoot Gallery Committee, 2013; Treaty 7 Elders et al., 1996). Additionally, Blackfoot women were also food distributors to family members and the community (Beck, 2016). Therefore, the extirpation of the bison had detrimental impacts on maintaining other

⁴ The rendition of the story shared in this paper was originally published by Barsh and Marlor (2003) and was not personally shared with me. I have chosen to incorporate the story for the insight it adds to understanding the complexities of Blackfoot food security. That said, I must acknowledge that I may be missing additional nuances of the story, and the published story has some caveats, such as it was written in English and being told through the lens of the Western gender perspective. This, in turn, may unintentionally create the gender binary (as the Blackfoot language does not have gendered terminology) and misrepresent Blackfoot gender ideologies.

elements of food security due to the interconnected nature of sociocultural and spiritual relationships with the landscape.

1.3 SETTLER COLONIALISM AND COLONIAL POLICIES

Settler colonialism, as defined by Patrick Wolfe (2006), is a land-centred project centred around the elimination of Indigenous sociopolitical, economic, and cultural structures and their replacement with colonial structures. Wolfe's (2006) definition provides the thesis with a framework for examining the structural patterns within the archival record, while also recognizing that colonial policies were not uniform and that their implementation was often dependent on the discretion of the individual Indian Agent.

In the Canadian context, the implementation of settler colonial structures, specifically assimilation and economic policies, was often justified through the concepts of civilization and social progress. The civilization agenda or mission is rooted in the "belief of racial and cultural superiority" (Truth Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 46), which involves the restructuring of social, economic, and political spheres through assimilation policies and the forced adoption of settler ideologies (Carter, 2014; Francis et al., 2007; Smith, 2009). The notion of civilization is connected to the theory of social evolution, particularly unilinear evolution. Within this framework, human societies are placed on a linear spectrum progressing from savagery to barbarism to civilization (Morgan, 1877), where hunting and gathering economies are positioned at the lowest rank, and agrarian and European societies are viewed as the pinnacle of development. This concept of social evolution is reflected in various Canadian policies, as the Dominion of Canada used civilization as a justification for imposing colonial sociopolitical, economic, and cultural structures. Particularly, through policies that focus on the acceptance of private property, individualism, and agriculture (Carter, 1989). Furthermore, within the context of food insecurity, the focus on the structural components reinforces the notion that food security is not an inherent

condition of colonized groups, but rather a condition created through historical decisions and the imposition of colonial policies (Cuéllar, 2013; Logan, 2020).

1.3.1 STARVATION, GAME DEPLETION, AND TREATY 7 (THE BLACKFOOT TREATY)

Prior to the making of Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty), Blackfoot food systems were already being disrupted by the depletion of game in the Northwest Territories, driven by the fur trade industry and increasing settler demand for both food and furs (Colpitts, 2014; Daschuk, 2013). As commercial expansion moved westward, “[g]ame and fur ‘deserts’” (Colpitts, 2014, p. 101) followed in its wake, placing growing pressure on Indigenous food systems. By the nineteenth century, trading posts increasingly relied on Indigenous hunters to supply provisions, with “each post receiv[ing] a sizeable portion of its foods from local natives” (Krech III, 2014, p. 4). Through the commercialization of food, a “shift in traditional attitudes toward sharing among unrelated groups” (Krech III, 2014, p. 4) begins to occur, particularly in response to changing needs, including access to colonial goods such as utensils, firearms, cloth, and other items (Krech III, 2014; The Blackfoot Gallery Committee, 2013). With the increase of demands, the Blackfoot experienced “heightened economic times” (The Blackfoot Confederacy Nations of Alberta, 2017, p. 34).

Simultaneously the 1800s were also marked by widespread disease, harsh winters, and, most significantly, the eventual decimation of the bison population (Daschuk, 2013; The Blackfoot Confederacy Nations of Alberta, 2017). The disappearance of the bison had devastating impacts on Blackfoot food security, as bison meat was a dietary staple and a key ingredient in pemmican, which served as a primary winter food source (Daschuk, 2013; The Blackfoot Gallery Committee, 2013). According to Daschuk (2013), the years of starvation, coupled with people relocating onto

reserves, and inadequate food aid, contributed to the spread of disease across the region. These overlapping crises created immense pressure on Blackfoot communities and shaped the context in which Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty) was negotiated.

In 1877, Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty) was made by the Blackfoot (Siksika)⁵, Bloods (Kainai), Peigan (Piikani), Sarcee (Tsuut'ina), and Stoney-Nakoda Nations with the British Crown. For the Indigenous signatories, Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty) represented a peace agreement between the six Nations in exchange for mutual assistance (Treaty 7 Elders et al., 1996). However, the Dominion of Canada interpreted the treaty as a surrender of land in return for aid, a commitment the state later violated by failing to provide the promised support (Samek, 1987; Treaty 7 Elders et al., 1996). Alongside implementing the reserve system, the colonial government enforced additional policies not covered in the treaty negotiations, including those previously discussed (Treaty 7 Elders et al., 1996).

Colonial land and assimilation policies are known to have disrupted Indigenous foodways across the region. However, the implementation and impact of colonial policies on specific Nations have rarely been examined in detail, as much of the research and information is dispersed across various fields of study. This fragmentation results in inconsistencies in understanding the role of colonial policies in creating social issues such as food insecurity. The variation in the implementation colonial policies is influenced by the Indian Agents assigned to reservations. These agents influenced many aspects of life on the reservations, including distributing rations, granting permission to leave the reserve, and dictating how individuals could spend their money (Carter, 2014; Daschuk, 2013; Schreiber, 2008; Smith, 2009). The impacts by implementation of land and

⁵ The Blackfoot and Indigenous Nations are using both the archival term for the Nation and the Nation's official title. As the thesis is engaging with archival documents, the Nation's archival term is used first and the official title is in brackets.

assimilation policies by the Dominion of Canada through Indian Agents likely impacted Blackfoot foodways, economic systems, and gender divisions of labour. In the process, the Dominion of Canada created a highly regulated system that perpetuated unequal relationships and engineered social problems, such as food insecurity. In the context of my thesis, the two policies I focus on are the Indian Act and Peasant Farming Act, with a primary focus on the Indian Act. Both of these policies contributed to the destabilization of Blackfoot food security and the diminishment of food sovereignty as they served as a tool for enforcing colonial control over Indigenous life.

1.3.2 THE INDIAN ACT (1876)

Initially passed in 1876, the Indian Act consolidated all the State's policies concerning Indigenous Peoples (Joseph, 2018). Designed as an assimilation policy, the Indian Act imposes colonial notions of civilization, economy, and gender relations through numerous legal provisions (LeBlanc & Burnett, 2017; Truth Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). By using the Indian Act as a standardized framework, the Dominion of Canada sought to whittle away the sovereignty of Indigenous Nations and eliminate Indigenous sociocultural and economic systems (Little, 2017; Titley, 1992). The Indian Act “touches on all aspects of Indian reserve life” (Leslie, 2002, p. 25), including defining reserves and restricting land-use (Hinge & Van Hoorn, 1981; Joseph, 2018). Moreover, by assimilating or civilizing Indigenous Nations, Canada would absolve itself from upholding legal and economic agreements by facilitating the acquisition of land through the abolishment of the reserve system (Joseph, 2018; Titley, 1992; Truth Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

A critical step in achieving this goal was establishing a legal and fixed definition for ‘Indian.’ In the creation of a legal definition, the State can control and determine who is able to and who can claim ‘Indian’ status. Under the Indian Act, an ‘Indian’ is “any male person of Indian

blood reputed to belonging to a particular band” (Dominion of Canada, 1876, p. 48). Selecting to define ‘Indian’ through the paternal lineage, the Indian Act started to disrupt the sociocultural role of women. Broadly speaking, as women’s roles within Indigenous Nations are not homogenous, Women are foundational in “maintaining order in the community” (Anderson, 2011, p. 101) and often participated in the politics and governance. Women had important roles in managing social relationships, transmitting cultural and spiritual practices, and determining seasonal migration patterns for food and spiritual practices (Anderson, 2011). Therefore, by imposing policies, such as the Indian Act, women were systematically ousted from their roles as political and economic decision-makers (Anderson, 2011; Joseph, 2018). For instance, when the Indian Act was implemented and imposed, the elected chief and band council system was meant to impose colonial systems of governance, which limited decision-making authority, and women were excluded from holding leadership positions (Joseph, 2018). When the Indian Act was implemented, it imposed a colonial system of governance that restricted the decision-making authority of elected chiefs and band councils; additionally, women were excluded from leadership positions (Joseph, 2018).

Under the Indian Act, women faced significant restrictions in their ability to participate in the Settler economy due to their inability to hold land titles or property. In 1884, the amendments were created to allow widows of ‘good moral character,’ who resided with their husbands at the time of death, to be allowed to be willed an equal share of land along with their children (Hinge & Van Hoorn, 1981). However, the amendments still did not permit for the inheritance of property, such as homes, livestock, or other goods (Hinge & Van Hoorn, 1981). In doing so, the women’s previous roles as active partners in community management and political decision makers are further limited. In this regard, colonial officials focused heavily on restricting women to the domestic sphere.

In addition, the Indian Act sought to restrict Indigenous participation in settler colonial economic systems by restricting Indigenous Nation's political autonomy through the implementation of Indian Agents. The Indian act established a system that allowed Indian Agents and the state to impose further controls and policies not previously included in treaty negotiations, such as restrictions on the sale of livestock and agricultural surplus (Smith, 2009). The limitation on autonomy allowed Indian Agents to enforce colonial policies at their discretion, leading to varying impacts on food security across different reservations.

1.3.3 THE PEASANT FARMING ACT (1889 -1897)

Agriculture is closely linked with colonial assimilation policies and the concept of social evolution, which argues that human societies follow a singular evolutionary path from primitive to civilized (Morgan, 1877) or from hunter-gatherers to agriculturists. The theory of social evolution often positions agriculture as the crux of civilization and social progress, which is ideology is present in the Dominion of Canada's push for Indigenous Nations to adopt agriculture as means to advance social progress (Carter, 2014). While on the Prairies, Indigenous Nations, aware of the decline of bison and other game, were not opposed to agriculture (Carter, 1989; Daschuk, 2013; Treaty 7 Elders et al., 1996); in fact, many treaty negotiations included provisions for an agricultural transition, such as tools and livestock (Carter, 1989). That said, the settler colonial states imposed other policies, resulting in significant difficulties for Indigenous Nations to participate in agriculture and Settler economies.

One of the policies is the Peasant Farming Act, initially proposed in 1889 by Indian commissioner Hayter Reed (Carter, 1989). The Peasant Farming Act banned the use of machinery and restricted tool use to simple tools such as axes, scythes and hoes (Carter, 2014). In some cases, the act limited the types of crops Indigenous Nations could grow. For instance, Indigenous Nations

were discouraged from growing wheat and encouraged to grow root crops, which required less machinery (Carter, 1989; Knuttila, 2023). From its inception, the Peasant Farming Act served two purposes: 1) the policy sought the social evolution of Indigenous Nations regarding farming, private property, and self-sufficiency, and 2) the policy prevented Indigenous Nations from becoming competitors in the settler economy.

The conceptual basis of the Peasant Farming Act is rooted in the social evolution and colonial ideologies of private property and self-sufficiency. According to Carter (1989), the Indian commissioner Hayter Reed argues that the use of farming machinery by Indigenous farmers would cause “an ‘unnatural’ leap” (p. 34) in their social evolution, which would result in Indigenous farmers being idle, lazy, and dependent. Reed sought to prevent Indigenous farmers from pooling resources to buy machinery and collaborate in agricultural work, seeing the practice as limiting social progress (Carter, 1989). Therefore, by banning farming machinery and restricting farming tools, the act in Reed’s eyes, would allow Indian Agents to foster individualism and self-sufficiency by stopping communities from participating in communal agricultural practices and encourage private property (Carter, 1989).

Furthermore, the policy lessened economic competition for white-settler farmers. Prior to the act, settler farmers began voicing their discontent about competing in a small market with Indigenous farmers (Carter, 1989; Carter, 2014). To reduce those concerns, the Department of the Interior and settler farmers divided out market districts, which ousted Indigenous farmers from the settler economic market (Carter, 1989). Indian Agents further enforced this exclusion by controlling Indigenous people’s ability to sell agricultural surplus and conduct business through policies such as the pass system. In short, the Peasant Farming Act showcases the juxtaposition within the Dominion of Canada’s Indigenous policies as prevailing colonial ideologies on racial

prejudice and hierarchy, and their objective to assimilate and *civilize* Indigenous populations within Settler societies.

1.3.4 UNDRIP, THE TRC, AND CANADA'S RECONCILIATION COMMITMENTS

In recent decades, there has been growing recognition of colonial histories and their impact on Indigenous Nations, both nationally and internationally. Beginning in 2007 with the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) by the United Nation, which outlines 44 articles affirming Indigenous rights (United Nations, 2007). The 44 articles cover a range of rights for Indigenous Peoples including the right to: self-determination, culture, land, and a life without discrimination (United Nations, 2007). Although 144 countries voted in favour of the declaration, the four countries, including Canada, initially voted against it (Coates & Holroyd, 2014). While later Canada signed the declaration in 2007, the signing remained largely symbolic for a time (Coates & Holroyd, 2014).

A year later, in 2008, Canada established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as part of the 2007 Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement. The commission was tasked with providing a detailed report on the history of residential schools and their impact on Indigenous children, as well as the state's role in residential schools. In addition to the report, the TRC was tasked with providing a framework for reconciliation, which includes 94 Calls to Action (Truth Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). According to Indigenous Watchdog, in 2025, Canada has only addressed 14 out of 94 calls to action, which is a call higher than Yellowhead Institute reported in 2023 (Jewell & Mosby, 2023). As part of the TRC's calls to action, the commission called for the full adoption and implementation of the UNDRIP in Canada's plan for reconciliation (Truth Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Then, in 2021, UNDRIP received Royal assent, and implementation began of declaration (Government of Canada, 2021).

Starting with the publication of Canada's action plan for the implementation of UNDRIP in 2023 (Government of Canada, 2023).

I have chosen to include a discussion on the TRC and UNDRIP, as the thesis focuses on understanding colonial narratives related to the disruptions of Blackfoot food security and sovereignty, and, by extension, the Truth and Reconciliation process. Researchers examining contemporary Indigenous food insecurity and sovereignty often cite the settler colonial policies, such as the Indian Act, and colonial ideologies, like unilinear evolution, as contributing factors leading to the destabilization of Indigenous foodways (Cidro et al., 2015; Domingo et al., 2021; Matties, 2016). The reconciliation of Indigenous foodways, and by extension the reestablishment of Indigenous food security and sovereignty, involves understanding and examining the colonial policies, ideologies and discourse responsible for their destabilization. My thesis is situated within the discussions, as the work within my thesis focuses on examining the use of colonial narratives and ideologies to shape historical colonial policies, and their role in destabilizing Indigenous food security and diminishing food sovereignty.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

Archives serve a significant role in creating and maintaining a state's narratives, specifically by acting as centres of power. On a superficial level, the archive's role is to house documents. However, decisions to preserve documents reflect layers of decisions, such as the motivations of the state and archivists preserving the document. By overseeing the archives, the colonial states choose which documents are worthy of saving, what writers are worth preserving, whose stories are held as national truths, and what events are liabilities in maintaining control of the historical narrative. Through these conscious and unconscious decisions, the state can create, maintain, and determine history. That said, archives can also "threaten the legitimacy of a state" (Griffith, 2019, p. 321), as they may contain records that challenge or contradict official narratives. As seen during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's investigation, where state institutions and churches were often reluctant to provide full access to archival documents.

Additionally, my focus for this thesis is examining the impact of colonial policies on Blackfoot food security and sovereignty through the lens of colonial documents. Therefore, my thesis is not a comprehensive account of the destabilization of Blackfoot food security and sovereignty, as it lacks first-hand accounts and Blackfoot perspectives. While I make a concerted effort to incorporate Blackfoot-authored materials, particularly in the discussion chapters, the central aim of this thesis is to critically examine specific threads within colonial archival narratives and create a foundation that can be expanded on by future researchers.

For this reason, I choose to address my thesis topic by taking an ethnographical archival approach. Taking an ethnographic approach to archives allows me to begin dissecting the decisions colonial agents made in the destabilization of Blackfoot food security and sovereignty. Therefore,

this section focuses on how colonial power is maintained in contemporary archives, the ethnographic approach to archives, and the scope of my thesis research.

2.1 CONTEMPORARY ARCHIVES AND THE MAINTENANCE OF COLONIAL POWER

The Archives in Canada have undergone, and continue to undergo, several ideological changes in their role to the State and the public. Currently, Canada's archival process stems from the concept of the total archives, which argues that the role of publicly funded institutions is to "acquire, preserve and make [archival materials] available for public use" (Millar, 1998, p. 104) for both the public and private sectors. The justification for a centralized archive centres around the importance of having a repository for "all records of significance to Canadians" (Millar, 1998, p. 104). This justification for a centralized archive generally glosses over the reality that archives are "sites of power" (Griffith, 2019, p. 321). While the goal is to create a centralized archive, many of Canada's colonial documents remain scattered in archives across North America (Dodds, 1983; Duff et al., 2004; Ghaddar, 2021).

The role of archives in creating and maintaining colonial projects is layered. All the decisions involved in the act of conserving documents shape how the past is retold and from whose perspective. This emphasizes that the act of conserving documents is not impartial and is political, as seen in the role of colonial institutions deliberately destroying documents to maintain the colonial narrative (Storey, 2022; Williams, 2015). Examples include the destruction of pass logbooks used by Indian Agents (Williams, 2015) and barring the Commission of Truth and Reconciliation from accessing specific documents (Truth Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

The notion of an objective archive, or specifically the unbiased collection of documents, is being challenged in Canadian archives. Particularly through the examination of power dynamics of collection management, such as the appraisal process, in the federal and provincial archival institutions (Cook, 2011a, 2011b; Ghaddar, 2021). Appraisal, or the archival decision of housing or eliminating a document, shapes the direction of historical documentation for generations. In Canada, the appraisal process can vary among archives and museums. For instance, the LAC uses the vague parameters of acquiring and preserving “archival records of national and historical significance” (Basar, 2005, p. 184) and the idea of document functionality (Cook, 2004) to guide the archival process. In a broad sense, determining the functionality or ‘value’ of a document relies on “pre-articulated ‘value’ criteria” (Cook, 2004, p. 8) set by the institution, which is often not clearly defined.

Due to the vague criteria, it is important to consider whose ‘values’ are prioritized in the archival system. Currently, the documents housed in the LAC are predominantly written by colonists about Indigenous Peoples, typically from the standpoint of colonial officials. The generational practice of valuing documents written by colonial officials has now created a “fragmented version” (McCracken, 2015, p. 183) of Indigenous history during the initial colonial period within Canada. While LAC does contain documents created by Indigenous Peoples, these documents tend to be created more recently. In short, generations of archival practices created a gap within the record, which in turn allows for the replication of predominant colonial narratives.

2.2 AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH TO ARCHIVES

Anthropologists studying colonial projects by examining archives have called for a shift away from looking at archives as "repositories of state power" (Stoler, 2008, p. 33) to entities created from the social, political, and cultural beliefs and emotions of the authors’ of the historical

documents. Therefore, rather than viewing historical documents or sources as "springs" of colonial truth" (Stoler, 2008, p. 33), an ethnographic approach to archival research allows for the documents to be viewed as artifacts of past ideologies, decisions, emotions, and uncertainties of colonists.

In the case of Canada, as with other colonial states, a crucial aspect of maintaining colonial projects is the collection and distribution of information (Reid & Paisley, 2017). Within the Dominion of Canada's bureaucratic system, large networks of agents existed, with shared and individual motivations influencing the information being collected and shared. Although the state's general purpose for gathering information was "to better conquer, govern, and rule" (Reid & Paisley, 2017, p. 2), each colonial agent collecting and distributing the information was not devoid of social, political, and individual motives. These layers of collective and individual motivations are inscribed into the reports that colonial officials produced and the policies they sought to influence, creating specific narratives within archival documents.

Colonial officials in the Dominion of Canada wrote documents shaped by concepts such as social evolution and *civilization* (Daschuk, 2013; Samek, 1987). Typically, the Dominion of Canada as a federal institution is often described as taking a gradualist approach to Indian policies (Samek, 1987). The slow-paced policies often coupled with a homogeneous perspective of Indigenous Nations create varying colonial approaches on the States' objectives to assimilate, eliminate, or 'civilize' Indigenous Peoples. Additionally, the bureaucratic system of the Dominion of Government did not allow for locally specific policies to occur and required Indian Agents to enact the homogeneous policy to assimilate and control Indigenous Nations (Samek, 1987). However, this is not to say that the policies had a uniform impact throughout the nation, as the implementation of federal policies is left to the discretion of local Indian Agents (Daschuk, 2013; Samek, 1987). Therefore, examining the line of communication between the federal government, Indian Agents, and Indigenous Nations within the archival documents allows the project to

investigate the specific role and variation of colonial policies in the destabilization of Blackfoot food systems and sovereignty.

2.3 PROJECT'S SCOPE WITHIN ARCHIVES

For my thesis, the primary sources of information are colonial reports and documents housed in LAC and the Galt Archives, spanning the period from 1877 to 1913. This timeframe was chosen as it encompasses the official making of Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty) and ends before policy changes that occurred during World War I. I selected LAC and the Galt Archives as the primary archives for this project because LAC has digitized many of the Department of Indian Affairs' annual reports and inquiries. The Galt Archives provides location-specific context on settler diets in Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty) territory during this period and offers a means to contextualize the implementation of federal policy.

The main historical documents I analyze are the *Reports of the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs* (1877–1879) and the *Department of Indian Affairs Annual reports* (1880–1913); both sets are housed and digitized by LAC. Other documents I examined from LAC include the *Department of Indian Affairs Letterbooks* (1877–1913) and the *Reports on the Murder of Ration Issuer Frank Skynner and the Subsequent Inquest by the Blackfoot Agency* (1894–1895). From the Galt Archives, I analyzed Mrs. Allick Blaine's family budget book (1886–1888), which offers insight into settler diets and food access in Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty) territory off-reserve during a portion of the selected timeframe. In the analysis chapters, I also incorporate an interview from the Apani Blackfoot Digital Library titled *Frank Weasel Head's Interview on Dance with the Unique History of Blackfoot Dance*, which provides necessary context for discussing aspects of the Sundance in Chapter 3. For the analysis of these documents, my focus was not solely on the text itself, nor on the data collected by the Department of Indian Affairs. Rather, my analytical process involved examining how information was presented within historical documents, including

patterns in language, recurring themes, and shifts in emphasis over time, as well as how individual Indian Agents framed, justified, and implemented policies, particularly where qualitative narratives did not align with quantitative data in the annual reports. Therefore, by taking an ethnographic archival approach, this thesis moves away from producing a descriptive account of policy development and instead examines how colonial policies were utilized to engineer Blackfoot food insecurity and diminish Blackfoot food sovereignty.

Given that this thesis limits itself to the examination of colonial administrative historical documents, Blackfoot perspectives on the events and policies discussed is constrained. To reinsert Blackfoot and Indigenous voices into the analysis, I chose to restrict secondary sources in the discussion chapters (Chapters 3, 4, and 5) to works by Blackfoot and Indigenous authors, or to publications from the last 25 years. This decision reflects a deliberate emphasis on the works of Blackfoot and Indigenous authors in a project that predominately uses historical colonial archives as its main source material. The inclusion of this restriction allows colonial narratives found within administrative records to become more apparent, as the works of Blackfoot and Indigenous authors help highlight the biases and assumptions embedded in colonial administrative records. Additionally, a full version of the thesis prior to defence was presented to the Blood Tribe Governance Committee for review and for the committee to provide feedback, which was incorporated into the final thesis document.

CONTENT WARNING

The following chapters analyze archival documents authored by colonial officials between 1877 and 1913; readers should be aware that this material includes explicit references to settler colonial violence. Passages from these documents include accounts of starvation, coercive assimilation, restrictions on movement, and the criminalization of Blackfoot ceremonies such as the Sundance. Language used throughout this thesis is taken directly from the archival record and, as such, includes terminology and expressions that reflect colonial ideologies of cultural superiority. Some excerpts include language that is racist, dehumanizing, and otherwise harmful. These materials are presented without censorship in order to critically examine the historical narratives and justifications used to implement settler colonial policies (Younging, 2025). While the thesis uses this type of language for research and analytical purposes, it should not be understood as acceptable terminology for describing Indigenous Peoples, communities, or cultural practices today.

CHAPTER 3: THE SUNDANCE AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Askokatssin is the place in the universes where we the earth people strengthen the sacred alliances with which the delicate balance of life is renewed.

-Dr. Betty Bastien, in the *Blackfoot Ways of Knowing* (p.114)

Askokatssin, or the Sundance, is a sacred ceremony still held by the Blackfoot Nations despite Canada's attempt to end the practice through an amendment to the Indian Act in 1895. I chose to begin this chapter with Dr. Betty Bastien's quote as her quote reminds me that *Askokatssin* holds a significance beyond what archival documents can capture. As well as a reminder that this thesis focuses on a small component of the banning of the Sundance from the perspective of colonial historical documents, which cannot capture the spiritual and social impact the Niitsitapii (the Blackfoot People) faced when unable to practice *Askokatssin*.

I also acknowledge the limitation of my discussion on the impacts of banning the Sundance. The impacts I discuss in this chapter are what I could identify from colonial historical documents and are not representative of the communities' experiences. Therefore, for the remainder of the chapter, I will refer to the ceremony as "the Sundance," as this is one of the documented names the ceremony is addressed by archival sources. I also do so to signal the distance between these colonial narratives and the cultural and ceremonial meaning of *Askokatssin*—an acknowledgement that both the documents and I (a settler researcher) are positioned outside of the ceremony itself.

Broadly speaking, the Sundance is a vital ceremony for the "renewal of life, good growing seasons, a safe community, [and] good health" (Asikinack, 2019, p. n.p.). The Sundance "was seen in this concept to give thanks and praise the benevolence of the Creator" (Treaty 7 Elders et al., 1996, p. 154), and, by extension, land, the sun, water and all living things. Therefore, the ceremony is deeply tied to the land, seasonality, and collective well-being and, by extension, the human-

environmental relationships associated with food systems and land-use. Therefore, colonial efforts to criminalize the Sundance have impacts far beyond spiritual suppression such as undermining Blackfoot food sovereignty through the disruption of human-environmental relations built on seasonal land use, food practices, and social gathering. In banning the Sundance, the Dominion of Canada limited the ability of Blackfoot communities to engage in sacred practices, exercise self-determination, and participate in land-based cultural systems. This, in turn, disrupted the sociocultural structures supporting Blackfoot food sovereignty as outlined by the IFSN— sacred or divine sovereignty, self-determination, participation, and policy.

Examining the annual reports produced by the Department of Indian Affairs prior to the 1895 criminalization of Indigenous ceremonies reveals that the government's approach to the Sundance was neither cohesive nor consistently enforced, even among agents operating under the same treaty. The inconsistency in discourse and policy implementation reflects broader patterns within the Department of Indigenous Affairs, where the priorities of individual Indian Agents typically shape policies. Although the archival material does not reveal why Indian Agents on the Blackfoot (Siksika), Blood (Kainai), and Peigan (Piikani) reserves took differing stances toward the Sundance, these discrepancies highlight how individual decisions shaped the specific forms that the destabilization of food sovereignty and security took on each reserve.

Within this chapter, I examine how the 1895 banning of the Sundance contributed to the diminishment of Blackfoot food sovereignty. I begin by examining the variation in how Indian Agents across the three Blackfoot reserves described the Sundance prior to the ban. Specifically, I focus on highlighting the inconsistencies in the treatment of the Sundance by Indian Agents. From there, I explore how the Department of Indian Affairs gradually shifted toward a more uniform policy of suppression, focusing on how colonial officials framed the Sundance as a disruption to

labour and productivity. I then compare these claims to agricultural yield data collected by the Department to assess the weight of these concerns. Finally, I examine the broader social impacts of the ceremony ban, including its effects on intergenerational knowledge and community ties, which are vital to Blackfoot food sovereignty.

3.1 ARCHIVAL SOURCES AND GENERAL THEMES

The historical documents analyzed in this section include the *Department of Indian Affairs Annual reports* (1880–1913), and the *Department of Indian Affairs Letterboxes* (1877–1913). I also reviewed the *Reports of the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs (1877-1879)*; however, these reports do not contain information on the Sundance.

My primary focus is on the annual reports, which offer detailed insights into federal and local colonial perspectives on the Sundance and shifts in the rationale for banning the ceremony over time. While the letterboxes are occasionally referenced, they are not central to the analysis due to the limited information they contain. The remainder of this section explores key themes identified in the annual reports, particularly those related to the Blackfoot Nations and the Sundance.

References to the Sundance, in relation to the Blackfoot (Siksika), Blood (Kainai), and Peigan (Piikani) Agencies, appear sporadically in *the Annual reports of the Department of Indian Affairs*. The earliest mention of the Sundance is in 1877, and the final mention is in 1908. Between 1877 and 1913, 24 mentions of the Sundance appear as illustrated in Figure 1. Of the total mentions, eleven are from the Blackfoot (Siksika) agency, six are from the Blood (Kainai) agency, two are from the Peigan (Piikani) agency, and the remaining four are general remarks about the North-West Territories.

Mentions of the Sundance within the annual reports vary, but I broadly categorized the mentions into seven sub-themes, Figure 2 shows a visual representation.

- **Sub-theme one:** Colonial agents' expressions of hope or uncertainty regarding the ceremony's decline.
- **Sub-theme two:** Framing of the Sundance as a disruption to economic activities such as agriculture or ranching.
- **Sub-theme three:** Status of the ceremony ban and reports of continued practice.
- **Sub-theme four:** Discourse on eliminating perceived "torture" (Department of Indian Affairs, 1884, p. 197) practices.
- **Sub-theme five:** Suppression of broader Indigenous cultural and economic practices.
- **Sub-theme six:** Generalized complaints.
- **Sub-theme seven:** Rejection of the Nation's request for food items related to the ceremony.

I first examine the variation in colonial perspectives towards the Sundance prior to the 1895 ceremonial ban, focusing on sub-theme one and four. The section highlights how Indian Agents' approaches ranged from passive tolerance to active modification, reflecting inconsistent colonial strategies. Then, I analyze the shift toward a more uniform policy after 1895 by examining sub-theme three, five and seven. This section explores the Department of Indian Affairs' increasing involvement in surveillance and enforcement after the ceremony ban. The next section addresses sub-theme two. This section compares Indian Agents' narratives about labour interference with agricultural data to assess whether the Department of Indian Affairs' agricultural data supported concerns about productivity. Finally, I explore how the ceremony's suppression impacted community well-being and cultural continuity, especially among working men and children. These archival patterns reveal how the criminalization of the Sundance began destabilizing Blackfoot

food sovereignty by disrupting sacred practice, self-determination, and participating in the intergenerational transmission of knowledge

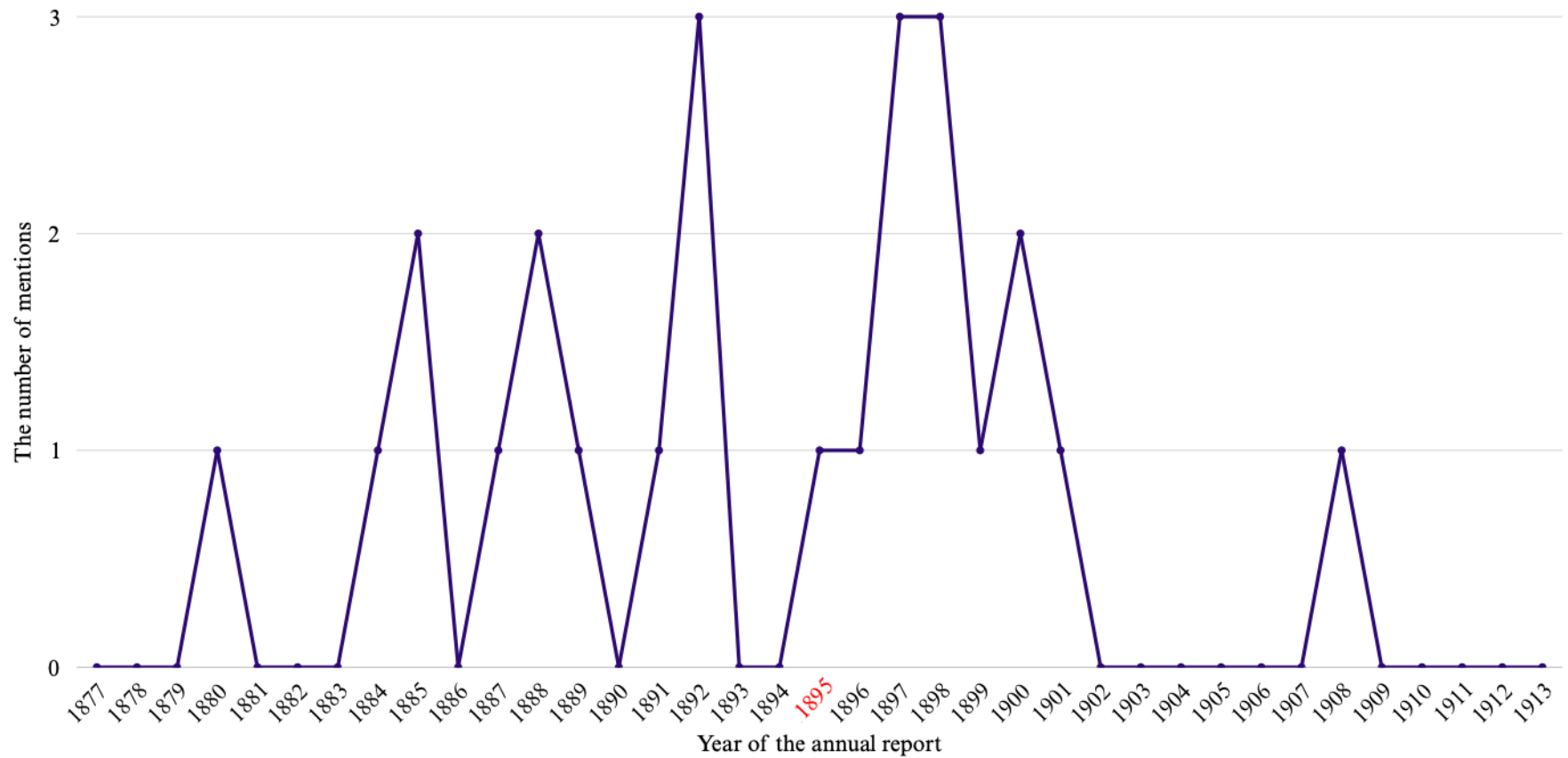


Figure 1: Mentions of the Sundance in relation to the Blackfoot Confederacy within the Department of Indian Affairs annual reports.

Note. The Sundance ban occurred in 1895. The data is drawn from the *Reports of the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs (1877–1879)* and the *Department of Indian Affairs Annual Reports (1880–1913)*. Additionally, the date for banning of the Sundance is highlighted in red.

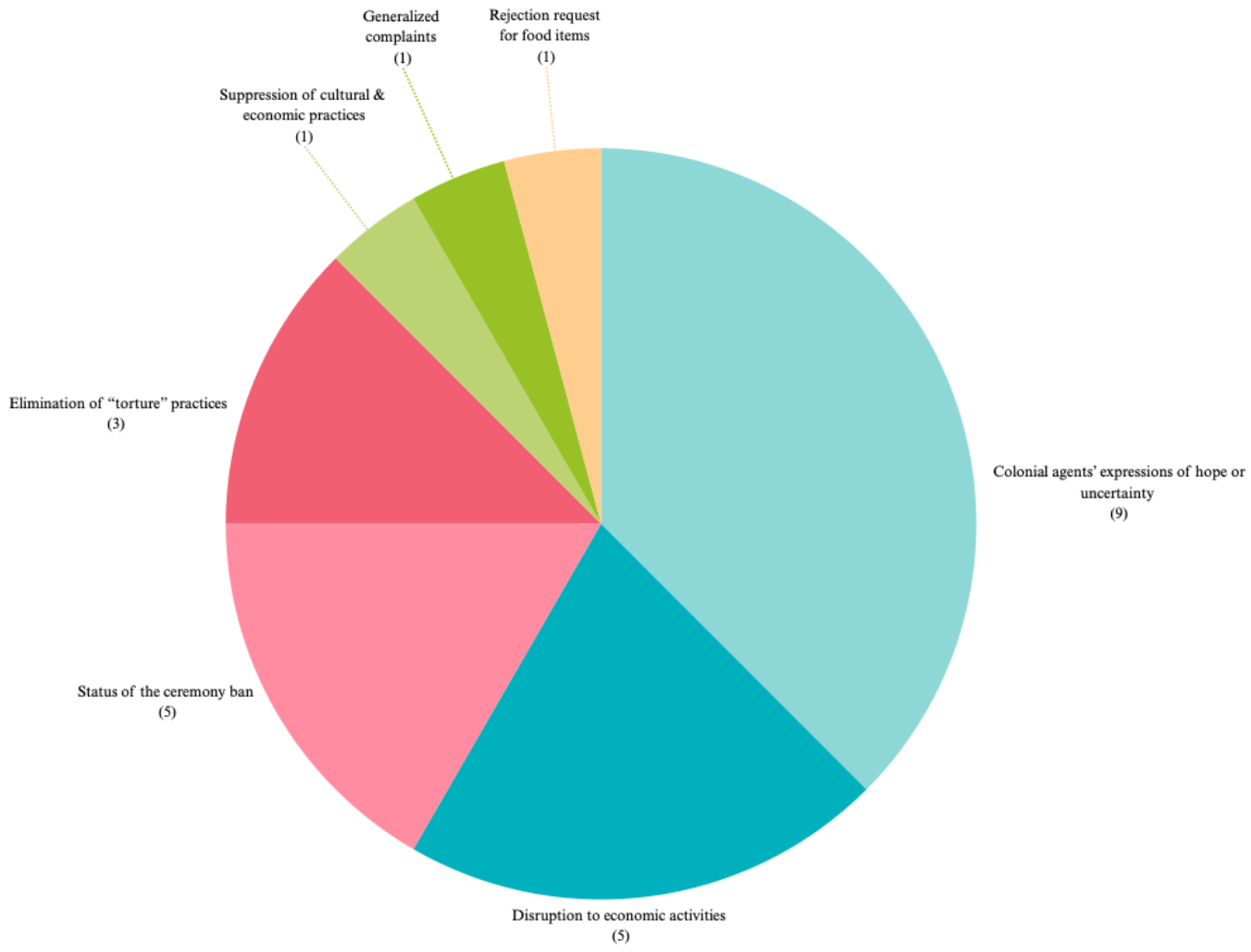


Figure 2: Breakdown of the seven sub-themes in the Indian Affairs Reports (1877-1913) relating to the Sundance.

3.2 VARYING COLONIAL PERSPECTIVES TOWARDS THE SUNDANCE PRIOR TO THE BAN

The Department's passive stance is reflected in both official reports and the actions of Indian Agents stationed on the Blackfoot (Siksika), Blood (Kainai), and Peigan (Piikani) reserves. To explore the Department of Indian Affairs' passive stance, and the differing perspectives of Indian Agents prior to the ceremony ban, I begin by analyzing the most prominent thematic category in the annual reports: the hope or uncertainty that Sundance would gradually disappear and the colonial discourse surrounding the elimination of perceived "torture" practices (Department of Indian Affairs, 1884).

In the late 1800s, the Department of Indian Affairs' general stance on the Sundance was that the ceremony would gradually disappear through assimilation policies. Therefore, the Department of Indian Affairs does not present a cohesive stance for preventing the Sundance until after the 1895 ceremony ban. Rather, the discourse surrounding the Sundance before the ceremony ban typically varied among Indian Agents and changed over time. For instance, the first mention of the Sundance related to the Blackfoot Nations was in 1884 by Pocklington, the acting agent in Treaty No. 7. In the 1884 annual report, Pocklington expresses skepticism about the ceremony's decline in his report by stating: "It is very unlikely that this custom will soon die out, as the Indians still look upon it as the great event of the year" (Department of Indian Affairs, 1884, p. 197).

The following year, Pocklington's stance changed as he began repeatedly claiming the participation in the Sundance was declining despite continued participation. In the years to come Pocklington frequently expressed disdain for the Sundance throughout his reports in the late 1800s. He is often seen expressing the belief that the Sundance is dying out despite evidence to the contrary. In 1885, Pocklington remarks, "If left alone, the Sundance will soon have ceased to be

the great festival of the year"(Department of Indian Affairs, 1886, p. 170). Later in 1887, he reiterates this belief by stating that in "a few years more [the Department of Indian Affairs] will probably see the end of [the Sundance]" (Department of Indian Affairs, 1888, p. 262). Pocklington's remarks appear to reflect the Department of Indian Affairs' passive stance towards the Sundance. While he does not specify the reasoning behind his belief, Pocklington's comments are likely an attempt to mirror the Department's priorities, such as pushing for transition to agriculture (discussed in Chapter 5) and the advancing of broader assimilation policies (discussed in Chapter 4).

In the annual report for 1888, the passive stance is officially seen beyond individual Indian Agents, with Edgar Dewdney, the Lieutenant Governor of the Northwest Territories, giving the following statement:

[O]ther civilizing influences under which the Indians of the Northwest are being constantly brought, the gradual abandonment by many of their old heathen celebrations, such as the Sundance, was to be looked for... (Department of Indian Affairs, 1888, p. 61).

Dewdney's statement reflects the belief that assimilation policies, such as residential schools or the shift to agriculture, will inevitably cause Indigenous ceremonies to disappear without the need for direct intervention. However, the non-direct approach to addressing the continual practice of the Sundance was not implemented by all Indian Agents following Dewdney's statement.

Other agents, such as Agent Magnus Begg from the Blackfoot (Siksika) agency, appeared less convinced that the Sundance would naturally disappear over time. In the 1888 annual report, Begg adopted a more active approach to modifying the ceremony, as evidenced in his statement:

The 'Sundance' was not a success, as 'Crowfoot' gave me his assistance to do away—as much as possible—with the torture act, which is undergone by candidates for the title of 'brave' (Department of Indian Affairs, 1888, p. 269).

Unlike Pocklington or Dewdney, Begg sought to directly alter the ceremony by targeting specific elements. His reports frequently focus on eliminating the so-called ‘torture’ practices, which refers specific chest piercing components of dances (Flynn & Doolittle, 2015), suggesting that he viewed this as a means of reducing participation in the Sundance. In the reports, Begg’s focus on the elimination of perceived ‘torture’ recurs across several of his reports and creates a majority of the content categorized under sub-theme four. Although Begg took a more interventionist stance in modifying certain aspects of the ceremony, there is little evidence to suggest that he intended to abolish the Sundance entirely prior to the 1895 ban.

3.3 SHIFTS TOWARDS A UNIFORM POLICY AFTER THE BANNING OF THE SUNDANCE

The banning of the Sundance in 1895 came with a shift in how the Department of Indian Affairs addressed the continual practice of the ceremony. Prior to the ban, the Department of Indian Affairs’ stance on the treatment of the Sundance was inconsistent and passive, and it was often dependent on the Indian Agent. However, this began to change after 1895, as the department adopted a more hands-on and active approach to the suppression of Sundance as part of the official ban. This section I will show the shift in the Department of Indian Affairs’ policy stance on the Sundance and their attempt towards a more uniform policy. Therefore, in this section, I will focus on the status of the ceremony ban and continued practice (sub-theme three), the suppression of Indigenous practices (sub-theme five), the rejection for food items requests (sub-theme seven), and mentions of disruption to labour (sub-theme two).

The stance of the Department of Indian Affairs does not appear directly after the ban but several years later in 1900. In the period between 1895 and 1900, a majority of statements in the annual reports addressing the Sundance are from Indian Agents, mostly from Blackfoot (Siksika)

reserve. One of the first statements on the Sundance after the ban is found in the 1896 annual report by Begg, he states the following:

For the second year in succession, we have not any "sun-dance" upon the reserve, and this old pagan ceremony, I think, has died out for good. The working men who, as a rule, gave liberally towards its support, get nothing in return, and, interfering as it did, just at the busy season, it lessened their earnings and caused them to ignore it entirely; and now even the old men take it for granted that they have seen the last of it. This summer the Indians have not even gathered into large camps, as formerly. Some made the attempt, but they were told it would not be tolerated, and they afterwards quietly dispersed to their own places, and in this way I hope to stop, in part, at least, their migratory habits (Department of Indian Affairs, 1897, p. 279).

The statement above amalgamates several themes seen throughout the annual reports regarding the Sundance. The first is the persistent belief that the Sundance is disappearing despite agents constantly reporting the continual practice of the ceremony for several more years within the annual reports. The second is the economic disruption the Sundance poses. While the next section delves into specifics, it is important to acknowledge that colonial officials often framed the issues with the Sundance as interfering with economic activities such as harvests or ranching within the annual reports. However, the statement above stands out from others as Begg explicitly discusses the attempt to disrupt 'migratory habits and community ties with the restriction to gatherings.

The disruption of 'migratory habits' aligns with colonial notions of civilization and fixed settlement, as discussed in Chapter 5. In relation to the Sundance and other ceremonies, seasonality plays a vital role in preparation. As Rosie Red Crow explains, "the first sound of thunder" signaled the time to begin preparing for the Sundance (Treaty 7 Elders et al., 1996, p. 86). Even the dishes served or used during ceremonies, such as berry soup, were tied to seasonal cycles of harvesting (Treaty 7 Elders et al., 1996). These examples show that ceremonial practices were deeply interconnected with land-based knowledge, mobility, and seasonal food systems, as well as with community structures. For instance, removing children from day schools to likely participate in

harvesting (Department of Indian Affairs, 1892). Therefore, the disruption of seasonal mobility has far-reaching effects on Blackfoot food sovereignty, including destabilizing human–environment relationships and the transfer of intergenerational knowledge of land-use practices.

The obstruction of seasonal mobility as part of a broader move toward more active suppression of the ceremony marks a shift in policy implementation. However, differences in implementation of the ceremony ban across agencies remained. For example, in the 1897 annual report, agents reported that both the Blood (Kainai) and Peigan (Piikani) reserves did have a Sundance that year. In both cases, agents undertook different strategies to disincentivize celebrating the Sundance. For the Blood (Kainai) reserve, the Indian Agent attempted to replace the Sundance with an alternative gathering called “Dominion Day sports” (Department of Indian Affairs, 1898, p. 264). While the report does not contain much information on the Dominion Day festival, the strategy for replacement is clear. That said, reporting of the continuation of the sports festival is unclear within future editions of the annual report.

However, replacing the Sundance with a settler festival was not a standard practice. Unlike the Blood (Kainai) reserve, the Peigan (Piikani) reserve did not receive the opportunity for an alternative festival. In the Peigan (Piikani) section of the report, the agent stated the following: “The Indians wished to have a sun dance this summer, but after a little persuasion gave up the idea” (Department of Indian Affairs, 1898, p. 312). The statement is vague, but does suggest that despite the ban, the Piikani (Peigan) Nation intended to hold a Sundance and in the face of opposition. The type of opposition or ‘persuasion’ the Nation faced is not discussed in the annual reports.

Two years later, in the 1899 annual report, the Blackfoot (Siksika) reserve faced similar treatment to the Peigan (Piikani) reserve as the Indian Agent Wheatley from Blackfoot (Siksika) agency began restricting food items relating to the ceremony. The following quote discusses the occurrence:

The Indians held their sun dance in August, a later period than usual. The reason of the delay was, the chiefs were under the impression that I would relent and give them assistance to hold this dance, in the shape of beef tongues and paunches, which of course I refused to do (Department of Indian Affairs, 1900, p. 249).

This statement is the only direct connection in the annual reports between the Sundance and food. Despite being the only instance, the statement provides valuable information on how Indian Agents on the Blackfoot (Siksika) reserve began actively suppressing ceremonial practices and what practices were in place before the ban—specifically, the access to beef tongues and paunches from the butcher houses.

Bison tongues are known components of the Sundance (Barsh & Marlor, 2003; Weasel Head, 2005). For instance, Barsh and Marlor (2003) note that bison tongues and berries were part of ritual meals connected to the ceremony. Although the specific ceremonial use of paunches, or stomachs, remains unclear, Plains communities have historically used bison stomachs as cooking vessels (The Blackfoot Gallery Committee, 2013). According to Brinks (2008), hunters regarded organ meats such as livers, kidneys, stomachs, and hearts as “choice pieces” (p. 169) following bison hunts. Therefore, the consumption of organ meats is not unusual. In his 2005 interview, Frank Weasel Head explained that as bison populations declined, communities adapted by using beef tongues as ceremonial replacements (Weasel Head, 2005). Moreover, the restriction on these items suggests that before the ban the community was likely able to access specific food for the ceremony.

Despite the gradual shift towards a uniform policy, treatments and strategies for suppressing the Sundance remained varied until the 1900s when the Department of Indian Affairs began providing more direction in its annual reports. In 1900, the Department of Indian Affairs began to discuss its stance on the Sundance in the annual report. In annual report for that year, there are early indication of the department's shift in policy, particularly where Deputy Superintendent Jas Smart stated the following:

The Sun Dance, the Tamanawas and the Potlach festivals help to keep alive habits and practices which are most objectionable, but, as they have their religious and economic features, the Department's policy has been to suppress the worst features and wait for time and other influences to do the rest (Department of Indian Affairs, 1901a, p. 42).

In Smart's statement, he provides more justification for enforcing the ceremony ban and directives on what ceremony features harm the implementation of State's assimilation policies, such as agriculture and ranching. Unlike Dewdney's statement in 1888, Smart focuses on two features of ceremonial practice, which are religious and economic practices. The religious aspects of the ceremony ban align with Begg's actions towards the removal of specific ceremonial practices that colonial agents consider uncivilized, namely the 'torture' acts.

For Smarts, his concern is not the religious practices, but destabilization of the economic components of the Sundance. In the letter, when he discusses breaking up a Sundance ceremony on the Blackfoot (Siksika) reserve, Smart recounts the instruction given to Indian Agents to "discountenance the dances in every possible way, to forbid their illegal features, and to restore to their former owners, horses and other property given away as presents" (Department of Indian Affairs, 1901a, p. 378). In this instance, the disruption to the ceremony appears to be focused on socioeconomic practices and, by extension, community cohesion.

Broadly speaking, the Sundance served both social and spiritual functions, as it was a time when all members of the Blackfoot Nation came together (Weasel Head, 2005). Community cohesion, as part of the social function, created important spaces for food sharing and the transmission of intergenerational knowledge. The Sundance also provided opportunities for other key rituals, “including marriages, transfer ceremonies, and medicine pipe ceremonies” (Treaty 7 Elders et al., 1996, p. 84). As such, colonial efforts to suppress the Sundance also disrupted the broader social structures interwoven with Blackfoot spiritual life, which in turn disrupted the ability to maintain and pass down traditional knowledge.

Although the ban occurred in 1895, the suppression of the Sundance was not instantaneous. In the 1900 report, Smart noted, “[o]ne of the drawbacks of prosecution is the great difficulty to get any of the Indians to give information against the ringleaders in the illegal practices” (Department of Indian Affairs, 1901a, p. 378). In the following years, reported occurrences of the Sundance decreased, but when they did appear within the annual reports, the department began to take a more active role in the surveillance. For instance, in 1901, the Blood (Kainai) agency reported the following: “This year the Blood Indians again held a sun dance and were camped together for over four weeks. A large party of Blackfeet, North Peigans and Sarcees were also present to assist them” (Department of Indian Affairs, 1901b, p. 377). A year later, in 1902, the Department of Indian Affairs sent the following letter about the Blood (Kainai) agency: “Have you been advised of the reported Sundance Blood Reserve. If so, what has been done to carry out the Department’s policy regarding such dances” (McClean, 1902). The letter is likely referring to the 1901 Sundance rather than a more recent occurrence; however, the exchange showcases the department begins to take a more active role in the surveillance of policy implementation.

The active role of the Department of Indian Affairs in the suppression of the ceremony may be a reason for the shift towards a uniform policy stance by 1908. As in 1908, the Department of Indian Affairs adopted a stronger stance on the belief that assimilation policies were successful and, if the policies continued to be enforced, the Sundance would disappear in time. Deputy Superintendent Frank Pedley's opening report in the 1908 annual reports encapsulates this sentiment, where he states the following concerning the Sundance:

The policy of the Department in this and kindred directions has been to confine prohibitive legislation to the repression of the most conspicuously objectionable features of what was deemed objectionable and to trust as far as possible to the influence of Christian civilization to engender a public feeling on the reserves hostile to such celebrations, and thus lead to their voluntary abandonment (Department of Indian Affairs, 1908, p. 31).

The features deemed objectionable in the statement echoes back to the spiritual and economic practices, likely 'torture practices and agriculture, mentioned in Smart's 1900s statement. More importantly, Pedley's statement represents a shift towards framing the banning of Indigenous ceremonies as religious rather than economic, such as disruptions to agriculture or sub-theme two—which will be discussed in detail in the subsequent section. This statement by Pedley is one of the first direct mentions of Christian civilization concerning the ceremony ban in a context relating to the Blackfoot Nations. In addition, the shift in policy stance reinforces the naturalizing of assimilation policies by Indian Agents through the belief that Indigenous ceremonies are bound to disappear as part of assimilating into Christian civilization.

In short, the Department of Indian Affairs began to move towards an active and more uniform policy to address the continual practice of the Sundance between 1895 and 1908. The shift from passive to active suppression of Sundance is shown in the increasingly direct interventions and likely the increase in surveillance. Additionally, the thesis examines the discourse surrounding the banning of Sundance, which is reframed as part of Christian civilization, including the adoption

of Christianity and the shift towards settler economic practices. The latter is the focus of the following section, in that the aim is to explore how colonial agents framed the Sundance as a direct disruption to labour and economic productivity or sub-theme two.

3.4 COLONIAL NARRATIVES ABOUT THE SUNDANCE AS DISRUPTION TO LABOR AND ECONOMIC PRODUCTIVITY

Within the broader context of the destabilization of Indigenous food security and sovereignty, the criminalization of the Sundance was closely tied to colonial efforts to reshape Blackfoot economies. Therefore, this section explores the connection between the criminalization of the Sundance and the implementation of colonial economic systems, such as agriculture, ranching, and wage labour. Drawing from annual reports between 1877 and 1913, this section highlights how the Sundance was framed as a barrier to labour and productivity, which addresses sub-theme two. I present this section in the following order. First, I analyze the narratives Indian Agents present in the annual reports where the Sundance is discussed in relation to the disruption to agricultural labour and economic progress. Next, I compare these narratives with agricultural yield data reported to the Department of Indian Affairs to assess whether the concerns expressed in the reports aligned with measurable outcomes. Finally, I consider how these narratives and data patterns contributed to shifting departmental policies, and how these changes could have further disrupted Blackfoot food systems and sovereignty.

Prior to the 1895 ceremony ban, a major belief held by the Department of Indian Affairs was the presumption that the Sundance would disappear as a byproduct of successful assimilation policies. Agriculture played a role in the policy goals for assimilation and civilization within the Dominion of Canada. In this context, participation in agriculture was seen as “a civilizing occupation” (Samek, 1987, p. 56), requiring people to settle in a location. Additionally, the

Dominion of Canada saw the implementation of agriculture as a method to cut financial support to Indigenous Nations; there is considerable discussion in the annual report regarding the self-sufficiency of reservations, which is discussed in Chapter 4 and 5. Although agriculture is a tool for the Dominion of Canada, Nations under Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty) negotiated for support, such as tools and instruction, for agriculture as “they could no longer rely on the buffalo for subsistence” (Treaty 7 Elders et al., 1996, p. 210).

Within annual reports, Indian Agents monitored the transition to agriculture and the hurdles the reserve encountered, including the disruption to labour. Often in the reports, Indian Agents associate the Sundance as a disruption to labour and agriculture. The earliest example is in the 1887 annual report, in which Pocklington, on the Blood (Kainai) reserve, reported the following:

I experienced considerable difficulty in getting potatoes cleaned, as at that time the Sundance was going on and work to some extent abandoned. At the same time I must say that this annual festival is gradually but surely losing its old-time importance; a few years more will probably see the end of it (Department of Indian Affairs, 1888, p. 262).

Pocklington’s statement highlights the tension between the implementation of agricultural policies and the Sundance. The statement highlights the abandonment of agricultural work, particularly potato processing, in favor of ceremonial activities. Potatoes appear frequently in the annual reports with Indian Agents referencing the consumption and the incorporation of potatoes in the Blackfoot diets—refer to Chapter 4. Although the incorporation of potatoes in Blackfoot diets does not automatically suggest food security as a component, food security also encompasses food availability, which emphasizes dietary or cultural preferences. From the archival document I examined, the indigenization of potatoes, or even preferences of potatoes outside of colonial perception, is uncertain and requires further research.

That said, the focus on ceremony interfering with agricultural labour draws attention to the increasing frustration of colonial officials regarding how the Blackfoot Peoples were integrating agricultural practices with their sociocultural and spiritual traditions. Although Pocklington focuses on the abandonment of work, the potatoes harvested on the Blood (Kainai) reserve for that year was around 986 bushels (Department of Indian Affairs, 1888), which is second highest crop yields on the Blood (Kainai) Reserve that year as seen in Figure 4.

Additionally, unlike the commonly held presumption by colonial officials, the Blackfoot People did not halt sociocultural and spiritual traditions in favour of agriculture; rather, they seem to have worked with them. The complaint by colonial officials that ceremonies were disrupting agricultural labour is referenced in Frank Weasel Head's interview in 2005, when he discusses the Sundance being driven underground. In the interview Weasel Head talks about the people shortening components of the ceremony to lessen the risk of detection (Weasel Head, 2005).

As time progressed, the complaints by Indian Agents discussing the Sundance focused primarily on the ceremony's disruption to agricultural labour. A sentiment seen in the Mangus Begg annual report in 1892 concerning the Piegan (Piikani) agency, where he states the following:

So soon as, the Indians had finished putting in their crops they formed two camps and began preparations for the Sundance, this was a very miserable spectacle, the dance proper only lasting two and a half days. Unlike previous years, I had little difficulty in getting the Indians to look after potatoes and gardens (Department of Indian Affairs, 1892, p. 335).

Begg's reporting on labour disruptions is different. For one, Begg recognizes that agricultural work was not abandoned; instead, the community accommodated both ceremony and agriculture. However, the archival records do not provide insight into the details or decisions made by the communities in planning agricultural labour around the Sundance. From Begg's reporting, there appears to be a level of community planning that the Indian Agents were not privy to this

information. Despite the Peigan Reserve's efforts to manage both the Sundance and agricultural activities, Begg continued to frame the ceremony as a disruption to labour. In his final sentence, he retrospectively constructed a narrative of labour disruption in 1892. However, the annual reports themselves undermine this claim with several instances where agents comment positively on harvests or labour efforts during that period, suggesting agricultural work often continued alongside ceremonial life.

Much of the archival evidence about resistance to colonial policies emerges only after officials consider those policies successful. Indian Agents, including Begg, often reported implementation challenges only once they perceived the problem to be under control. In this case, although Begg acknowledged improvements in agricultural participation, he maintained that the Sundance remained an obstacle—revealing the ongoing tension between assimilation goals, acculturation and Indigenous resilience. While Begg frames the issue in economic terms, there remains an underlying objective of cultural assimilation and the failure of agriculture to succeed in advancing the civilization agenda as colonial officials envision. As the belief in the "natural" disappearance of Indigenous practices gave way to disappointment, colonial agents increasingly adopted more active and interventionist approaches. The transition from passive policy to active suppression reflects this shift, as seen in the changing tone and content of the annual reports on the Sundance. Additionally, the complaints by colonial officials regarding the Sundance disrupting agriculture does not align with agricultural data collected by the department.

3.5 HARVEST DATA TRENDS, 1877–1913

Beginning in the 1882 annual report, the Department of Indian Affairs began collecting agricultural data across reserves, including the Blackfoot Nations. Since the transition to agriculture the acceptance of civilization, tracking this data plays an important role in

understanding the variation in the implementation of colonial policies. Therefore, this section examines the disconnect between the data collected on agricultural yields and how Indian Agents interpreted fluctuations concerning the Sundance and economic productivity.

Despite frequent assertions in the annual reports that the Sundance disrupted agricultural productivity, the yield data collected between 1877 and 1913 do not provide clear support for these claims. When I examine harvest records from three agencies, an opposing narrative emerges as the data does not show a miraculous increase in the agricultural yields after the 1895 ban; instead, the agricultural data collected illustrates an opposing scenarios as there are notable differences in agricultural yields on the three reserves, which are likely a variation in the implementation of agriculture policy on the three reserves. For instance, as illustrated in Figures 3, 4, and 5, there were notable decreases in agricultural yields and crop variety in both the Blackfoot (Siksika) and Blood (Kainai) reserves after 1895; however, the Peigan (Piikani) reserves experienced an increase in both agricultural yields and crop variety.

Agricultural crops on the Blackfoot reserves largely abide by the crops in the written Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty) agreement—potatoes, barley, oats and wheat (The Department of the Interior, 1966). While other crops were grown to varying degrees, typically, the most productive crops are a combination of the aforementioned crop types. For example, on the Blackfoot (Siksika) reserve, agriculture consistently revolved around potatoes, with turnips and oats playing secondary roles. As shown in Figure 3, potatoes dominate the Blackfoot (Siksika) crop mix, followed by smaller, more variable plantings of turnips and oats. While both the Blood (Kainai) and the Pegan (Piikani) reserves grew predominately potatoes, oats, and wheat as show in Figure 4 and 5 respectively. While the colonial documents I examined do not provide a clear rationale for the variation in crops across the three reserves, the crop preference may have been influenced by

dietary preferences, colonial agricultural demands, or environmental capacity; however, the reasoning behind crop variations, aside from the Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty) clauses, requires further investigation.

Due to potato yields often outperforming other crops, Indian Agents appear to tie the successful transition to agricultural and economic productivity with potatoes. The relationship between potato yields and agricultural productivity by Indian Agents is further entwined with the perceived success of colonial agricultural policy. In other words, the failure or success of potatoes symbolized the perceived success or failure of colonial agricultural policies, and by extension, the effectiveness of individual Indian Agents in enforcing the Department of Indian Affairs orders. To refer back to Pocklington's remarks in 1887, the colonial narrative tends to link the Sundance to disruptions in agricultural labour and declining productivity, regardless of the acknowledgement in other annual reports that weather events impact a lot of poor yields, rather than a lack of labour (Department of Indian Affairs, 1888). In fact, 1887 marks the highest recorded potato yield for the Siksika (Blackfoot) reserve in the entire 35-year span I examined. As shown in Figure 3, potato yields begin to decline in the years following 1895. While the Blood (Kainai) reserve shows slight variation in its primary crops, growing wheat and oats, potato yields followed a trend comparable to the Blackfoot (Siksika) reserve. However, unlike potatoes, the other two major crops on the Blood (Kainai) reserve are wheat and oats. Prior to 1897, both wheat and potatoes produced fairly consistent yields. However, after the ban, wheat yields decreased significantly, leaving potatoes as the sole crop type to produce significant yields until around 1908, when wheat yields increased to 23,000 bushels. Although this decline aligns with the 1895 ceremony ban, it also coincides with a broader policy shift toward ranching, a topic explored further in Chapter 5.

Unlike the Blackfoot (Siksika) and Blood (Kainai) reserves, the Peigan (Piikani) reserve displays a distinct pattern in agricultural yields, as illustrated in Figure 5. The Peigan (Piikani) reserve did not have a single dominant crop; its yields fluctuated between oats and potatoes as the leading crops. While the Blackfoot (Siksika) and Blood (Kainai) reserves consistently produced higher yields, particularly potatoes, the Peigan (Piikani) reserve typically recorded harvests below 5,000 bushels until 1913, when wheat production spiked unexpectedly. The reasoning or explanation for the lower harvest is not explicitly discussed in the annual reports for 1877 to 1913.

After banning the Sundance in 1895, agricultural yields on the Blackfoot (Siksika) and Blood (Kainai) reserves showed no signs of stability or growth. The differences in agricultural yields among the three Blackfoot Nations became more pronounced after the ban. The Blood (Kainai) reserve, for example, experienced a marked decline in overall production and increasingly relied on the sale of hay, which consisted of uncultivated prairie grasses rather than farmed crops. This shift from agriculture to ranching may help explain the substantial decline in yields on the Blackfoot (Siksika) and Blood (Kainai) reserves. Although potatoes remained an important crop, by the early 1900s, yields had diminished significantly. These trends suggest that agricultural outcomes increasingly reflected the evolving priorities of colonial policy under Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty), particularly the transition from agriculture to ranching.

The Peigan (Piikani) reserve, by contrast, does not follow the patterns observed on the other Blackfoot reserves. Rather than experiencing a post-1904 increase in hay production alone, the Peigan (Piikani) reserve shows a rise across all major crops. By 1913, wheat and oats reached their highest recorded yields on the reserve. However, the reasons behind this sudden increase in agricultural productivity are not clearly explained in the annual reports—Indian Agent W.B.L. Donald of the Peigan (Piikani) agency attributed the growth to consistent encouragement over

multiple seasons (Department of Indian Affairs, 1913). The agent also reported the presence of “[grain] elevators and warehouses” (Department of Indian Affairs, 1913, p.325) in and around the reserve; the increase in infrastructure likely allowed for an increase in sales of agricultural products but did not provide much reason for an increase in yields. In short, the reports provide no explicit explanation for the increase in agricultural yield for the Peigan (Piikani) reserve.

In relation to the Sundance and its perceived disruption of agricultural production, the rationale behind the 1895 ban does not appear completely rooted in the data collected by the Department of Indian Affairs. Although Indian Agents claimed banning the ceremony would enhance labour efficiency and increase crop yields, the data suggests otherwise. Following the 1895 ban and the last documented instance of the Sundance in 1902 on the Blood (Kainai) reserve (McLean, 1902), yields declined across most reserves, except for the Peigan (Piikani) reserve.

Despite these trends, Indian Agents continued to frame the policy as a success and aligned it with the department’s broader economic agenda. However, the decrease in agricultural yields is likely reflective of departmental policy shifts rather than individual interests; as towards the 1900s, the department began to shift its interest towards ranching and wage work as a means to achieve economic self-sufficiency on reserves (refer to Chapter 5). That said, the differentiation between agricultural products consumed by reserve members versus the sale of agricultural products is not discussed within the annual reports. However, Indian Agents do mention the inclusion of potatoes in Blackfoot diets, but not extensively (see Chapter 4).

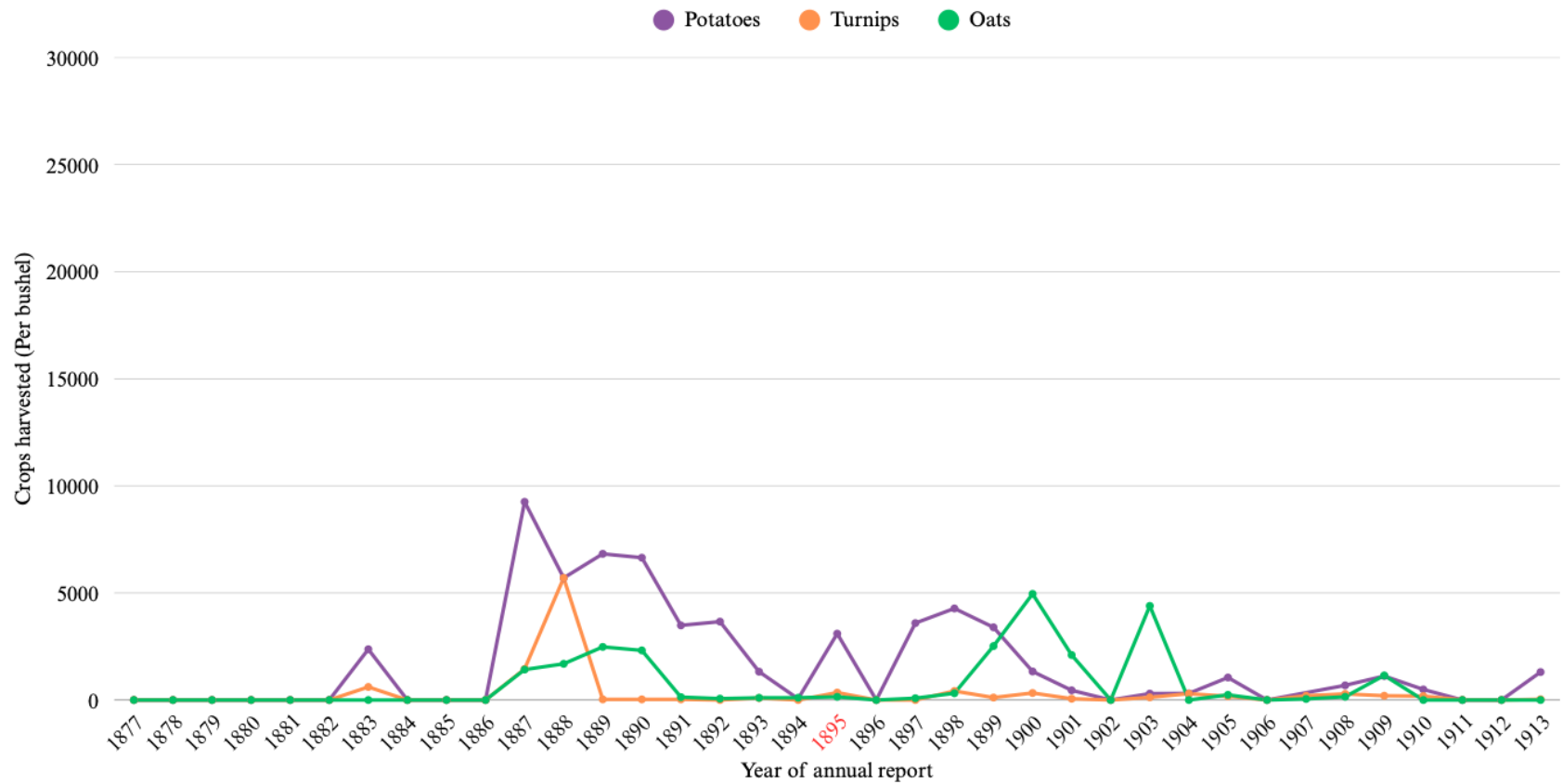


Figure 3: Harvest yields (per bushels) of the top three crops on the Blackfoot (Siksika) reserve between 1877 and 1913.

Note. Data is derived from the Reports of the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs (1877–1879) and the Department of Indian Affairs Annual Reports (1880–1913). The decreases in the graph for 1902 and 1912 are a result of no reports being issued for those years. Additionally, the date for banning Sundance is highlighted in red.

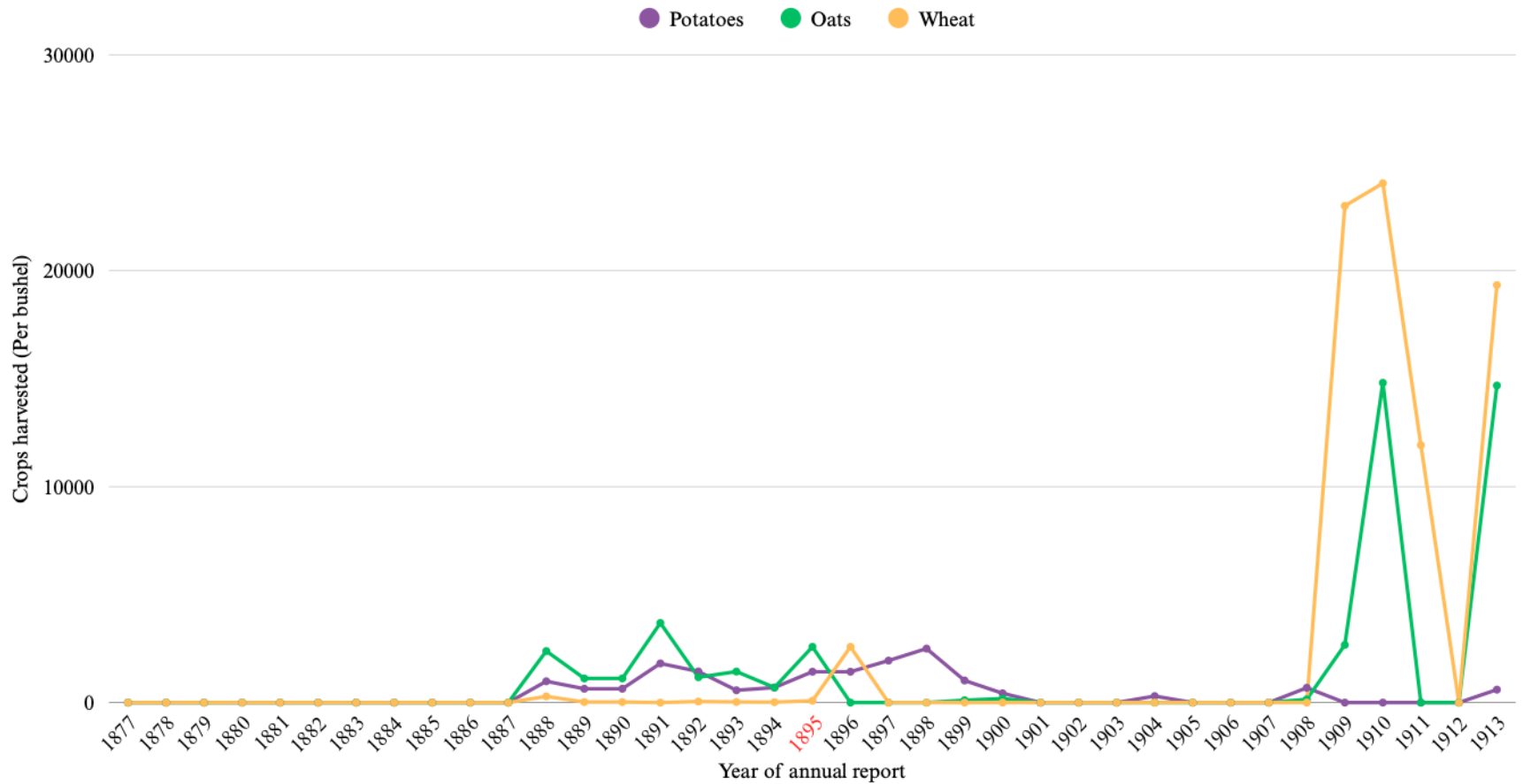


Figure 4: Harvest yields (per bushels) of the top three crops on the Blood (Kainai) reserve between 1877 and 1913.

Note. Data is derived from the *Reports of the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs* (1877–1879) and the *Department of Indian Affairs Annual Reports* (1880–1913). The decreases in the graph for 1902 and 1912 are a result of no reports being issued for those years. Additionally, the date for banning Sundance is highlighted in red.

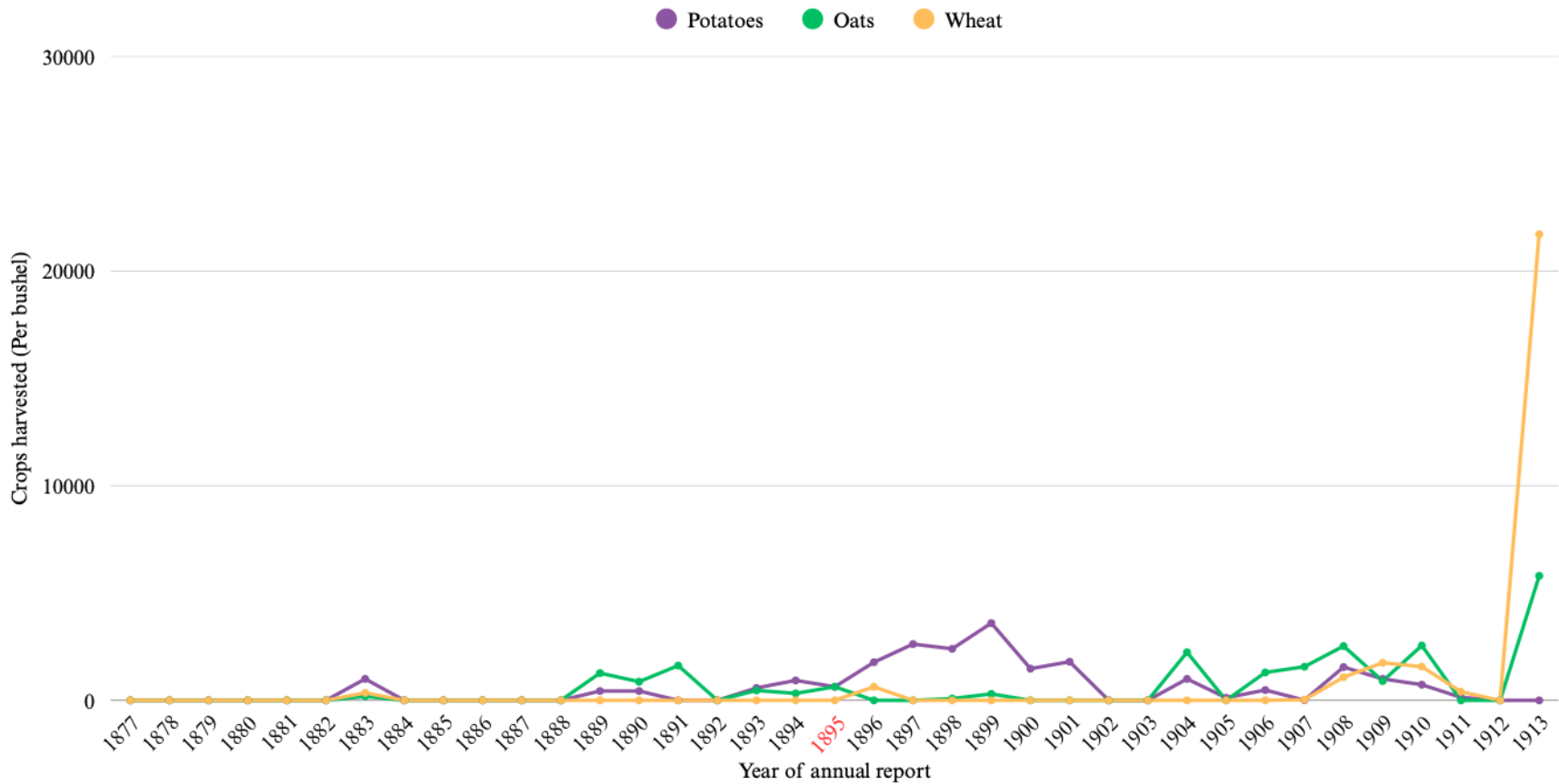


Figure 5: Harvest yields (per bushels) of the top three Crops on the Peigan (Piikani) reserve between 1877 and 1913.

Note. Data is derived from the *Reports of the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs* (1877–1879) and the *Department of Indian Affairs Annual Reports* (1880–1913). The decreases in the graph for 1902 and 1912 are a result of no reports being issued for those years. Additionally, the date for banning Sundance is highlighted in red

3.6 DISRUPTING THE COMMUNITY AND THE CEREMONY BAN

In addition to being a spiritual ceremony, the Sundance served as a gathering space where families and communities reinforced kinship ties, shared food, and passed on cultural knowledge. With the passing of the 1895 ceremonial ban, there were likely broader impacts on community well-being and intergenerational transmission of knowledge, concerns that are central in contemporary discussions of Indigenous food sovereignty (Natcher et al., 2016; Robin, 2019). While the Department of Indian Affairs' annual reports do not explicitly discuss the suppression of the Sundance as a threat to community well-being, they occasionally allude to the impacts of the ban on the community but often treat them as secondary outcomes of broader assimilation policies. The following section examines two such examples, in which Indian Agents primarily discuss the impact of the Sundance ban on agricultural labour, yet indirectly reveal differences in how various segments of the community, particularly working men and children, may have responded to the ceremony's suppression.

Unlike the frequent focus on agricultural disruption, references to the breakdown of community structures and intergenerational knowledge transfer appear only occasionally in the annual reports. When these topics are discussed within the reports, they are often framed as generational differences in attitudes toward the Sundance. One such example appears in an 1896 report, previously mentioned in this chapter, where Begg wrote:

The working men who, as a rule, gave liberally towards its [the Sundance] support, get nothing in return, and, interfering as it did, just at the busy season, it lessened their earnings and caused them to ignore it entirely; and now even the old men take it for granted that they have seen the last of it (Department of Indian Affairs, 1897, p. 259).

Due to the focus on labour and economic disruption, men are the focal point in Begg's remarks on generational tensions. The quote reflects how colonial officials used shifts in ceremonial

participation to affirm assimilation narratives: younger men's withdrawal from the ceremony is interpreted as *progress*. Begg frames the withdrawal of ceremony by younger men as attempting, or struggling, to meet the conflicting demands of wage labour and participating in ceremonial life. In Begg's perspective, the younger men focusing on wage-labour is a sign of civilization policies working.

Although Begg does not examine the generational tension in depth, the quote suggests a reluctance among older individuals to 'abandon' traditional practices such as ceremony. More broadly in the annual reports, generational or gender differences are tied to perceived acceptance of colonial policies. For example, unrelated to the Sundance, agents noted that Blackfoot men were 'progressing' faster than women because they began wearing "white men's clothes," whereas Blackfoot women were "slower" (Department of Indian Affairs, 1896, p. 278) or more reluctant to change their style of dress. In the context of the Sundance, the colonial discourse surrounding generational or gender differences appears limited to men and, on rare occasions, children—women are not mentioned despite being responsible for starting the ceremony (Treaty 7 Elders et al., 1996).

Generally, the discourse surrounding the ceremony began to shift in the reports, with Indian Agents beginning to frame the withdrawal from the ceremony as a sign of acceptance of colonial policies despite the criminalization of the ban and the ceremonies going underground (Weasel Head, 2005). With reporting on the Sundance shifting, Indian Agents increasingly focused on documenting how individuals spent their earnings. While the annual reports provide limited detail on expenditures, the items that were recorded reflect what colonial officials viewed as signs of assimilation, particularly purchases associated with private property, such as machinery and household items (Department of Indian Affairs, 1889, 1897). In rarer instances, Indian Agents also

noted the purchase of food and clothing. For example, the 1896 report for the Blood (Kainai)

Reserve states:

They have earned more money this year than in any previous season... The money earned has been well spent, the Indians as a rule purchasing mowers and rakes, wagons, harness, heavier working horses, cooking stoves and utensils, household goods and clothing, besides extra food (Department of Indian Affairs, 1897, p. 278).

Although these reports do not provide consistent data on individual spending, the inclusion of food and clothing suggests that some individuals may have used wages to supplement rations and improve food security under colonial constraints. Specifically, individuals from the Blood (Kainai) reserve with cash were improving their diets by adding "vegetables and fruits" (Department of Indian Affairs, 1899, p. 237) to their diet. Generally, food consumption and ration distribution are not tracked in any detail in the annual reports for the Blackfoot Nations. As a result, it is difficult to fully understand the strategies individuals undertook to support themselves or how they may have adapted to imposed economic pressures through the archival documents.

In addition to the 1896 annual report, the 1897 report reflects colonial concerns about generational tensions surrounding the Sundance. That year, Wheatly wrote the following regarding the Blackfoot (Kainai) reserve:

I hope, without much trouble, that this festival [the Sundance] will be done away with, as it is a great factor in stopping work that should be done, and most of the Indians who have taken cattle are against it. It is only the middleaged and old people who want it continued. I have also to mention that the girls in the boarding school did not go out to the camp this summer, as formerly. The boys were allowed out by the principal for thirteen days, on account of the assistant principal and matron leaving at the end of the June quarter, and the rest of the staff were released for the holidays (Department of Indian Affairs, 1898, p. 259).

Like Begg, Wheatly frames declining participation in the Sundance as evidence of successful assimilation and embracing colonial values. His report stands out, however, for its demographic framing: it contrasts those who continue to support the ceremony (namely, middle-aged and older

individuals) with those engaged in ranching, who are portrayed as having willingly rejected traditional practices. Rather than acknowledging the role of policy in curbing ceremonial participation, Wheatly presents this shift as a voluntary outcome of adopting settler economic roles. The annual reports thus reinforce colonial narratives by naturalizing the impacts of assimilation, while ignoring the structural criminalization that forced individuals to weigh the risk associated with participating in the Sundance.

Another unique element of Wheatley's 1897 quote is the mention of children and the implication of their previous ability to participate in ceremonial life prior to the 1895 ceremonial ban. Generally speaking, children are rarely mentioned in annual reports outside of the context of day, industrial and residential schools; therefore, commenting on the regulation of children's participation in ceremonial life reflects a growing strategy of colonial officials in disrupting cultural continuity across the entire community.

While the distinction between girls and boys is attributed to staffing constraints, it is difficult to determine whether ceremonial participation factored into these decisions, especially since both are mentioned in the same passage. Nonetheless, the report suggests a shift in how colonial officials choose to restrict the children's ability to participate in community gathering like the Sundance. The report does seem to suggest that, prior to the ban, children were able to leave school and attend such events. However, by 1897, this access appears to have diminished, potentially limiting their ability to participate in cultural practices and creating further barriers to intergenerational knowledge transmission.

3.7 CONCLUSION

Chapter 4 focuses on the banning of the Sundance and its impact on Blackfoot food sovereignty, particularly the notion of "destroy[ing] to replace" (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388). The banning

of the Sundance was part of a broader colonial strategy to restructure Blackfoot relationships with the land, food, and community to mirror those of settlers. The banning of the Sundance within annual reports centres around the process of *social evolution* and the acceptance of *civilization*. Prior to the ban, Indian Agents and the Department of Indian Affairs did not have a uniform method for suppressing the ceremony, as the general belief held by colonial officials was that through the implementation of colonial agricultural practices and restrictions on mobility, the community would inevitably lose interest in the Sundance. Essentially, although not directly stated by colonial officials, the belief was that the replacement and destabilization of Blackfoot food systems and land-use through the implementation of colonial agriculture would lead to the disappearance of the Sundance. That did not occur, which resulted in a policy change and the addition of the Sundance to the ceremonies banned under the Indian Act.

With the official banning of the ceremony in 1895, the annual reports shifted towards the uniform and active suppression of the Sundance, which involved restricting access to particular food items and physical gatherings. In the reports, however, the implementation of the ceremony ban varies across the three Blackfoot reserves, as there are differences in the colonial treatment of ceremonies before and after the official ban. Some Indian Agents attempted to replace the Sundance with alternative celebrations, such as Dominion Day, while others did not provide any alternatives, with the focus being on a more forceful response framed as persuasion. Although variations are mentioned across the three Blackfoot reserves, the general policy shift is from passive suppression toward a more uniform and active suppression after the official banning.

Furthermore, the banning of the Sundance disrupted all four pillars of Indigenous food sovereignty: sacred and divine relationships, self-determination, participation, and policy. Most evidently, restrictions on communal gatherings and ceremonial food items directly undermined

sacred practices central to Blackfoot food systems, which, in turn, disrupted the Blackfoot Nation's ability to maintain human-environmental relationships vital to land-use practices. Moreover, the imposition of settler agricultural models and ideologies of civilization further limited Blackfoot self-determination by constraining how agriculture could be integrated into existing cultural frameworks. Although this chapter touches on several pillars of Indigenous food sovereignty, further research is needed for a more detailed analysis.

In summary, the suppression of the Sundance was a conscious colonial effort to dismantle the Blackfoot's spiritual, cultural, and economic systems, which are essential components of food sovereignty. While the destabilization of food systems was a secondary outcome of broader assimilation policies, archival documents illustrate how colonial policies, such as the ceremony ban, disrupted ceremonial life and the ability of Nations to uphold human-environmental relationships as colonial officials sought to eliminate and replace Indigenous economies. Finally, by examining historical policies, this chapter provides a foundation for understanding how the implementation of colonial policies varied across the Blackfoot Nations with a specific focus on the impacts on Blackfoot food sovereignty.

CHAPTER 4: RATIONS, AND FOOD INSECURITY

People grazed horses and cattle, there were good gardens of potatoes and pumpkins, and a variety of crops were harvested by sickles and threshed by hand. But in the early years there were still “no restrictions on hunting”

-Dick Nice Cutter, in *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7* (p. 98)

For this chapter, I chose to include Dick Cutter’s quote from *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7* because it addresses one of my ongoing frustrations with the archival documents, specifically, the information that Indian Agents deemed unnecessary. While this chapter discusses food insecurity and rations, the archival documents I examined rarely mention food as anything beyond an economic liability. By this, I mean that Indian Agents rarely discussed food outside the context of rations, which obscures details of logistics of food procurement, such as what continued to be hunted, gathered and grown in gardens, but also the sociocultural relationships with food in the colonial record. The omission of this type of information in the colonial records creates difficulty in tracing the methods in which the Blackfoot communities maintained, adapted, and resisted their food practices separate from colonial agent narratives on social progress.

During the making of Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty), the Blackfoot Nations negotiated several key provisions related to land-use and food security, including unrestricted access to hunting grounds, support for the transition to agriculture, and a reliable supply of rations (Treaty 7 Elders et al., 1996). These negotiations took place during a period of widespread starvation caused by the rapid decline of bison and other game animals, a consequence of the fur trade and increasing settler encroachment (Daschuk, 2013). According to the Treaty 7 Elders et al. (1996), the Chiefs approached the treaty negotiations with the goal of limiting settler and American trader incursions and protecting the remaining bison population.

In contrast, colonial officials were primarily focused on securing a land surrender to enable further settlement in the Northwest Territories (Treaty 7 Elders et al., 1996). Although rations were referenced by colonial officials in archival documents as a treaty obligation, the mentions of rations do not appear in the written text of Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty). This discrepancy between oral and written treaty accounts is well documented. As with many treaty obligations, the promises made by the colonial government were often ignored, left unfulfilled, or later restricted through additional policy measures.

Therefore, this chapter focuses on the references to rations within the archival record, primarily in the annual reports, to examine the shift in colonial policies and the weaponization of rations. I begin by examining the general patterns and how food is typically framed within the reports. Following this, I discuss the discourse surrounding rations prior to 1900, focusing on distribution rations, particularly complaints from Blackfoot leaders and inconsistencies within early policy. I then shift focus to the weaponization of rations, which refers to the tactic of using food to undermine Indigenous sovereignty and impose colonial ways of life, including foodways (Matties, 2016). In this part of the chapter, I focus on how colonial officials withheld rations as a method to enforce colonial policies, specifically through the restriction of movement and forcing children into schools. This is followed by an examination of the murder of the rations issuer on the Blackfoot (Siksika) reserve to highlight the purposeful concealment of the mistreatment of the Blackfoot community and overt colonial violence within the reports. Lastly, I discuss the shift in colonial policy toward the notion of *self-sufficiency* in the early 1900s and the rapid ration reduction.

4.1 ARCHIVAL SOURCES AND GENERAL THEMES

Rations are mentioned throughout the annual reports; however, they are not referred to in a standardized manner. Colonial officials variously describe the distribution of food using terms such as issuing beef, flour, or tea, and sometimes refer to rations as “relief,” “free rations,” or “gratuitous food.” Collectively, there are approximately 89 references to rations within the annual reports in relation to the Blackfoot Nations. This does not include the rare mentions of other food items, as Indian Agents often separate rations issued by the government and food items bought or made by Blackfoot Peoples.

Figure 6 illustrates the distribution of mentions of rations throughout the annual reports by splitting the mentions into two categories: generalized mentions of rations and references to free rations or gratuitous food. The first category, or the generalized mentions of rations, includes 55 direct mentions of rations, 20 references to the issuing of beef, flour, or tea, and two instances describing rations using the language of relief or general provisions. The second category, or references free rations or gratuitous food, contains 12 mentions. The shifts in language to refer to rations signify shifts within ration policy around the 1900s, as shown in Figure 6. Particularly, the shift begins to indicate how colonial officials framed the provision of food from a treaty obligation to something more discretionary or charitable.

Similar to the variation in language used to refer to rations within the annual reports, the reasons for their mention can vary. Generally, the mentions of rations can be grouped into the following seven sub-themes, as shown in Figure 8:

- **Sub-theme one:** Distribution and issuing of rations by Indian Agents.
- **Sub-theme two:** Complaints from nation members.

- **Sub-theme three:** Reduction of rations.
- **Sub-theme four:** Issues with the distribution of ration.
- **Sub-theme five:** Withholding of rations.
- **Sub-theme six:** Crimes relating to rations.
- **Sub-theme seven:** Transition to self-sufficiency, or forfeiture of rations.

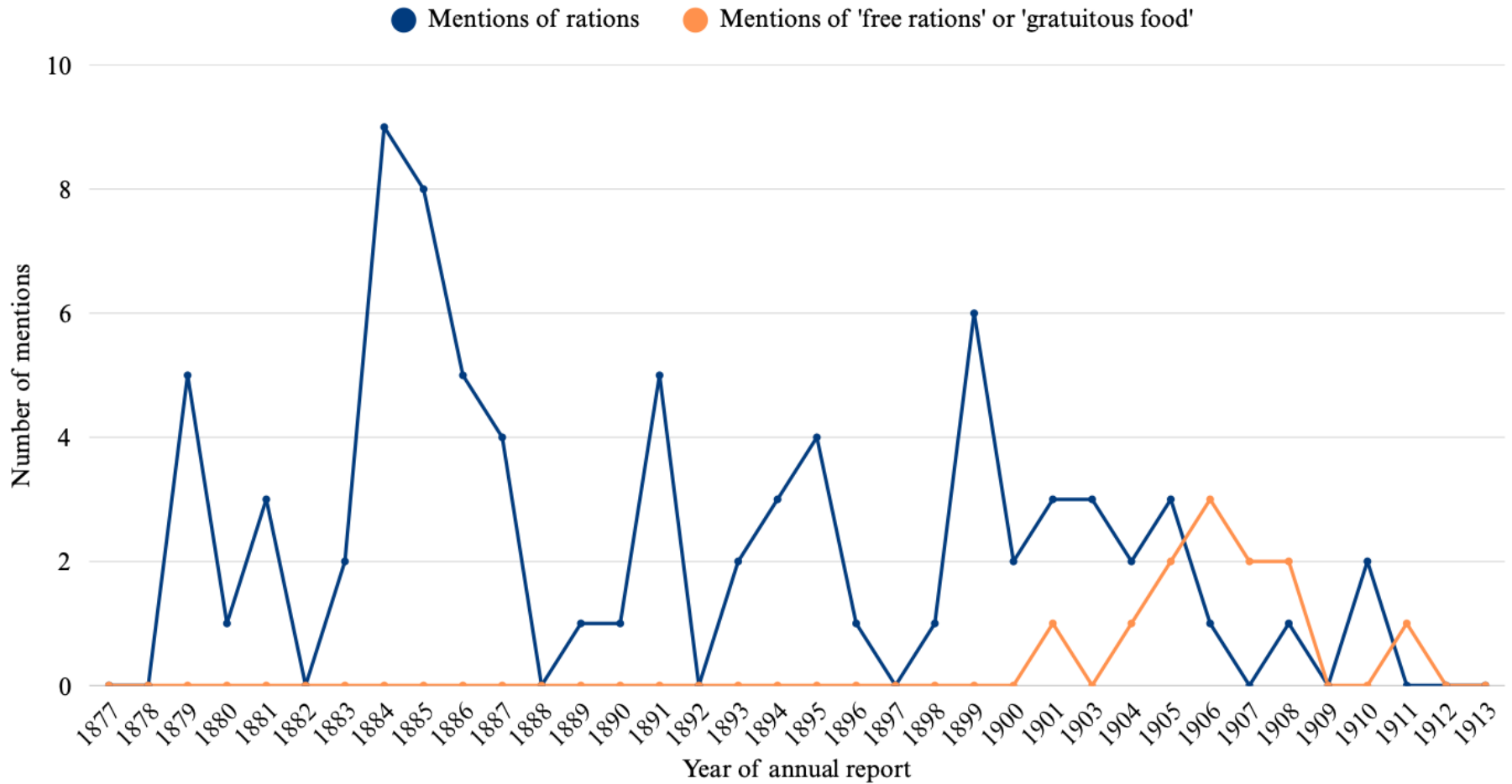


Figure 6: Mentions of the rations in relation to the Blackfoot Confederacy within the Indian Affairs reports (1877-1913).

Note. The category of ‘Free rations’ or ‘Gratuitous food’ are derived from the phrases Indian Agents use within annual reports. The data is drawn from *the Reports of the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs (1877–1879)* and *the Department of Indian Affairs Annual Reports (1880–1913)*.

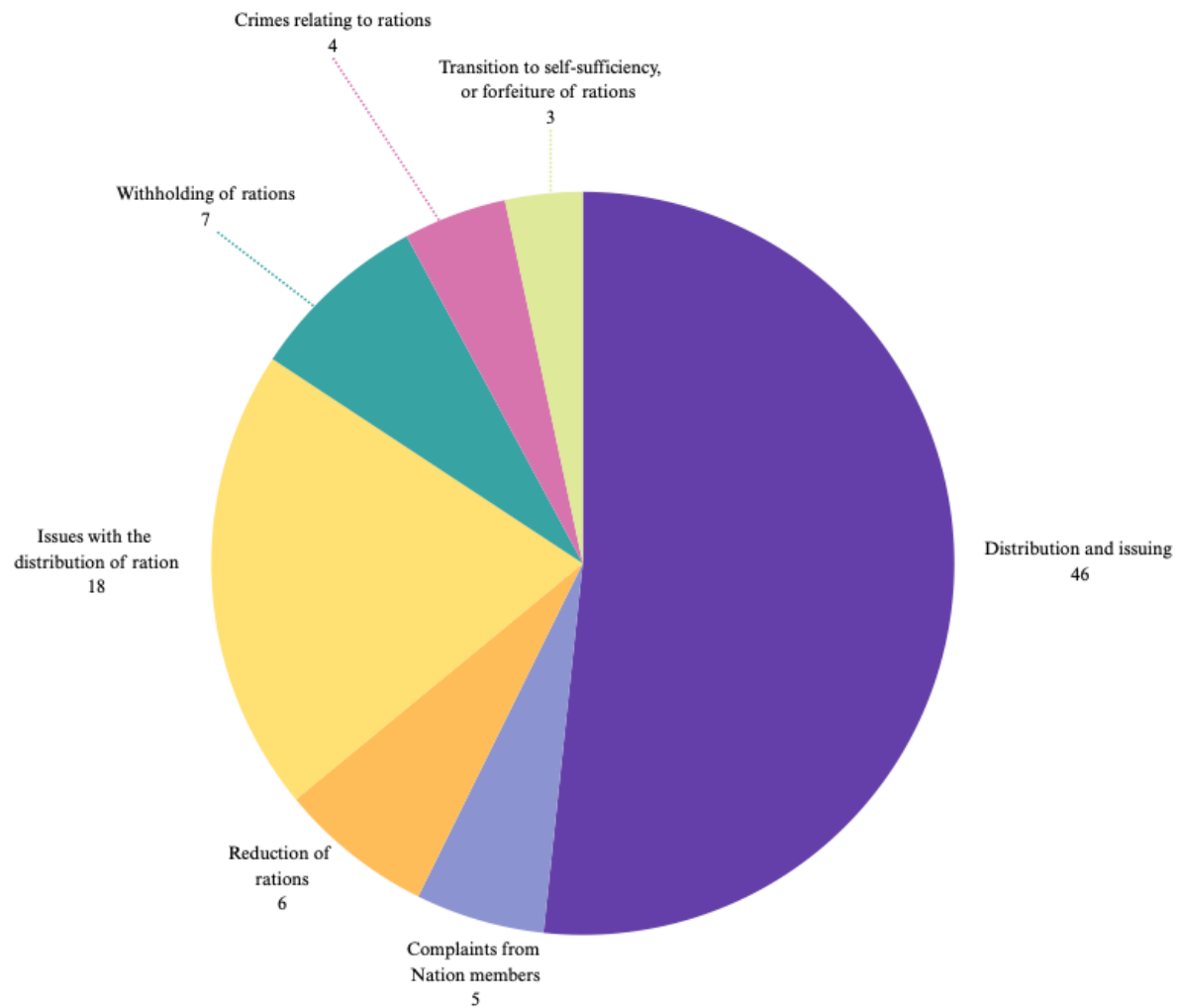


Figure 7: Breakdown of the seven sub-themes in the Indian Affairs reports (1877-1913) relating to rations.

4.1 GENERAL MENTIONS OF FOOD

Before examining the colonial discourse surrounding rations, clarifying how the Department of Indian Affairs refers to food within the annual reports is crucial. Rations do not refer to all food on reserves. The term "*ration*" specifically refers to the food items the department distributes, which Blackfoot reserves typically consist of beef, flour, and occasionally tea. As a result, food grown on reserves, such as potatoes or garden produce, as Cutter's quote at the beginning of the chapter refers to, does not fall under the category of rations within the annual report. However, beef is typically categorized as a ration, regardless of whether Blackfoot individuals raised the cattle themselves, as cattle are highly regulated with the ranching industry growing in importance on the Blackfoot reserves towards the 1900s (refer to Chapter 5). In short, the focus on rations within the annual report limits the ability of the documents to provide details on the Blackfoot People's practices on maintaining food security outside rations.

While the mentions of food are limited, the annual reports do contain several examples of Blackfoot individuals preparing and eating certain foods beyond rations. One of the earlier examples is found in the 1885 annual report on the Piegan (Piikani) reserve, where agents reported a surplus of potatoes harvested that exceeded people's ability to consume them. Apart from mentioning people eating agricultural surplus, the annual reports do not provide details on how much of the agricultural harvest is sold versus consumed by individuals living on reserves. Later, in the 1895 annual report on the Piegan (Piikani) reserve, the consumption of potatoes was discussed again; however, this instance describes the preparation of potatoes.

Later, in the 1892 annual report on the Piegan (Piikani) reserve, the consumption of potatoes was discussed again; however, this instance describes the preparation of potatoes. In the report, Pocklington describes the following:

The market price being exceptionally low, I prevailed upon the Indians to eat their potatoes rather than sell at so low price. During the winter when visiting their houses, I noticed in nearly every case a pot of potatoes on the stove cooking (Department of Indian Affairs, 1893, p. 336).

Although Pocklington's focus centres on the economic logistics of potato sales and frames consumption of potatoes as social progress, this account is one of the few instances within the annual reports that discusses agricultural products being prepared and consumed. Notably, the potatoes are not referred to as rations, nor is the consumption of potatoes, or any other crops of high agricultural yields, ever framed in contexts of social gathering. Rather, potatoes are framed as an economic benefit for the department and illustrated as a form of social progress, as Pocklington emphasizes how potatoes were cooked (i.e., in buildings using settler-approved utensils and appliances). This is not to imply the Blackfoot Peoples did not use these items prior to this period; rather, the colonial agent framing of cooking food with settler items as novel plays into the larger narrative of *successful* assimilation policies.

Typically, references to food outside of rations appear in relation to health or as evidence of successful assimilation, as previously discussed. The clearest example comes from the 1895 annual report, where the Indian Agent on the Blood (Kainai) reserve comments on women's *progress* by stating, "the large majority now make bread instead of bannocks, while a few milk cows and make fair butter" (Department of Indian Affairs, 1896, p. 395). Here, food is not framed as a necessity or part of maintaining social cohesion; rather, diet and food are seen as indicators of progress toward the colonial notion of civilization and progress. Although Indian Agents do not often discuss food, the focus on bannock is interesting, as the implication is that using the flour provided by the department to create bannock was the incorrect use of rations.

Although mentions of food apart from rations are sparse, the examples presented within the annual reports suggest an effort by colonial officials to shift Blackfoot diets and food

preparation techniques to mirror those of settlers. While the efforts to destabilize Blackfoot food security, particularly the utilization and accessibility of food, play an important role in colonial assimilation policy, this aspect of colonial policy remains difficult to trace archivally. For example, the annual reports prioritize recording economic productivity and rarely document the domestic sphere, including the role of Indian Agents' wives, who were often responsible for instructing Indigenous women on settler food preparation techniques (Department of Indian Affairs, 1900). As a result, the impacts of settler colonial assimilation policies on food preparation are challenging to trace.

4.2 OVERVIEW OF RATION DISTRIBUTION BEFORE 1900

Between 1877 and 1900, rations were frequently discussed in the annual reports, though often in vague or logistical terms. Mentions of rations prior to 1900 primarily reflect four key sub-themes: the distribution or issuing of rations by Indian Agents (sub-theme one), complaints raised by members of the Nations (sub-theme two), criminal activity related to ration scarcity or control (sub-theme five), and the withholding of rations, often as a disciplinary or coercive measure (sub-theme six).

The majority of these early mentions of rations fall under sub-theme one, which generally focuses on administrative confirmations, such as whether rations were issued according to the Department of Indian Affairs' guidelines, or whether food was purchased and accounted for by contractors. These entries tend to be formulaic, offering little information beyond a statement of compliance. However, a closer look at the few more detailed entries sheds light on what was being distributed, how much, and under what conditions.

Although the Department of Indian Affairs appears to have had a work-for-ration policy, which required any "able-bodied Indians" (Department of Indian Affairs, 1880, p. 15) to conduct

labour before receiving supplies, the issuing of rations between 1879 and 1885 appears less standardized than in later decades. Although the Department of Indian Affairs does not explicitly acknowledge this lack of standardization, Indian Agents frequently note fluctuating population numbers, often due to Nation members tracking bison south across the 49th parallel in the years following the making of Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty) (Department of Indian Affairs, 1885, 1886). In the 1879 Report of the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Indian Commissioner Dewdney stated the following about ration distribution on the Blackfoot (Siksika) reserve:

I was prepared, under the circumstances, to take my share of the responsibility of feeding the Indians, but I did not feel inclined to authorize any fixed rations, and I told him that the officers of the post must be guided by circumstances as they arose, and must use every precaution to economize and see that they were not imposed on by the Indians (p. 144).

Dewdney's statement provides several insights into the early ration distribution system. The first is likely the inability for the Department of Indian Affairs to track the population of the Blackfoot Confederacy, as when faced with complaints by Chiefs on unfair rations, Dewdney later stated he took the complaints as an "excuse to count them" (Dominion of Canada, 1879, p. 128). Unlike in later years, the Department of Indian Affairs' approach to distributing rations seems sporadic rather than organized. Additionally, Dewdney's statement starts the recurring concern of the Department of Indian Affairs on the financial cost to the State to provide rations. Lastly, the lack of standardization within the early ration distribution methods gave way to uneven distribution between individuals facing starvation.

4.3 COMPLAINTS, AND PUSHBACK BY BLACKFOOT LEADERS

The lack of consistency in ration distribution is also a source for complaints or concerns for leaders of the Blackfoot Confederacy. Two notable quotes in the 1879 annual report detail

conversations between Dewdney and Blackfoot leaders about food distribution. One such exchange, which Dewdney relayed in the report, was with Chief Crowfoot and focused specifically on rations in relation to treaty payments. According to Dewdney, the conversation went as follows:

He [Crowfoot] said, "I do not propose to be paid to-morrow; how many days' rations are you going to give us?"

I [Dewdney] said, "All the provisions we bring in shall be given to you before we return."

"Well," he said, "How many days rations do you think you have, two or three?"

I said, "we have three good days rations and some over" (The Department of the Interior, 1879, p.187).

The conversation between Chief Crowfoot and Dewdney underscores the absence of a standardized or transparent rationing system. In the quote above, Chief Crowfoot repeats his line of questioning regarding receiving the delivery provisions; although Dewdney provides a vague answer, the need for Chief Crowfoot to ask repeatedly may indicate a lack of preparedness on the part of colonial officials—whether due to poor planning of the amount of ration required or an intentional effort to limit the ration distribution. Additionally, the report and Dewdney do not provide specific details on the quantity or type of rations being distributed. In short, the conversation between Chief Crowfoot and Dewdney reflects a lack of an organized ration system or policy for the years following the treaty's signing.

Moreover, Chief Crowfoot's critique regarding the unfair distribution of rations is not isolated. In the same report, Dewdney noted that "the chiefs of this tribe [Peigan and Blood] had made several complaints to me that they had not been treated fairly in the issue of rations" (The Department of the Interior, 1879, p. 119). These statements collectively reveal the uneven implementation of the ration policy and the awareness of the discrepancies by both parties. While the report does not expand on the types of complaints being issued, the repetitive mentions of complaints suggest the lack of consistency in ration distribution. The lack of details began to shift

in the 1880s, when the Department of Indian Affairs started conducting audits and keeping records on ration distributions as policy began to be implemented.

By 1881, the annual report began providing details on the average rations. For the Blackfoot (Siksika) reserve, the average ration was around “1 3/4 lbs. per diem, consisting of meat and flour” (Department of Indian Affairs, 1882, p. 156). Information for the average ration for the Blood (Kainai) and the Peigan (Piikani) reserves is not provided; while they may have been receiving a similar quantity of rations, this is not certain. This quantity of rations did not last long, as in 1882, the Department of Indian Affairs began reducing the ration of flour on both the Blood (Kainai) and the Peigan (Piikani) reserves to “one-quarter of a pound per head daily” (Department of Indian Affairs, 1883, p. 58). Again, the Blackfoot (Siksika) reserve was not included in the reduction, which suggests a variation in ration distribution across reserves. While detailed explanations are not provided, colonial officials argue that the changes were due to fluctuations in population on the census (Department of Indian Affairs, 1883). However, population changes would not impact individual rations but rather the collective quantity that the department would be required to provide.

Further discrepancies in the issuing of rations are found in 1883 on the Blackfoot (Siksika) reserve, with Inspector Wadsworth, who is the Inspector of Indian Agencies and Superintendent of Farms, stating, “[He] found the issue of flour here somewhat less per head than at the Blood, and there was some discontent regarding it” (Department of Indian Affairs, 1884, p. 264). By 1883, the Department of Indian Affairs had been conducting audits of the ration houses, and agents recorded that the ledgers and books were in good condition. Therefore, it is uncertain whether the discrepancies were purposeful. In addition to these discrepancies, the Blackfoot (Siksika) reserve also faced a reduction in their flour rations that year, with “the ration of flour from one-half pound

to as nearly one-quarter pound” (Department of Indian Affairs, 1885, p. 127). Once again, the Indian Agents remarked on the reduction of flour as a positive measure for saving money on behalf of the department (Department of Indian Affairs, 1884).

Additionally, in the 1884 annual report, there was a change in the type of rations being issued, notably with the removal of bacon in favour of beef. The reason for the change is recorded as “the Indians had taken a prejudice against bacon” (Department of Indian Affairs, 1885, p. 265). However, since beef was sourced from the surrounding area, the agents were not too concerned about the cost of that change. In fact, many local newspapers around 1886 began publishing advertisements for tenders on behalf of the Department of Indian Affairs in order to fulfill rations on the Blackfoot reserves and around the Northwest Territories (Assistant Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1895; Indian Commissioner, 1892). From this point forward, rations for the three Blackfoot reserves typically consisted of beef and flour, with occasional mentions of tea.

4.4 POLICY SHIFTS AND WITHHOLDING RATIONS

A year later, the discourse surrounding rations shifted away from standardizing distribution to withholding rations to influence Blackfoot People’s behaviour. Specifically, the withholding of rations is often discussed in relation to restricting movement and forcing children into schools. The 1885 annual report contains the first examples of Indian Agents reporting the use of rations as a means to control behaviour. In the report, Pocklington states the following:

I regret to report that these Indians have contracted the habit of visiting the town of Macleod, much too often for their good, and remaining for days at a time. As far as possible, we stop the rations of any Indian off the reserve (p. 170).

The quote illustrates the explicit use of withholding rations as leverage to confine individuals to reserves, contributing to the destabilization of traditional foodways and land-use practices by limiting people’s ability to hunt and gather. Other mentions appear in the 1886 annual report, in

which agents discuss withholding rations from individuals leaving the reserve for "American territory" (Department of Indian Affairs, 1887, p. 240). Moreover, colonial officials did not frequently frame these movement restrictions as deliberate efforts to undermine food security. Instead, they justified the weaponization of food as part of a broader colonial project to impose settler territorial boundaries by replacing the existing Blackfoot land-use systems.

Another example of Indian Agents withholding rations to coerce the parents into enrolling their children in Residential or Industrial schools as parents were reported as consistently refusing to enroll their children despite colonial pressures (Department of Indian Affairs, 1886). While this thesis does not examine the context of rations within Day, Industrial, or Residential schools, the tactic of coercing parents through food is reported within the context of annual reports. One early example is from the 1885 annual report, which includes the following statement:

That the Department must well understand, that amongst the four tribes of Blackfeet, Blood, Piegans and Sarcees, not one Indian is willing to part with his young children or allow them to remain here for any length of time. Therefore, it is advisable and necessary to bring pressure in some way to bear upon those Indians who refuse their children, as by threatening to deprive them of their rations... (p.175).

The quote above showcases the use of rations by colonial agents to force parents to comply with colonial policies. Additionally, the quote suggests that colonial agents believed the threat of withholding rations was sufficient leverage to coerce parents into enrolling their children, implying that food security, even with rations, was likely tenuous. Other instances are mentioned in 1896, stating the department had withheld rations in the past as a method to return children to school (Department of Indian Affairs, 1897), which likely caused growing tensions within the community. Although the Inquest does not provide many details, the recurring use of rations as a tool for coercion suggests this may have been an ongoing practice.

Rising tensions over rations became evident with the murder of a ration issuer, Frank Skynner, on the Blackfoot (Siksika) reserve around 1894. The first mention of murder within the annual report is in 1897 as part of a larger discussion of settler deaths on the Blackfoot (Siksika and Kainai) reserves. Despite the broader Inquest into the circumstances surrounding the murder, the reporting on the death of a ration issuer in the annual report is minimal. In fact, the report simply states, “the killing of the issuer at the Blackfoot Reserve” (Department of Indian Affairs, 1898, p. 42) in relation to the murder case. Rather than discussing the circumstances of the murder, the annual report instead frames the events as evidence of the danger colonial officials face in their roles.

On the other hand, the Inquest into the murder of the ration issuer by the Blackfoot (Siksika) agency highlights several layers of colonial violence within the ration system and its policies. The acts of colonial violence are seen most clearly in the letters written by other ration issuers on the Blackfoot (Siksika) reserve. In the letters written by colleagues of the deceased, it is apparent that Frank Skynner’s temperament and abuse of power over ration distribution were known issues on the Blackfoot (Siksika) Reserve. In the letters, one colleague notes Skynner had "perpetual complaints from the Indians" (Blackfoot Agency, 1894-1895, p. 61) due to his frequent yelling at individuals. Specifically, Skynner’s colleague highlights his known mismanagement of rations as a point of continual contention between Skynner and the members of the Blackfoot (Siksika) reserve. The mismanaged rations are described as cutting rations below the required amount, with the letters stating he "exercised no judgment in issuing" (Blackfoot Agency, 1894-1895, p. 64) and "refused good rations to sick Indians" (Blackfoot Agency, 1894-1895, p. 62).

The Inquest complicates the narrative surrounding the ration system, as the annual reports often provide only superficial commentary, frequently stating that audits were completed or that

no unusual occurrences had taken place. In contrast, the inquest documents reveal that Indian Agents, other ration issuers, and the Blackfoot (Siksika) community were fully aware of ongoing abuses of power. For instance, a letter from fellow issuer John McCrea recounts a conversation with a pregnant Blackfoot woman who stated that she only came to the ration house after Skynner had left (Blackfoot Agency, 1894-1895, p. 64). While the letters most evidently illustrate the mismanagement of rations by colonial officials, the letter by McCrea highlights the risk to the physical well-being of individuals who undertook to receive food. Especially in a system that relies on the temperaments of ration issuers, the act of choosing to wait for rations becomes an area where individuals exercise their agency with the act of waiting, as well as a barrier to accessibility.

In addition, McCrea's letter underscores the purposeful neglect by colonial officials in discussing the ongoing misconduct on the reservation by colonial agents in the annual reports, which creates purpose gaps within administrative historical documents. Despite widespread awareness of Skynner's mistreatment of Blackfoot individuals and mismanagement of rations, colonial officials took no steps to intervene. McCrea reinforces this in his closing statement: "I might say in conclusion that I was not surprised when Mr. Skyler was murdered, as the Indians detested the sight of him and threatened him both by knife and gun" (Blackfoot Agency, 1894-1895, p. 65).

While the motivations behind the murder appear rooted in Skynner's mismanagement of rations, the annual reports continue to frame rationing as orderly and largely error-free. The case of Frank Skynner illustrates the mundane nature of colonial violence through the purposeful omission of failure within colonial projects such as the rationing system. Annual reports often reframe policy changes as signs of progress or success, rather than as an attempt to conceal the uncertainties and tensions these shifts produced. However, the cases of withholding rations on

reserves provide clear examples of the disconnect between colonial narratives and the purposeful creation of gaps in the archives, as without the Inquest, the annual reports do not provide explicit details on the influence issuers have on the rationing system. In short, the themes within the archives highlight the ways in which food insecurity was actively structured and sustained through colonial administration, particularly through the weaponization of rations.

4.5 COLONIAL NARRATIVES AND CONCERNS WITH FOOD SECURITY

Much of the documentation on rations focuses on quantity and policy shifts, while complaints regarding the quality of the food being issued, a known issue with rations (Treaty 7 Elders et al., 1996), are rare within the annual reports. This makes a recorded exchange from the Peigan (Piikani) reserve in the 1891 annual report particularly notable. In the report, Inspector McGibbon, an inspector of Indian Agencies, documents the following conversation:

Thunder Child called and wished to talk; he said the flour was not black nor was it white. I told him the flour they were getting was much more wholesome for them than the very white flour. I asked him what about the beef. He said half of it was good, and the other half was not so good. I told him that they were getting, and that the flour was better than many white people used, and that white people had to pay taxes in order to furnish funds to pay the rations for the Indians. He shook hands and said he was quite satisfied (p.223).

Among all the annual reports, this appears to be the only direct reference to spoiled or poor-quality rations in relation to the Blackfoot Confederacy. Although spoilage and mismanagement of food supplies were known to occur (Daschuk, 2013; Treaty 7 Elders et al., 1996), such issues are rarely acknowledged in the annual report (Department of Indian Affairs, 1892). This exchange is also telling of the dismissive tone being adopted by Indian Agents, who downplayed Indigenous concerns by framing the rations as superior to what settlers consumed, despite some historical documents suggesting the contrary. While records on settler diets in Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot

Treaty) territory during this period are limited, a document—Mrs. Allick Blaine’s family budget book (1886–1888) —offers some insight into settler diets several years prior.

The most commonly recorded items in Mrs. Allick Blaine’s budget books between 1886 and 1888 include meat (60 entries), sugar (39 entries), flour (22 entries), and coffee (19 entries). While these staples dominated the family’s diet, the records also include less frequently purchased but notable items such as cranberries, peaches, cornmeal, raisins, honey, lemons, and possibly oysters. Although the budget reflects the family’s personal preferences and economic means, the presence of imported fruits and specialty goods suggests access to a relatively diverse diet.

The diversity of Mrs. Allick Blaine’s family diet highlights the lack of variety in the rations provided to the Blackfoot, particularly the absence of fruit, which would have made up a larger portion of the traditional Blackfoot diet prior to colonial restrictions. One of the few references to gathering is from the Blackfoot (Siksika) reserve in 1892, where the agents were complaining about student attendance being low in the summer as “the Indians move about a great deal during the summer months for berries and new feed for their horses, which takes the children away from the vicinity of the schools” (Department of Indian Affairs, 1893, p. 344). Once again, in the 1898 annual report mentions the "addition of vegetables and fruits" (Department of Indian Affairs, 1894, p. 237) by members of the Blood (Kainai) reserve who were earning wages, which is one of the few references in the reports. Beyond this, there is little documentation regarding continuing gathering practices or other food-related practices.

In summary, the mention of rations prior to the 1900s contains two narratives. The first is the push for ration reduction and standardization by Indian Agents, based on the perception that rations provided ample food security. The second narrative is seen primarily in annual reports: the unequal distribution, rations being withheld to modify behaviours, and the questionable quality of

rations. In essence, these practices amplified a state of food insecurity and limited Blackfoot Peoples ability to maintain traditional foodways through the restriction of movement through the withholding of rations.

4.6 THE SHIFT TOWARDS SELF-SUFFICIENCY AFTER 1900S

The discussion about rations significantly changed in 1901 as colonial officials began to modify the language regarding the Government's treaty obligation to provide rations. Prior to 1901, colonial officials typically referred to ration distribution using terms such as 'rations,' 'relief,' or simply 'issuing' beef, flour, or tea. However, in 1901, colonial officials began to refer to rations as "free rations" (Department of Indian Affairs, 1905, p. 318) or "gratuitous food" (Department of Indian Affairs, 1906, p. 282), which marks a shift in the overall colonial narrative—portraying rations as frivolous despite being a treaty obligation. Although concerns about the financial obligation of providing rations are not unique to the 1900s, the way colonial officials began to cut rations under the pretence of nations becoming self-supporting is more evident. With the movement towards self-sufficiency, the Department of Indian Affairs began to discuss a broader policy to help the State relieve itself financially from providing funds for rations through the implementation of a self-support plan.

The 1900s marked a clear policy and narrative shift toward promoting Indigenous self-sufficiency and reducing dependence on government assistance. In practice, self-sufficiency included the rapid reduction in the quantity and frequency of rations distributed on Blackfoot reserves. This change is captured in the 1901 annual report, which frames cost savings as evidence of successful policy:

The food issue to the Blackfeet has cost the government several thousand dollars less the last fiscal year than ever before, which is tangible evidence that the Indians have made a step towards self-support, and to my mind a step upwards (p. 233).

The shift in discourse surrounding rations occurs around the same time as an increase in cattle ranching and earned wages through other industries, which are discussed in Chapter 6. That said, the focus on reducing rations is interconnected with the notion of progress and civilization, as the Department of Indian Affairs has stopped supporting rations.

The rapid reduction of rations is evident throughout the 1900s, with one of the first occurrences recorded in the 1904 annual report. In this report, the Department of Indian Affairs claims that the Blood (Kainai) reserve was “voluntarily giving up the rations” (Department of Indian Affairs, 1904, p. 343), and that several families had joined “the self-support plan” (Department of Indian Affairs, 1904, p. 343). However, the report does not provide specific details on implementing the self-support plan or the methods used to persuade individuals to give up their rations. This lack of transparency aligns with other annual reports from that period, which rarely explain the mechanisms behind ration reduction policies. Despite the lack of details, the Department of Indian Affairs praised the ration reduction policy, stating the policy is evidence that “the slowness of progress in the bringing of the Indians to a state of self-support is to be attributed largely to the system of free feeding” (Department of Indian Affairs, 1905, p.318). Then praising the giving up rations on the Blood (Kainai) reserve as a success.

By 1905, the policy for reducing rations was in full force across Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty), with specific focus on the Peigan (Piikani) reserve. On the Peigan (Piikani) reserve, the frequency of ration distribution was reduced to “one free ration of flour and beef” (Department of Indian Affairs, 1905, p.290) a week, which was reduced from two times a week and previously three times a week (Department of Indian Affairs, 1905). Although the reduction of rations was impacting the entire nation, the policy and support of the reduction of rations is justified through the economic prosperity of a portion of the community. For the Peigan (Piikani) reserve in 1905,

only “five members of the band were then on the total self-support list” (Department of Indian Affairs, 1906, .290). In 1905, the recorded population of the Peigan (Piikani) reserve was 499 individuals, as shown in Figure 7. Consequently, the department justified ration reduction, given that approximately 99% of the reserve was deemed non-self-supporting. This is important to remember, as according to the Department of Indian, the reduction of rations, or ‘the free distribution of food’ for three years was not gradual—Table 1 is a reconstructed table from the 1906.

Table 1.

A reconstructed from the 1906 annual report depicting the reduction of rations on the Peigan reserve.

Year	Lbs. of beef issued.	Lbs. of flour issued.
1903	187,851	90,645
1904	134,376	76,200
1905	82,245	65,100

Note. Original table can be found on page 296 of the 1906 annual report.

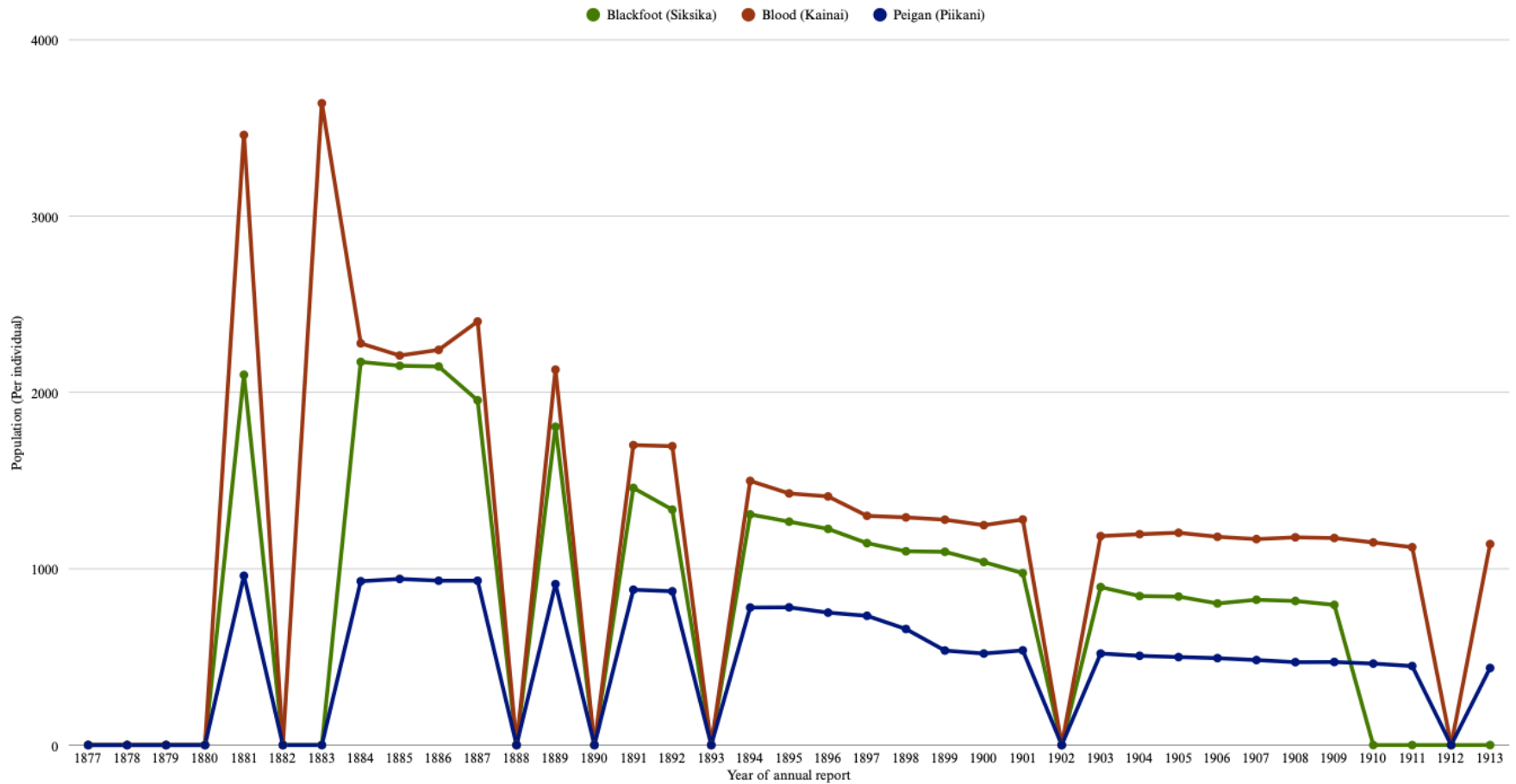


Figure 8: Population for each of the Blackfoot Confederacy Nation according to the Indian Affairs report census (1877-1913).

Note. The data is drawn from incomplete census data from *the Department of Indian Affairs Annual Reports (1880–1913)*. No data reports for any of the Nations in 1877, 1878, 1897, 1882, 1888, 1893, 1902, and 1912. Additionally, the department did not publish census data for the Piegan (Piikani) Nation for 1883, and the Blackfoot (Siksika) Nation does not have census data after 1910.

Unsurprisingly, the Department of Indian Affairs backpedalled on the success of the ration reduction policy in the 1911 annual report. Following a harsh winter that caused massive cattle losses on the Blood (Kainai) reserve, the agent reported:

This feature of their management has in late years been somewhat overdone, as it has recently been necessary to return to the free ration list a few individuals who were for a time able to support themselves from their cattle herd, but were unable to continue doing so owing to the reduction of the cattle through unnatural losses (Department of Indian Affairs, 1911, p.262).

The shift in perspective seen in the statement above illustrates the growing understanding by some Indian Agents about the instability and economic uncertainty surrounding ranching and agriculture within the area. By 1913, the policy is not mentioned. However, it is unclear whether the report caused the Department of Indian Affairs to reconsiderations of the rapid ration reduction policy. However, the annual reports do not discuss the consequences of the rapid ration reductions on the Blackfoot People. For the majority of the reports, Indian Agents focus on presenting elements of the policy as beneficial to the colonial state, such as lessening economic spending, rather than discussing the impacts on people's health or their access to food outside of the ration system. The violence and dehumanization involved in the implementation of colonial policies, such as the rapid reduction of rations by the Dominion of Canada, likely produced long-term health impacts, which would require more research fully comprehend.

4.7 CONCLUSION

Chapter 4 centres around the impacts of ration policies on Blackfoot food security. Throughout the annual reports, colonial agents portray rations and food as tools of social progress and as markers of successful colonial policy. As a result, these reports rarely acknowledge the systemic issues within the ration system. Instead, they construct a narrative of bureaucratic order by emphasizing completed audits, describing ration reductions as voluntary, and presenting self-

sufficiency as an outcome of Indigenous compliance. Although rations were used to restrict land-use practices such as hunting, gathering, and ceremony, the reports conceal the violence embedded in the ration system. In other words, the state was aware of how rations were used to force compliance with colonial economic and assimilation policies, as well as to eliminate longstanding sociocultural relationships tied to land and food systems; however, this is typically not referenced explicitly in the annual reports.

The narrative surrounding ration policies, as a standardized and bureaucratic process, appears closely tied to Canada's broader strategy of presenting a successful colonial project. Within the annual reports, discourse surrounding the ration system typically involves reference to successful audits, ongoing progress towards self-sufficiency, and the voluntary end of ration use. However, in the inquiry into the murder of Frank Skynner, the discussion surrounding the ration system is riddled with mismanagement of rations, the dependency of individual ration issuer judgments, and the barrier to access rations by the community as a result of the ongoing threat of violence against colonial officials –none of which are mentioned within the annual report. The discrepancies within documents highlight the efforts of Indian Agents in the construction of colonial narratives surrounding the success of policies and the purposeful obscuring of colonial violence.

Despite the discrepancies, analyzing the ration system reveals the Dominion of Canada's intentional efforts to eliminate Blackfoot foodways and destabilize food security. Specifically, through the weaponization of rations and the use of food, both in diet and preparation, as a measure of social progress. By weaponizing rations, the state began to alter individual behaviours, such as coercing individuals to remain on reserves and forcing parents to enroll their children into residential schools; this, in turn, began to destabilize Blackfoot food security. The withholding of

rations to prevent individuals from leaving the reserve creates significant barriers in the intergenerational transfer of knowledge related to seasonal food practices and landscape management. This is exemplified in Chapter 4, where agents discussed the impact of restricting children from joining their parents in gathering activities on school enrollment rates.

In short, Chapter 4 discusses the state's active attempts to destabilize Blackfoot food security by preventing access to traditional foodways through ration withholding, which in turn creates a self-fulfilling prophecy of dependency on ration use. Despite actively disrupting human-environmental relationships by restricting land-use, the department further disrupts Blackfoot food security by altering policies that reframe rations as charity rather than a Treaty obligation to further the state's aim to relieve itself of the perceived economic burden.

CHAPTER 5: IMPACTS OF AGRICULTURE, RANCHING, AND OTHER INDUSTRIES ON BLACKFOOT FOOD SECURITY AND SOVEREIGNTY

After the buffalo started to disappear, our way of life began to change. The buffalo was our main source of life and when it began to disappear, we were in a dire situation. I think the situation we were in helped the government to settle treaty with us more easily.

- Victoria McHugh, in *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7* (p. 75)

I begin this chapter with Victoria McHugh's quote from *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7* as the quote highlights shifts in Blackfoot land-use and human-environmental relationships caused by settler colonial activities. The disappearance of the bison marks the transition toward agriculture and the changes to the Blackfoot way of life through the imposition of colonial policies. McHugh's quote references the large-scale starvation that occurred prior to the making of the Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty) and the Nation's need for relief in the form of rations (Treaty Elders, 1996). In many ways, this chapter begins to address my initial question: How did the disappearance of the bison impact the making of Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty)? While that question has shifted over time, the loss of the bison symbolizes the shift in Blackfoot land-use and ability to maintain human-environment relationships vital in supporting Blackfoot food security and sovereignty, as highlighted through the historical ecological landscape approach. At the same time, the loss of the bison and the making of Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty) further allowed the Dominion of Canada to force additional settler colonial policies (such as the Indian Act) to eliminate and replace Blackfoot sociopolitical, economic and cultural structures. This process of replacing existing Indigenous structures, as discussed by Wolfe (2006), can be understood through the lens of elimination.

The Dominion of Canada's agricultural policy for Indigenous Peoples is often intertwined with notions of civilization and *social progress* (Carter, 2014) as a means of elimination. Therefore, agriculture, in the eyes of the Dominion of Canada, served as a tool for civilization, one

that would force people to settle on reserves, engage in labour and accomplish the goal of economic self-sufficiency (Carter, 2014; Samek, 1987) . That said, the Department of Indian Affairs did not apply their economic policy consistently on the Blackfoot (Siksika) reserves between 1877 and 1913. Although agriculture was promoted as vital to the settler colonial project, by the 1890s the department had begun to scale back its efforts, shifting attention toward developing a ranching industry. Around 1905, as ranching and wage labour gained relative stability, the department reintroduced agriculture as a renewed area of focus.

From the perspective of food security and sovereignty, although the department pushed for economic self-sufficiency, this is not typically synonymous with individual or even community access to food. For instance, as I discussed in the last chapter, the Dominion began to cut rations toward the 1900s under the guise of successful policies that supported self-sufficiency, particularly the adoption of agriculture and ranching. However, around the same time, the Department of Indian Affairs began collecting data on the avenues of income on the reserves, as shown in Figures 9, 10, and 11. The data collected by the Department of Indian Affairs, recorded over thirteen years, illustrates a different narrative than the one presented by Indian Agents. In discourse within annual reports, Indian Agents associated economic self-sufficiency strictly with the agricultural and ranching industries, as well as the decrease in ration use. However, Indian Agents rarely discussed the relationship between access to cash and wage labour, as seen in this collection of data, with likely implications for food access. While agriculture plays an important role in discussing the intersection between policies and colonial civilization initiatives, the diverse avenues of income recorded by the Department serve as the starting point for this chapter, as the data led me to expand the chapter to include other industries.

The format of this chapter follows the three major economic industries (agriculture, ranching, and wage labour) that the Department of Indian Affairs identifies within the data it collects concerning the Blackfoot reserves. For each industry, I provide a brief discussion of the archival data, including the frequency of mentions within annual reports and subthemes within reports. Following the archival data for each industry, I examine how the implementation of colonial economic and assimilation policies began to destabilize Blackfoot food security and sovereignty. That said, I also must state the limitations of this chapter, or more specifically, what this chapter does not address. This chapter does not focus on the cultural or social significance of the bison's loss, nor does it attempt to reconstruct Blackfoot perspectives on the shift in food systems, as I examine historical documents from the perspective of colonial officials. Instead, the focus is on how colonial officials engineered the destabilization of Blackfoot food security and sovereignty by imposing policies promoting agriculture, ranching, and wage labour as a core component of their settler colonial project. Additionally, there are limitations to the discussion of these themes, as the data in the annual reports do not tend to be contextualized. There are significant gaps within the archival record.

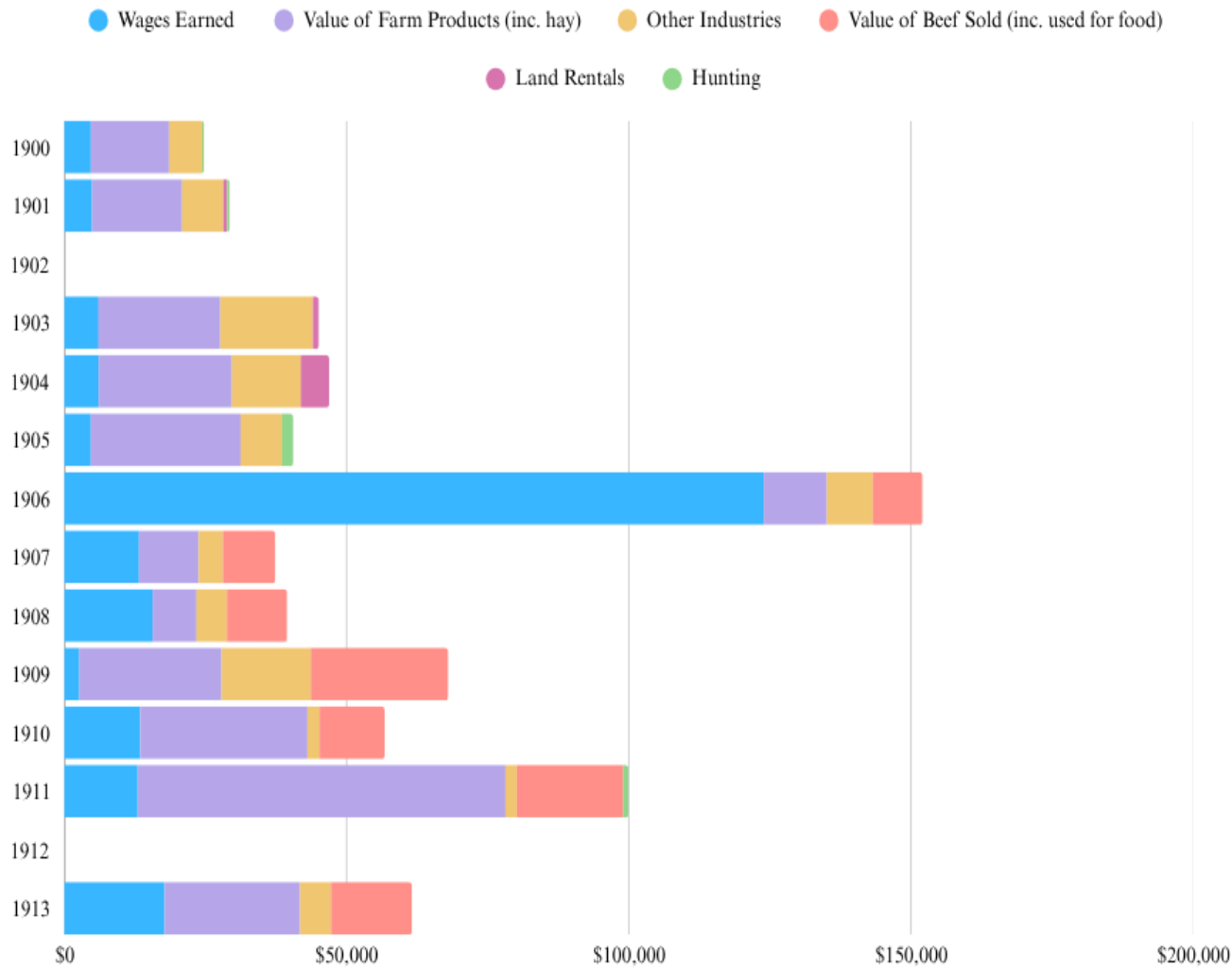


Figure 9: The bar graph illustrates various sources of income on the Bloods (Kainai) reserve from 1900 to 1913.

Note: Reports for the years 1902 and 1912 have not been located. The Department of Indian Affairs began recording the value of beef in 1906. Revenues from fishing were excluded from the graph.

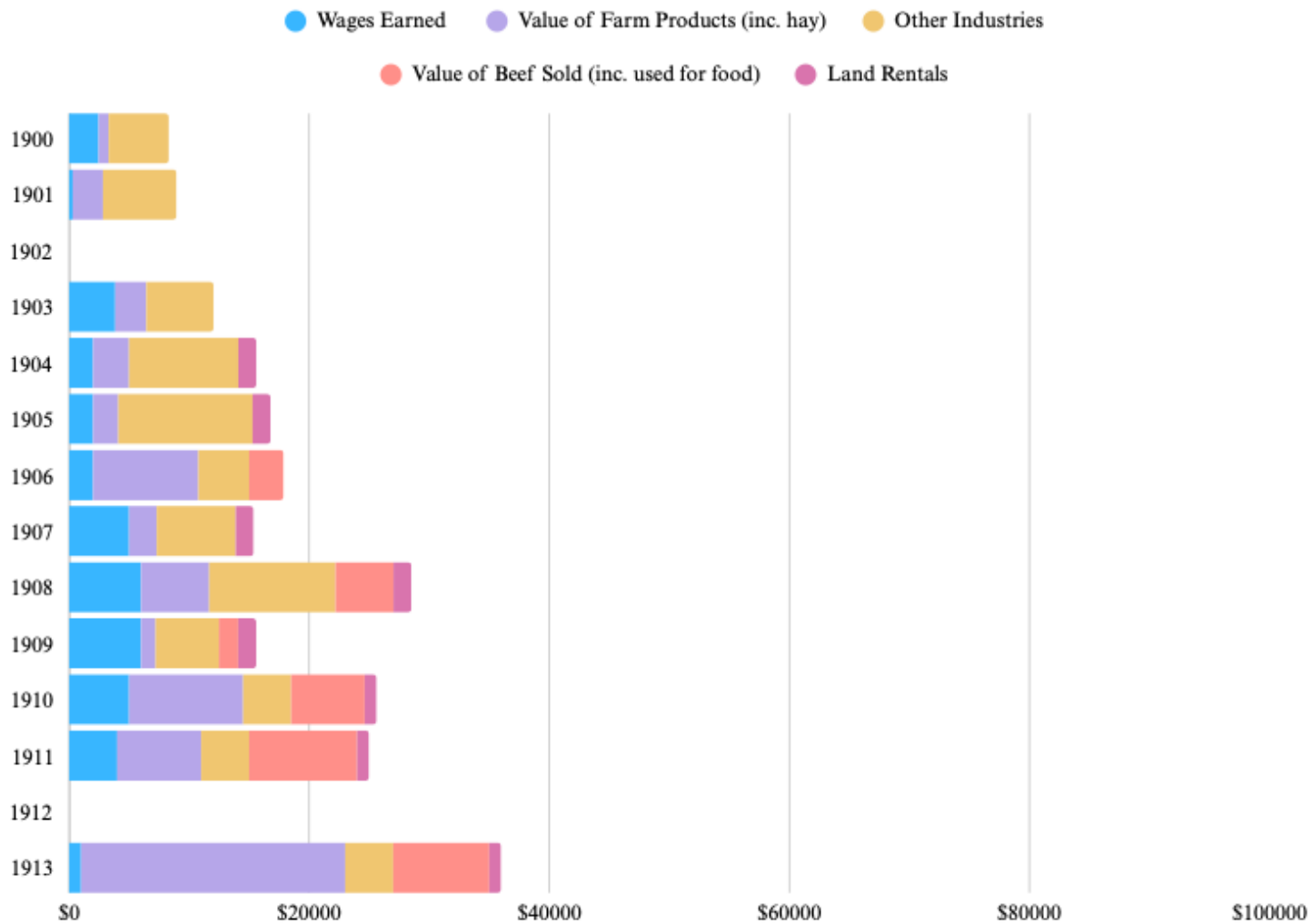


Figure 10: The bar graph illustrates various sources of income on the Peigan (Piikani) reserve from 1900 to 1913.

Note: Reports for the years 1902 and 1912 have not been located. The Department of Indian Affairs began recording the value of beef in 1906. Revenues from fishing and hunting were excluded from the graph.

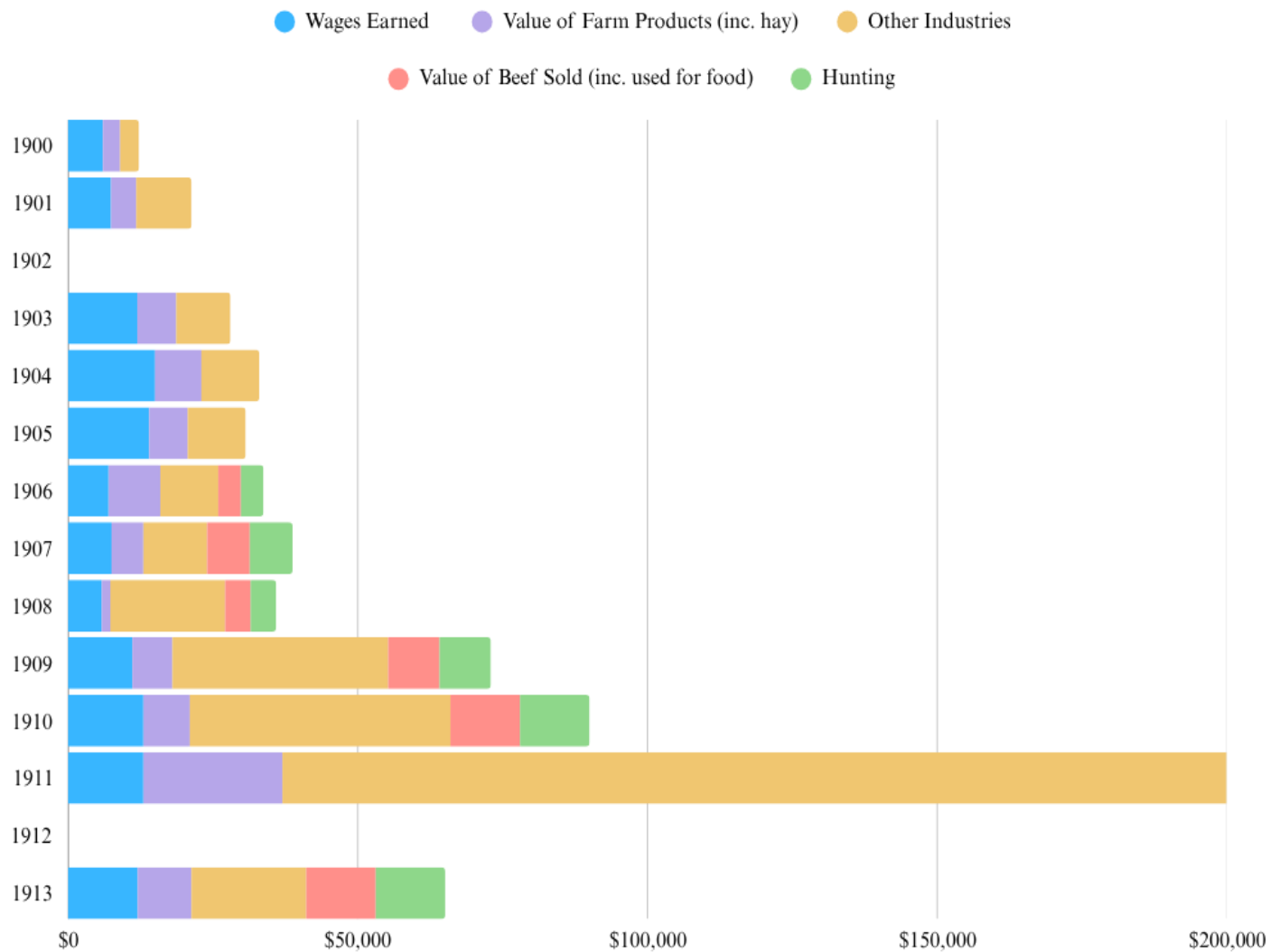


Figure 11: The bar graph illustrates various sources of income on the Blackfoot (Siksika) reserve from 1900 to 1913.

Note. Reports for the years 1902 and 1912 have not been located. The Department of Indian Affairs began recording the value of beef in 1906. Revenues from fishing were excluded from the graph.

5.1 ARCHIVAL SOURCES: AGRICULTURE

Agriculture is vital within colonial thought and policy surrounding ‘social progress’ and serves as “a potent symbol of settler-colonial identity” (Wolfe, 2006, p. 396). Therefore, the transition of agriculture was one of the methods colonial officials implemented to eliminate preexisting Blackfoot land-use practices that supported both food security and sovereignty. For this reason, agriculture is the first of the three economic industries this chapter focuses on.

For the archival documents, I focus on analyzing the *Department of Indian Affairs Annual Reports* (1880–1913), which allows me to examine the ongoing shifts in colonial thought regarding agriculture and its implementation on the Blackfoot reserves. Specifically, I analyzed the discourse surrounding the implementation of farming, the commodification of agriculture, and the crops grown on reserves. Within the annual reports between 1877 and 1913, there are 102 references, or mentions, of agricultural activity (excluding mentions of hay). The presence of agriculture remains relatively constant in reports throughout the years, as illustrated in Figure 12. However, from around 1903 to 1905, there is scarcely any mention of agriculture on the Blackfoot reserve, which aligns with the rise of cattle and the policy change regarding agriculture in Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty) at the turn of the century. The appearance of agriculture with the annual reports appears in 1878, or the year after the making of Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty), and remained a relevantly significant till 1913, which is illustrated in Figure 12.

The discourse surrounding agriculture within the Annual reports can be broadly sorted into seven sub-themes, as shown in Figure 13.

- **Sub-theme one:** *Crop production and labour* encompass mentions that describe agricultural work on reserves or agricultural yields.

- **Sub-theme two:** *Crop sales* categorize mentions involving agricultural contracts, the sale of surplus crops, and money made from agricultural produce.
- **Sub-theme three:** *Transitioning into agriculture mentions agricultural policy* and the perceived acceptance of agriculture by the Blackfoot, such as the purchase of farming machinery.
- **Sub-theme four:** *Infrastructure* involves mentions that focus on machinery, tools, and implementation of irrigation that are used to aid in agriculture.
- **Sub-theme five:** *Weather-related crop loss* includes any mention of total or partial crop failures that is explicitly linked to weather conditions such as drought or frost.
- **Sub-theme six:** *Unsuitable for farming* includes statements that explicitly describe the reserve's inability to support successful agriculture, due to climate.
- **Sub-theme seven:** *Miscellaneous* includes general commentary related to agriculture that cannot be categorized into other themes.

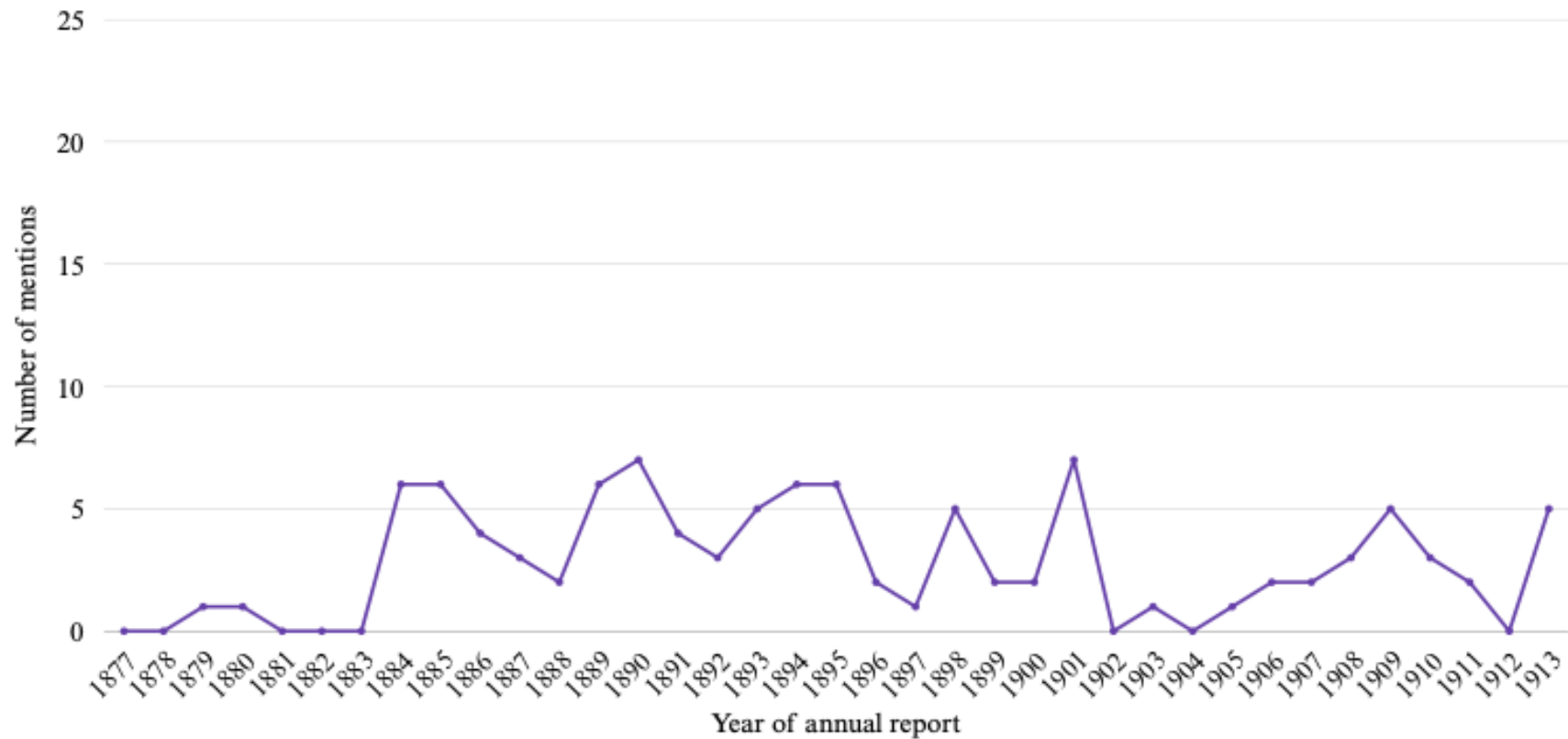


Figure 12: Mentions of agriculture in relation to the Blackfoot Confederacy within the Department of Indian Affairs annual reports (1877-1913).

Note. The data is drawn from *the Reports of the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs (1877–1879)* and *the Department of Indian Affairs Annual Reports (1880–1913)*.

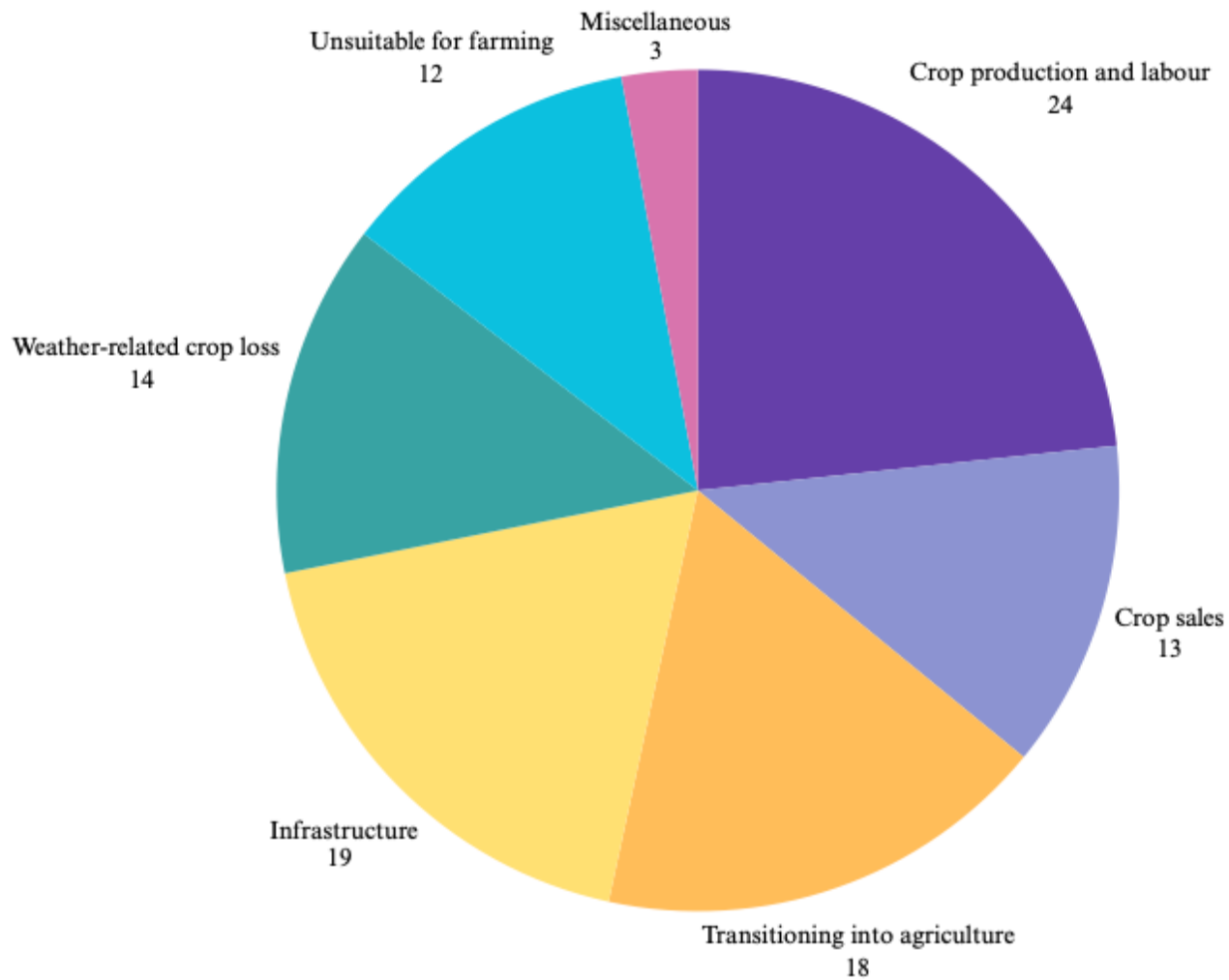


Figure 13: Breakdown of the seven sub-themes of agriculture within the Department of Indian Affairs annual reports (1877-1913).

5.2 SUB-THEMES: AGRICULTURE

Before discussing the archival material in detail, it is necessary to first address the context of agriculture within Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty). I spend the majority of this chapter discussing agriculture as a tool in destabilizing Blackfoot food security and sovereignty; however, as much as the Dominion imposed settler agricultural practices, it is also important to acknowledge that the Blackfoot Confederacy, the Stoney Nakoda, and the Tsuu T'ina Nations also negotiated clauses that supported agriculture. The choice of Indigenous Nations to transition into agriculture, and the acknowledgement of that choice, is part of recognizing Indigenous agency within a history set on the erasure of agency, choice, and resistance.

According to *The True Spirit and Original Intent of Treaty 7*, the agricultural clauses were negotiated in response to the disappearance of the bison and other game animals, as well as the growing need for rations due to starvation. With the depletion of game came shifts in diet to prevent starvation with people resorting to “eat[ing] gophers and whatever they could to feed themselves” (Treaty 7 Elders et al., 1996, p. 75), as well as having impacts on people’s ability to prepare for the winter as people “did have not enough hide material to make winter clothes” (Treaty 7 Elders et al., 1996, p. 75). These impacts on the Blackfoot’s way of life initiated the process by which the Blackfoot Nations and leaders began discussing the possibility of making a Treaty (Treaty 7 Elders et al., 1996). However, the negotiations around agriculture do not appear to have been framed as a complete or permanent shift away from traditional food systems. Elder Paul Smith, of the Piikani Nation, emphasizes this by stating that, “the Indian leaders would never give up territory that they used for everyday survival” (Treaty 7 Elders et al., 1996, p. 75).

In other words, the decision to negotiate for agricultural supplies and instruction, in addition to rations, emphasizes that the Blackfoot Nations were not passive actors in Treaty

negotiations. Blackfoot leaders weighed the needs of their people and fought for Treaty clauses that emphasized the continued freedom to hunt and the “government’s commitment to protect the buffalo” (Treaty 7 Elders et al., 1996, p. 325)—promises that were either altered or omitted from the final written text of the treaty. By omitting the negotiated clauses sought to protect the Blackfoot’s way of life, the Dominion of Canada used agriculture as a tool for colonial violence that centred around the elimination of Indigenous sociocultural and political structures, which in turn led to the destabilization of Blackfoot food security and sovereignty.

Within annual reports, agriculture is presented through the lens of economic self-sufficiency and as a tool for assimilation. While agriculture is directly associated with food production, Indian Agents do not frame their discussion of agriculture and successful agricultural policy as supporting Blackfoot food security. Rather, the adoption of agriculture is seen as a way to relieve the state of the economic burden of providing rations to the Blackfoot Nations and to advance civilization by restricting Blackfoot land-use. Therefore, by using the theoretical lens of settler colonialism and the landscape approach, I examine the archival documents using the subthemes to examine how the framing of agriculture as a means of colonial control and assimilation began to destabilize Blackfoot food security and sovereignty by restricting how agriculture was practiced and limiting Blackfoot agency, sale or use of agricultural produce.

The first mentions of agriculture within the reports appear several years after the signing of Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty), beginning in 1879. In that year’s report, the Indian Commissioner for the North-West Territories outlined the federal government’s rationale for supporting a transition to agriculture on the Blackfoot reserves. He stated that:

[T]he policy, of the Government in attempting to make the Indians of the North-West self-supporting by instructing them in cultivating the soil, herding cattle, etc., will in his opinion, prove a success; and that there can be little doubt if the buffalo continue to be

scarce that unless the Indians become self-supporting they must be fed at the expense of the country" (p.17).

The statement above frames the transition to agriculture as part of the Dominion of Canada's broader aim to relieve itself of the financial responsibilities tied to Treaty obligations, with food security treated as an afterthought. This economic framing of agriculture is particularly evident in early mentions of agricultural activity in the annual reports. In the earlier annual reports, the focus of Indian Agents is not on food security, as Indian Agents rarely report whether agriculture yields were consumed or integrated into diets. Instead, the focus of early reports centres around changing land-use patterns and imposing settler agriculture practices with most of the discussion on agriculture between 1884 and 1890 centring around the breaking up of land for cultivation and the number of acres seeded. This reinforces the notion that for colonial officials, the goal of agriculture is not food access but rather a means to impose settler economic structures and land-use practices, which in turn destabilizes Blackfoot security and sovereignty.

Annual reports for 1880 and 1884 focus predominantly on recording and describing agricultural labour as evidence of the application of the settler agricultural model. Particularly, Indian Agents dedicated much of their reports to describing agricultural labour, such as the use of the Department's horses to plough, as well as the types and amounts of seeds sown (Department of Indian Affairs, 1884). In 1884, the Blackfoot (Siksika) reserve reportedly sown "164 acres...composed of wheat, oats, barley, potatoes, turnips, carrots, onions and garden seed" (Department of Indian Affairs, 1884, p.220), and the Blood (Kainai) Reserve sown approximately 81 acres with a combination of oats, potatoes, turnips, wheat and carrots (Department of Indian Affairs, 1884, p.220). Along with imposing settler economic structures and land-use practices through agriculture, colonial agents restricted agricultural practices by determining what could be

grown. In terms of crops grown on Blackfoot reserves, they were restricted to those listed in the written agreement of Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty), which limited types of seeds to potatoes, barley, oats, and wheat. While the Treaty states that different seeds could be grown in case crop types were deemed unsuitable for cultivation, this did not occur on any of the Blackfoot reserves, as crops grown on reserves did not stray immensely from the seed types specified in the Treaty. While colonial agents appeared to trial different types of crops, such as corn or onions, they did not produce high yields; so, by the 1890s, the crops grown on reserves were a combination of oats, potatoes, and wheat, as illustrated in Figures 4, 5, and 6.

Furthermore, by 1885, as larger tracts of land were being sown, Indian Agents shifted their focus towards increasing the harvesting of agricultural surplus and finding markets for the produce. With the increase in harvests, Indian Agents began to discuss possible markets for the sale of crop surplus, and agent reports having formed a contract with the North-West Mountain Police "twenty thousand pounds at one cent per pound" (Department of Indian Affairs, 1885, p.169). In the years following, many of the contracts for Blackfoot agricultural surplus are with other settler organizations such as the North-West Mountain Police or with Industrial schools. Additionally, that same year, the Indian Agent on Peigan (Piikani) reserve discussed restricting the sale of agricultural surplus. In the report, he states:

Last winter I had to stop the issue of permits, as I was informed that Indians were selling a sack of potatoes (about eighty pounds weight) for twenty-five cents, and in several cases two sacks for that sum, rather than take them home again" (Department of Indian Affairs, 1885, p.169).

The restriction of agricultural sales between Piikani farmers and settlers is notable, as it begins to illustrate the risks that Indian Agents faced in losing control over the sale of agricultural goods and the possible pushback against the pressure to expand cultivation. In relation to Blackfoot food sovereignty, restricting individuals' ability to sell and negotiate the price of their agricultural

produce undermines their capacity to make decisions about their food systems and limits their ability to obtain cash outside the highly regulated colonial system.

The focus of reports shifted away from contracts towards the impacts of climate on crop yields around 1887. The focus on weather-related crop failures became increasingly common in the annual reports between 1887 and 1900. Around the 1890s, mentions of failed harvests caused by heat, fire, or frost appeared consistently, with at least one crop failure reported each year between 1890 and 1895. The consecutive failures in crop harvests reported in annual reports began placing pressure on Indian Agents, as their ability to implement agricultural policies was faltering. The growing uncertainty surrounding the success, and by extension, the aim of economic self-sufficiency through assimilation, placed pressure on the success of harvests. This concern among Indian Agents is evident in Chapter 4, where they express growing concern about potato harvests and the *abandonment* of agricultural labour for ceremonies, as potatoes seemed to be the exception among crop failures as illustrated in Figures 4, 5, and 6.

Additionally, the first mention of the Peasant Farming Act appears in the 1891 annual report, in a statement emphasizing the role of Indian Agents in preventing the use of “labour saving machinery” (Department of Indian Affairs, 1892) unless the individual owned the machinery. Beyond this, little information on the Peasant Farming Act is explicitly discussed. Instead, the reports focus on descriptions of farming tools used for harvest, which were likely included by Indian Agents to illustrate compliance with the policy and to highlight machinery purchases. While the restriction on machinery likely impacted Blackfoot food security and limited food sovereignty, such as by preventing the acceptance of large contracts, the annual reports do not provide sufficient detail to address these specific questions.

The consecutive reporting of crop failures by Indian Agents led to the declaration that Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty) was unsuitable for agriculture in the 1900s, resulting in shifting economic policies (Department of Indian Affairs, 1899; 1900; 1901). Despite the declaration of Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty) being unsuitable for agriculture, the Dominion of Canada was actively recruiting settlers to North-West territories under the Dominion Land Act of 1871 (Carter, 2016). Instead, the Department of Indian Affairs and Indian Agents justified the shifting away from agriculture was the unpredictable weather in the area. The clearest example is in the 1901 annual report from the Piegan (Piikani) Reserve, in which the agent states, “[m]any years of fruitless efforts having demonstrated the fact that on account of climatic conditions and the quality of the soil, this reserve is unsuitable for farming” (p. 281). Despite the Department of Indian Affairs claiming that agriculture was unproductive and, by extension, not economically viable, the data they collected on various income sources between 1900 and 1913 (as seen in Figures 8, 9, and 10) illustrate that the income earned from farm produce on the Blackfoot and Blood reserves was significant. That said, the division between agricultural sales and hay sales is uncertain. While the Piegan reserve did not have significant income from farm produce, the Department of Indian Affairs did not appear to differentiate between reserves and impose a homogeneous claim that the entire territory was unsuitable for agriculture. Moreover, I speculate that the shift toward other industries may have been an attempt by the Department of Indian Affairs to transition to a more lucrative economic system, thereby achieving their aim of economic self-sufficiency more quickly, while also restricting the industries in which the Blackfoot People were increasingly involved.

5.3 ARCHIVAL SOURCES AND GENERAL SUB-THEMES: RANCHING

Similar to agriculture, the primary historical documents analyzed in this section focus on the *Reports of the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs* (1877–1879) and the *Department of Indian Affairs Annual Reports* (1880–1913). Between 1877 and 1913, ranching and related activities, such as grazing, were mentioned 96 times. The discourse surrounding cattle and ranching increased noticeably in the 1890s, as illustrated in Figure 14.

Unlike agriculture, there is a distinction in the documents between cattle and ranching as an industry. For example, cattle were first mentioned in 1888 in reference to cattle killings; however, ranching as an industry on the Blackfoot reserves did not emerge until 1898, with the many mentions focusing on the growing size of cattle herds.

This distinction, reflected in the archival material, led to the categorization of total mentions into six sub-themes, as shown in Figure 15:

- **Sub-theme one:** *Cattle herd status* includes mentions discussing the number of cattle, cattle deaths, and other related metrics.
- **Sub-theme two:** *Ranching-related labour* includes mentions describing cattle herd maintenance, grazing, or any work related to ranching or cattle care.
- **Sub-theme three:** *Beef sales and contracts* include any mentions of sale amounts, contract negotiations, or related commercial activities.
- **Sub-theme four:** *Cattle killings* includes any mentions of cattle being killed, whether by accident, illness, or other causes.
- **Sub-theme five:** *Horse-for-cattle exchange* includes mentions of horse-for-cattle trades, the cattle loan program, and similar exchanges.

- **Sub-theme six:** *Miscellaneous* includes mentions that do not fall into the categories above, such as infrastructure built to support the cattle or ranching industry like barns.

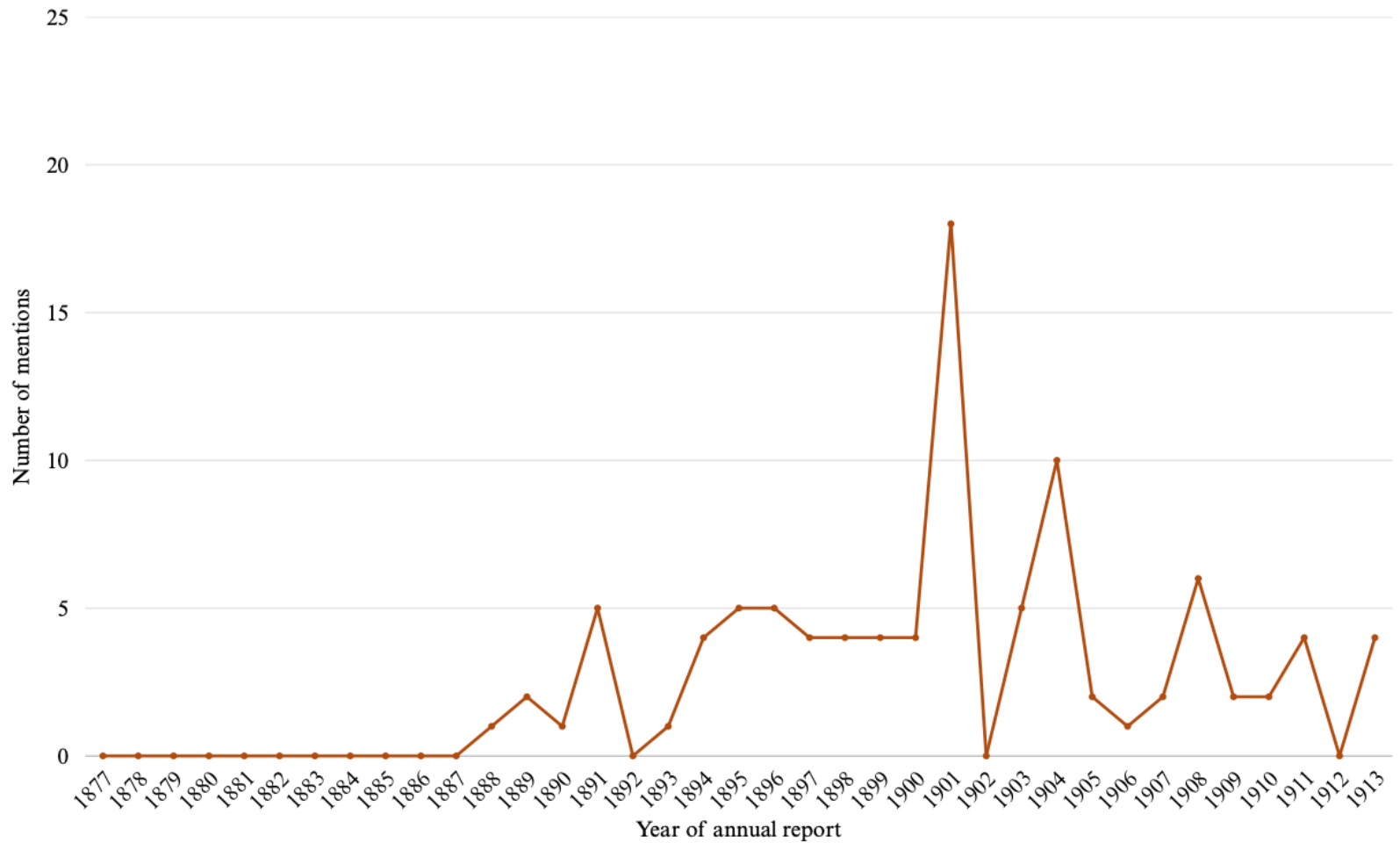


Figure 14: Mentions of ranching and cattle in relation to the Blackfoot Confederacy within the Department of Indian Affairs annual reports (1877-1913).

Note. The data is drawn from *the Reports of the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs (1877–1879)* and *the Department of Indian Affairs Annual Reports (1880–1913)*.

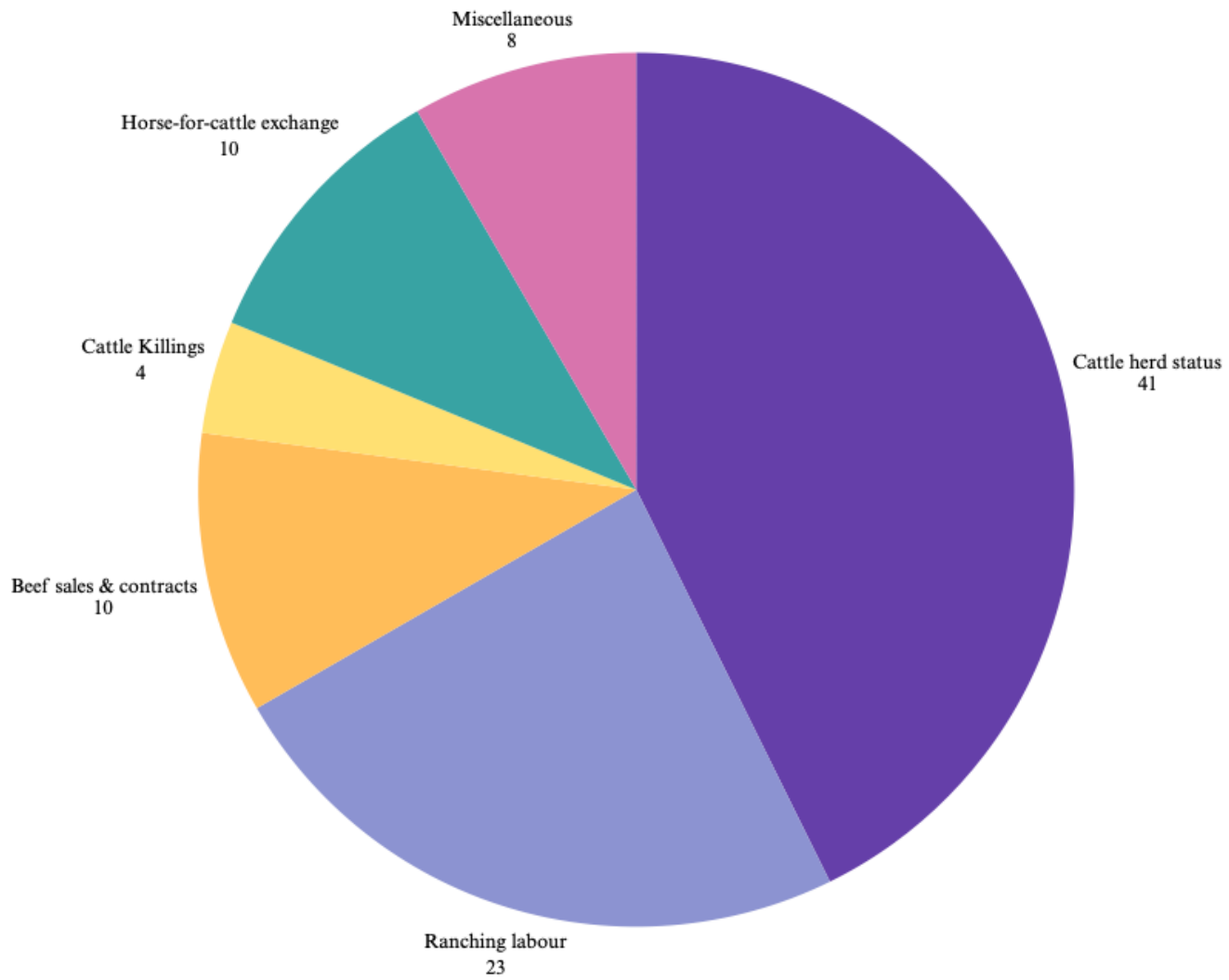


Figure 15: Breakdown of the six sub-themes of ranching and cattle within the Department of Indian Affairs annual reports (1877-1913).

5.4 SUB-THEME: RANCHING AND CATTLE

Before the establishment of the ranching industry, cattle were used as tools to impose settler colonial models of agriculture as they were viewed as preferred animals for agricultural labour. Cattle and ranching illustrate the shift in settler economic policies on Blackfoot reserves, as cattle are associated with agricultural labour and ranching is centred around achieving economic self-sufficiency through reduced spending on rations. As discussed in Chapter 5, towards the 1900s, the Department of Indian Affairs rapidly decreased the frequency of ration distribution on Blackfoot reserves, using the justification of the ranching industry as proof of economic self-sufficiency. With the shift around 1890 came a shift in land-use toward using grasslands as grazing lands rather than agricultural fields. This importance persists despite the shift in the economic industry, as the role of the settler industry is to eliminate and replace Blackfoot economic systems, and by extension, the human-environmental relationship with the land. In terms of Blackfoot food sovereignty and security, the shift to ranching further imposed restrictions on the use and sale of cattle, as the killing of cattle for food was highly regulated. Therefore, in this section, I begin by discussing the shift in the discussion surrounding cattle for agriculture and cattle creation in the ranching industry.

Ranching on Blackfoot reserves began gaining traction with the Department of Indian Affairs around 1890, as the department began transitioning away from agriculture. Prior to the 1890s, the annual reports' discourse surrounding cattle primarily focused on the cattle-killing, adoption of oxen for agricultural labour, and the growth of cattle herds. The first mention of cattle within the annual reports relating to the Blackfoot is in reference to cattle killing. In the 1888 annual report, the Agent on the Peigan (Piikani) reserve

discussed the presence of the North-West Mounted Police on the reserve "to watch for the stolen horses and prevent Indians from killing cattle" (p. 269). Other mentions of cattle killings within the annual reports in 1889 where Indian Agents dismissed settler ranchers' complaining about cattle death, and in 1894, when a cattle-killing was investigated to ensure it was not the result of "lack of sufficient food" (p. 385), which the Indian Agent assured the accusations were false as daily rations were still being given. Although I do not delve further into examining the killing of settler-owned cattle in depth, as there is limited information within the annual reports, these incidents are associated with broader restrictions on Blackfoot mobility and land use. This emphasis on cattle protection by settlers reflects an attempt to impose settler economic models centred on private property, which conflicted with Blackfoot land-based practices.

Other early mentions of cattle also appear as Indian Agents began to push for the adoption of oxen for ploughing rather than horses, as oxen were seen by colonial agents as the preferred animal. The mention of trading horses for oxen is limited within the reports, but they mark the beginning of a larger pattern in which Indian Agents pushed Blackfoot farmers to sell their horses. For instance, in 1890, on the Blackfoot (Siksika) Reserve, the report stated:

The Indians are very willing to work the oxen; the only difficulty is that they do not have a sufficient number. I have advised them to sell some of their horses and buy oxen for themselves, as their horses are too small for the work (p. 161).

Later in the report, the exchange of horses for cattle shifted in its purpose as the focus was not on using oxen for agricultural purposes, but the growth of the ranching industry. As around this time, Indian Agents' concerns surrounding crop failures increased resulting in

the restructuring of settler colonial economic policies and their goals for economic self-sufficiency on Blackfoot reserves.

The first references to the cattle loan policy begin with the exchange of horses on the Peigan (Piikani) and Blood (Kainai) reserves in 1891. It is also interesting to note that these are the only Blackfoot reserves with direct mentions of the cattle loan policy. That said, the cattle loan policy was not officially given a title until 1899; however, the policy was referred to as the "loan system" (Department of Indian Affairs, 1900, p. 35) or "loan cattle" (Department of Indian Affairs, 1901a, p. 335). The 1899 annual report officially outlines the policy as such:

Years ago, what was called the 'loan system' was adopted. Animals were lent to Indians for the purpose of enabling them to raise stock, and when returned, they were, in turn, given out to others. ... By occasionally allowing them to sell an animal for their encouragement, they were led on from step to step (p. 35).

Therefore, from this point forward, I will refer to the policy as the cattle loan policy, which refers to the trading or sale of horses for cattle or the lending of cattle to Blackfoot ranchers. Early renditions of the policy are often discussed within annual reports in relation to the growth of cattle herds by the Department of Indian Affairs. While in 1891, the Peigan (Piikani) reserve was selling their horses for cattle, agents argued this would cause people to "better understand their [cattle] value, and so take more care of them" (Department of Indian Affairs, 1892, p. 206). Much like agriculture, the cattle loan program is intertwined with notions of civilization, while on the surface ranching deviates from the ideals of civilization, the imposition of the industry follows the logic of elimination by Wolfe (2006). The imposition of ranching, particularly the cattle loan program, centred around the forced adoption of settler colonial economic systems. For instance, in 1906, the loan

program began referencing another policy, under which cattle were used as collateral for individuals who wished to obtain a loan for houses (Department of Indian Affairs, 1906, p. 271). Similar to agriculture, where private property is associated with the ownership of farm equipment and the establishment of a homestead, ranching is associated with private property interconnected with cattle ownership. The cattle loan policy, according to the 1899 annual report definition, was last referenced in 1904.

With the establishment of cattle herds and the ranching industry around the 1900s, Indian Agents began shifting their attention toward beef sales and contracts as a source of income and as a method to cut costs on rations. While beef contracts were discussed prior—typically with the Agency buying beef—around the 1900s, the discourse shifted toward Blackfoot cattle ranchers starting to supply ration houses with beef (Department of Indian Affairs, 1898) and the Agency earning revenue from beef sales (Department of Indian Affairs, 1901). According to the data on various income sources, as illustrated in Figures 9, 10, and 11, the value of beef sales became significant around 1906; however, the department did not differentiate between beef sold as part of contracts and beef used as food on the reserves. The distinction between food and sales further emphasizes the department’s perspective that the role of economic industries is the establishment of colonial economic systems and relieving the department from economic responsibility for treaty obligations, rather than supporting Blackfoot food security.

5.5 ARCHIVAL SOURCES AND GENERAL SUB-THEMES: ADDITIONAL (OTHER) INDUSTRIES

Apart from agriculture and ranching, the annual reports mention various smaller, or typically less economically profitable, industries the Blackfoot people engaged in to earn

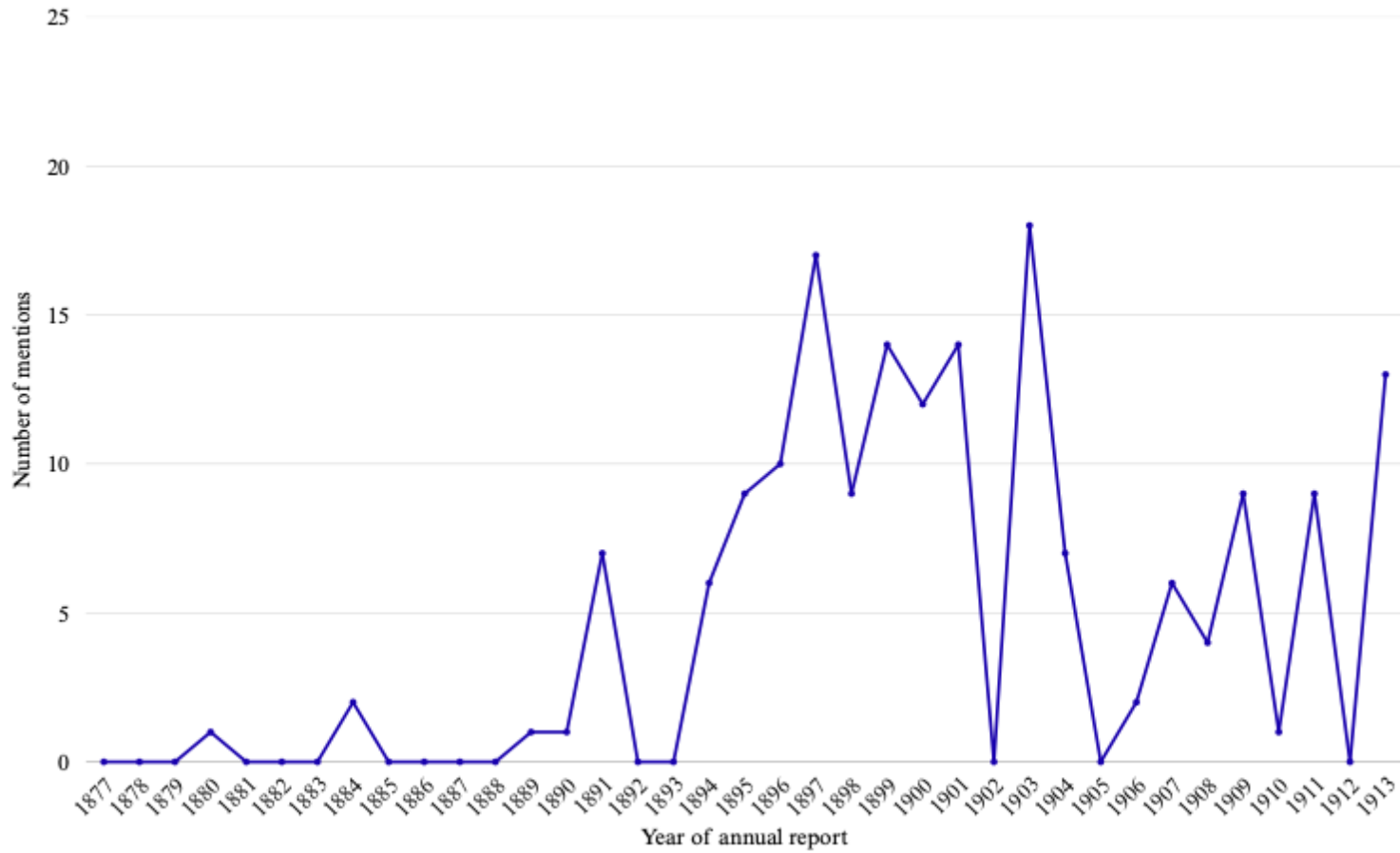
money. *Additional industries* is a generalized term to refer to the numerous types of labour found within the annual reports, including mining, hay freighting, and artisan work. These types of labour do not include work relating to the agricultural or ranching industries on the reserves but may be adjacent to them, such as the occasional mention of growing hay.

Between 1877 and 1913, there were around 172 mentions of additional industries within the reports. The earliest mention occurs in 1880, and then increases in frequency around 1894 to 1905, with the final mention occurring in 1913, which is illustrated in Figure 16. The types of labour mentioned within the annual reports can be broadly sorted into six sub-themes, as shown in Figure 17:

- **Sub-theme one:** *The hay industry*, which consists of mentions discussing hay freighting, hauling, growing, and selling.
- **Sub-theme two:** *Coal mining*, which consists of mentions discussing the physical act of mining, the hauling of coal, the operations of mining, and the sale of coal.
- **Sub-theme three:** *Labour for settler households and farms*, which includes individuals working as farm hands, domestic labourers, etc.
- **Sub-theme four:** *Generalized freighting* that does not include either coal or hay; this theme refers to the freighting of rations and other goods.
- **Sub-theme five:** *Artisan labour*, which refers to the sale of art such as beadwork or robes.
- **Sub-theme six:** *Miscellaneous* references to labour types that are not mentioned regularly, such as wolf hunting and tour guiding.

Figure 16.

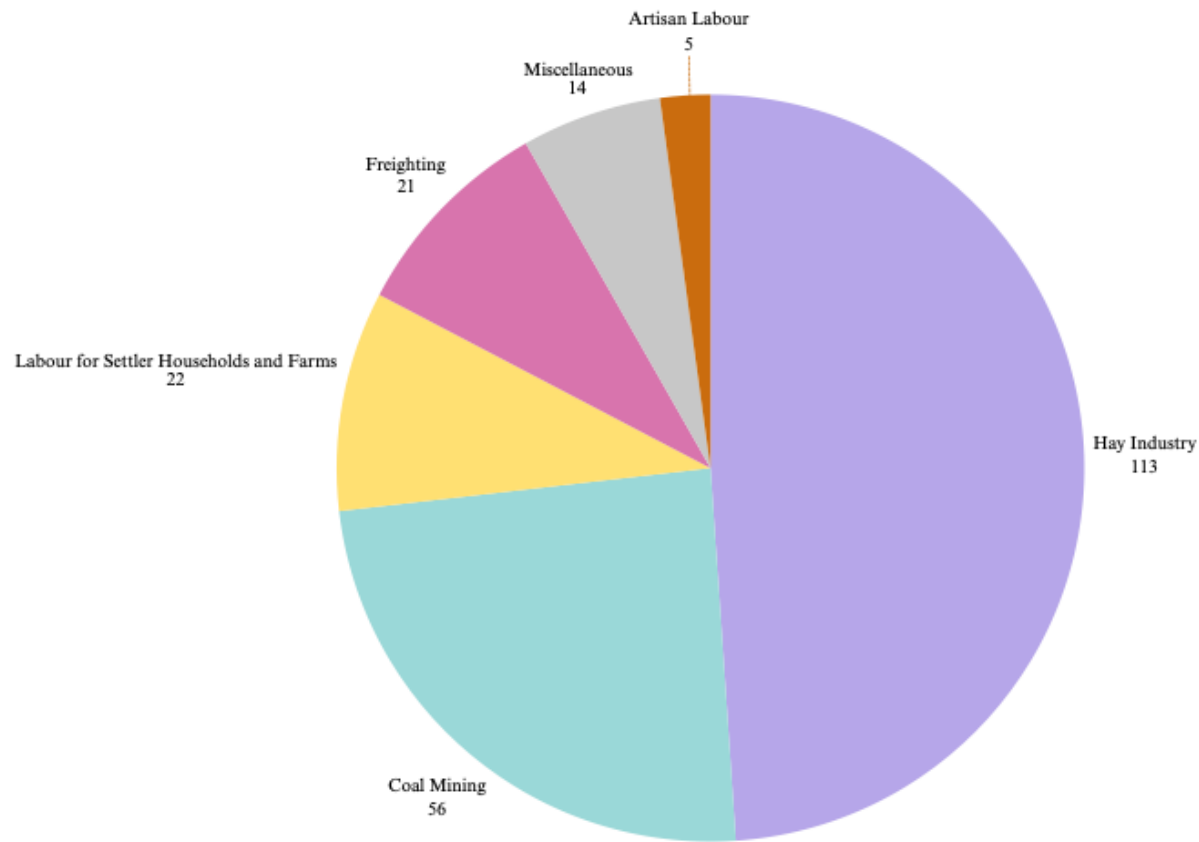
Mentions of additional industries within the Department of Indian Affairs annual reports (1877-1913).



Note. The data is drawn from *the Reports of the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs (1877–1879)* and *the Department of Indian Affairs Annual Reports (1880–1913)*.

Figure 17.

Breakdown of the six sub-themes of additional industries mentioned within the Department of Indian Affairs annual reports (1877-1913).



5.6 SUB-THEME: ADDITIONAL (OTHER) INDUSTRIES

The focus on additional industries is associated with a larger conversation on the transition and introduction of the wage economy. In the case of the Blackfoot, the movement towards working in industries, not relating to agriculture or ranching, represents the need to access cash in a highly regulated system, which could be used towards needs such as food. Destabilization of traditional food systems through the imposition of colonial economic systems results in a growing dependency on colonial goods, such as food, is not unique to this colonial project. Although my thesis does not discuss other settler colonial projects, the destabilization of food systems through colonial restrictions on land-use, is also seen in other cases of colonialism, such as in Banda, Ghana, and Zumbagua, Ecuador (Logan, 2020; Weismantel, 1989). In the annual reports, there are six sub-themes relating to additional industries; however, for this thesis I will focus on two sub-themes: the hay industries and artisan labour. I chose to focus on these two sub-themes as they highlight the range of economic strategies Blackfoot people used in response to colonial policies and the growing shift toward a wage economy on reserves.

The description of labour within the early reports is often in reference to individuals working as ration issuers, butchers, or farm hands (Department of Indian Affairs, 1885). However, labour within this context is often associated with the work-for-ration policy. There does not appear to be a strict transition in the implementation of these contracts in annual reports, as both policies are recorded in the 1884 annual report. For instance, the Indian Agent issued a generalized comment that individuals working as butchers would “pay themselves with meat” (Department of Indian Affairs, 1885, p. 263) signifying the work-for-ration policy. The work-for-ration policy appears to align with the Department of Indian Affairs’ desire to entice people to accept certain occupations such as farming. The work-for-ration policy was not always imposed on the Blackfoot

reserves, as seen in the reported conversation from Chief Crowfoot about inequitable pay for labour in the 1884 report. In the reported conversation, Chief Crowfoot argued that “his men who assisted in issuing rations should be paid the same wages (6[.]13 per month) as those who perform[ed] similar duty upon the Blood Reserve” (Department of Indian Affairs, 1885, p. 265). The recorded conversation provides additional insight into the discussion surrounding labour and compensation, specifically the pushback on the work-for-ration policy and the negotiation of wages. While the outcome of Chief Crowfoot’s advocacy does not appear in the later annual reports, the presence of the negotiation of compensation illustrates resistance against colonial policies that are present within the reports as ‘effortlessly’ implemented.

By the 1900s, the annual reports began providing data on the sources of income on the three Blackfoot reserves as seen in Figures 9, 10, and 11. While these figures provide a foundation for understanding the addition of other industries, it is important to recognize there are limitations in interpreting these figures due to the gaps within the annual reports. For instance, in Figure 9, wages earned for the Bloods (Kainai) are recorded to have been \$123,887.04; however, details regarding how wages were calculated, spent on, or even what jobs were performed to earn these wages are not disclosed within the annual report. Similarly, in Figure 11, the \$200,000.00 recorded as income on the Blackfoot (Siksika) reserve in 1911 is also not discussed by Indian Agents within the report. Although, these are significant data points within the collected data, they are not directly contextualized by Indian Agents within their reports, which creates a significant information gap.

Therefore, when discussing other industries in this section, I chose to focus on the hay industry and artisan labour to showcase two sides of how the Department of Indian Affairs pushed towards economic self-sufficiency, which created a shift away from agriculture. For the hay industry, once colonial officials recognized the high-income revenues from the industry, it became

highly regulated. In other words, Indian Agents began regulating contracts and creating strategies to increase profits from the hay industry, such as growing of hay rather than harvesting wild grasses. On the other hand, artisan labour is less restricted by the implementation of colonial policies and more reflective of individual uses of traditional skills for income, especially women's labour.

5.7 SUB-THEME: HAY INDUSTRIES

The reporting on hay before the 1900s centres around the use of hay as feed for animals on the reserves or the repurposing of failed harvests as animal feed. However, once the Department of Indian Affairs began shifting away from agriculture, as a means to achieve economic self-sufficiency on reserves, the focus of hay as an industry became prevalent within the annual reports with agents repetitively discussing the increase of hay production. There are two types of hay being reported within the annual reports, as illustrated in Figure 18 and 19; the first is the use of prairies grass as hay and the second is cultivation of hay. The cultivation of hay was a strategy implemented by Indian Agents to attempt to increase the amount of hay produced and increase revenue. That said, cultivation of hay appears unsuccessful, as the majority of hay being sold was prairie grasses or wild hay. In the context of Blackfoot food security and sovereignty, the hay industry and the colonial regulation of the industry sought to alter human-environmental relationships and land-use through the commodification of prairie grasses, and imposition of settler economic models to increase revenue.

In general, references to the hay industry in the annual reports are limited to harvest quantities, contract arrangements, and labour related to hauling. The earliest record of a hay contract appears in the 1891 annual report, describing an agreement between the North-West Mounted Police and the Blackfoot (Siksika) Reserve (p. 222). The hay industry became one of the

larger economic sectors on the Blackfoot reserves, second to coal mining during the period examined. Hay production began to increase around 1894, as illustrated in Figures 18, 19, and 20, likely in response to the recurring harvest failures that the Department of Indian Affairs began documenting during this time. While attention to the use of crop failures was not often discussed within the text of the report, Indian Agents on occasion include notes within their data tables describing the use of failed crops as hay. For example, in the table reporting the total harvest yields for the Blood (Kainai) reserve in 1884, there is a note identifying the oats being cut for hay (p. 528).

Similarly, to the sales of cattle, the hay industry is highly regulated by the Indian Agents as they controlled who could buy hay from reserves and controlling contracts. Unlike beef contracts, the sale of hay appears to be limited to settler institutions and ranchers. For example, in the 1900 annual report for the Blood (Kainai) Reserve noted contracts with "the Cochrane Ranche Company, North-West Mounted Police and settlers, netting in the neighbourhood of \$5,900" (p. 256). Four years later, the 1904 report, the sale of hay to settlers at "prices ranging from \$4.50 to \$7.50 per ton" (p. 258) continued to be recorded. In relation to Blackfoot food sovereignty and security, the Blackfoot Nations were forcibly removed from their ability to influence the policies shaping the economic and cultural structures of their communities; the imposition of settler economic models, pushing for increased hay harvesting, had larger environmental implications in the destabilization of traditional foodways. This was indicated in the annual reports for 1900, where Smart wrote:

In the North-west Territories they depend almost entirely upon the wild grass to furnish their hay, but as stock increases in some districts the day is drawing appreciably nearer when this natural source of supply will prove insufficient, and some experiments are being made in the direction of growing hay (p.38).

Broadly speaking, information regarding the hay industry, including hauling, contracts, and growing concerns about the sustainability of relying on wild prairie grasses for hay, began to decrease by the early 1900s. The control over contracts and the imposition of settler economic models had a similar impact on Blackfoot food sovereignty as they did on other industries.

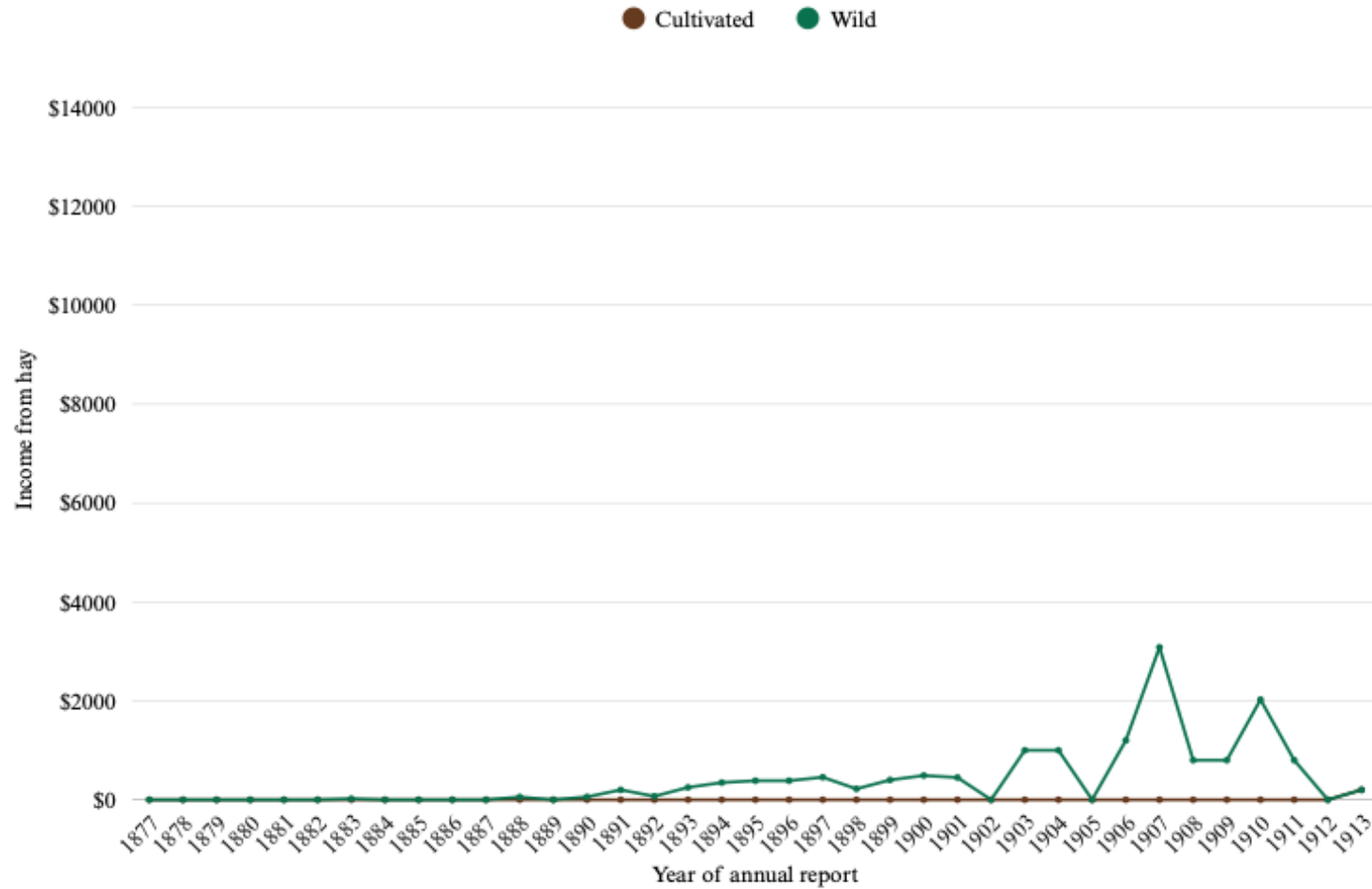


Figure 18: Income earned from hay on the Blackfoot (Siksika) reserve between 1877 and 1913.

Note The total revenue received from cultivated hay on the Blackfoot (Siksika) reserve is \$16.00. The data is drawn from *the Reports of the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs (1877–1879)* and *the Department of Indian Affairs Annual Reports (1880–1913)*.

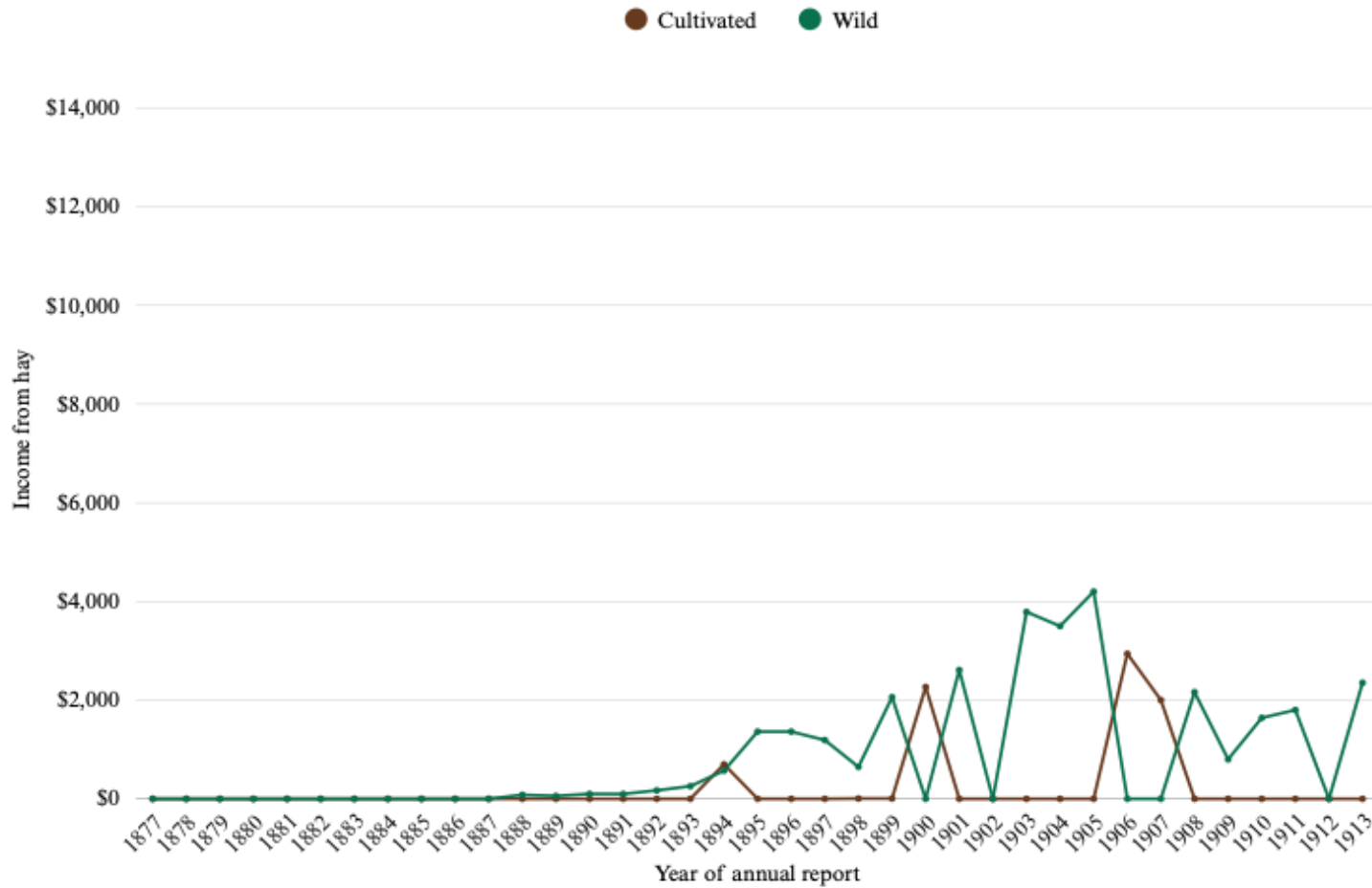


Figure 19: Income earned from hay on the Blood (Kainai) reserve between 1877 and 1913.

Note. The data is drawn from *the Reports of the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs (1877–1879)* and *the Department of Indian Affairs Annual Reports (1880–1913)*.

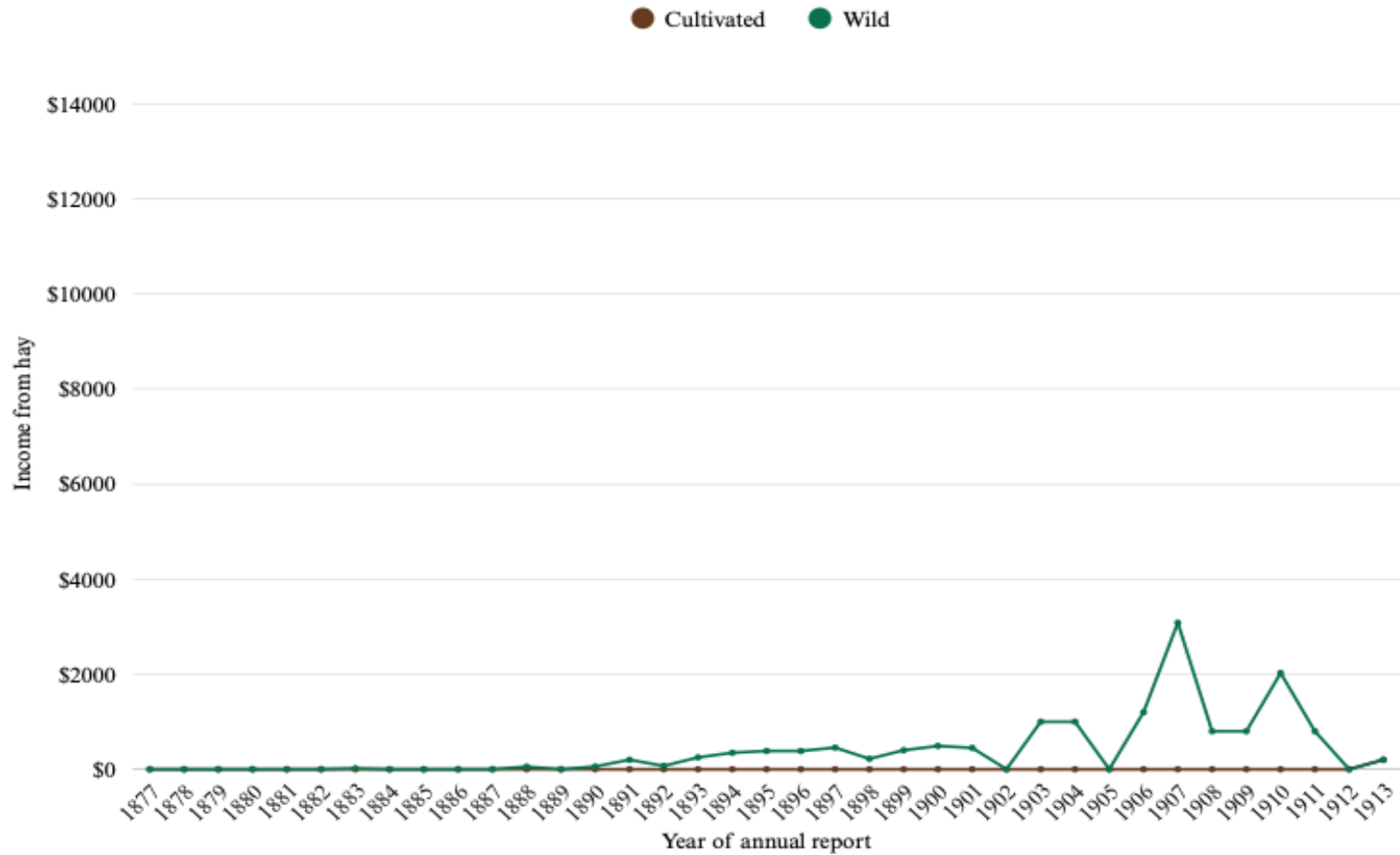


Figure 20: Income earned from hay on the Peigan (Piikani) reserve between 1877 and 1913.

Note. The total revenue received from cultivated hay on the Peigan (Piikani) reserve is \$200.00. *Note.* The data is drawn from *the Reports of the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs (1877–1879)* and *the Department of Indian Affairs Annual Reports (1880–1913)*.

5.7 SUB-THEME: ARTISAN LABOUR

Similar to other industries discussed within the chapter, the increase in Indian Agents reporting various types of labour demonstrates the Department of Indian Affairs' shift towards economically self-supporting reserves. The major difference with artisan labour is the use of traditional skills to earn cash to participate in the colonial economic system. The main objective of settler colonialism centring around the elimination of Indigenous sociocultural and political structures through the imposition and acceptance of settler colonial system. Wolfe (2006) discusses this in relation to assimilation programs that revolve around and reflect the "ideological requirement of settler-colonial societies" (p. 403). In the case of Blackfoot artisan labour, the lack of regulation on the use of traditional skills to produce artisan goods could be connected with the desire or need to participate in the settler economic system. While the use of traditional skills to earn wages may not be ideal for colonial officials, through the lens of the imposition of a settler economic system, Indian Agents may have viewed this as progress.

That said, the case of artisan labour is interesting as it reflects a blend of agency through the use of traditional skills and resilience, as these artisan goods were sold for cash and likely used to buy necessities such as food or clothing (Department of Indian Affairs, 1897). It is important to note that the annual reports are limited in their information on how Blackfoot individuals used the money earned. Since the reports focus on recording the process of assimilation policies and reporting on how money is spent in association with items deemed as indicators of progressing private property, such as cattle or farm machinery, information on individual spending is not often seen in the annual report.

The first mention of artisan labour on Blackfoot reserves in the annual reports is from around 1896, which records the following:

The Indian, Crow Collar, has developed quite a talent for carving heads in stone, which he sells; and another, Sharp Voice, has been learning to make hair bridles and cru[t]ches. A good many women earn money by the sale of bead-work, tanning, hides and making overcoats, shirts, moccasins and other articles of clothing (p.271).

Unlike other industries, discussed in the annual reports, artisan labour is one of the areas where there is an explicit gender divide. This is seen in the passage above from the Blackfoot (Siksika) reserve where Indian Agents divide their discussion of artisan labour in terms of gender, such as describing the differences in items being produced by men and women. Additionally, Indian Agents showed gender bias towards artisan goods produced by men. The bias is illustrated in the reporting, particularly by naming male identifying individuals and grouping women as a single nameless entity. This does not imply Blackfoot artisans aligning themselves with the progressing settler colonialism economic models, but rather it reflects how Indian Agents viewed artisan labour in their narrative of successful colonial policies.

On the other hand, women's labour is generally underrepresented in the reports, aside from occasional derogatory commentary by Indian Agents, but when wage labour is discussed in relation to women, it is typically within the context of domestic service or artisan labour. Within the 1897 annual report, the agent reported use of traditional skills as a means to earn money by stating on the Blackfoot (Siksika) reserve, "[t]he Indian women earn a little money by the sale of bead-work and other articles, such as moccasins, coats and leggings, made out of tanned antelope hide" (Department of Indian Affairs, 1898, p. 257). In the same year, Indian Agents on the Blood (Kainai) reserve also reported the sale of artisan goods by reporting women "tan[ed] robes for themselves and settlers" (Department of Indian Affairs, 1898, p. 225) as well as making beadwork. However, the Indian Agents reporting artisan work on the Blood (Kainai) reserve did not focus on women's wage labour, but rather how women participating in settler notion of women's work, as they report:

The women's work consists of their usual household duties, which since the introduction of better houses, better cooking utensils and better furniture, are now more numerous and take up much more of their time (Department of Indian Affairs, 1898, p. 225).

The inclusion of artisan labour, and by extension women's labour, offers one of the few glimpses into women's participation in the reserve economy and their use of traditional skills to earn income. Notably, there is a clear tension between framing the sale of artisan goods as evidence of progress toward settler economic models and the colonial assimilation policies that frame domestic labour as a woman's primary role in the colonial economic models. Therefore, from the perspective of Indian Agents, women's artisan labour is not typically framed as economic self-sufficiency, but rather as part of household domestic labour. In contrast, the sole example of men engaging in artisan labour describes their work as a talent and emphasizes the commercial value of their products.

The case of artisan labour provides insight into Indigenous agency within the imposition of settler colonialism's economic systems. Similar to the hay industry, the movement towards wage labour is likely connected to the rising need to access cash to purchase items, such as food, outside of the ration system. Although the annual reports are limited in the information they can provide due to the system of reporting by Indian Agents, the increase in wage labour speaks to a larger pattern of settler colonial projects that forces dependency on colonial goods, in this case prompting individuals to explore different avenues for income.

5.8 CONCLUSION

The chapter focuses on three economic industries: agriculture, ranching, and wage labour to discuss the broader sub-themes revolving around Blackfoot food security and sovereignty, specifically in terms of the imposition of settler economic policies. At the core, the chapter

examines the pattern of the destabilization of traditional food systems through the imposition of colonial economic systems, resulting in a growing dependency on colonial goods and a shift towards wage labour. Beginning with the imposition of agriculture, the focus of settler colonial policies was to impose the settler agricultural model to eliminate preexisting economic systems, which in this case was hunting and gathering. The imposition of agriculture and later ranching was not to support Blackfoot food security, as the end goal of the Department of Indian Affairs was to relieve the state from the economic responsibility of providing rations. As the department began to claim they were approaching economic self-sufficiency on reserves, they began rapidly cutting rations, which further destabilized Blackfoot food security. Simultaneously, with a decrease in rations, there was a rise of wage labour and other industries, which likely indicates the final component of the generalized pattern. In summary, through promoting economic self-sufficiency, the state engineered changes through colonial economic policies that reshaped Blackfoot land use and destabilized pre-existing human-environmental relationships vital to Blackfoot food security. These choices not only disrupted Blackfoot food security but also contributed to the broader diminishment of Blackfoot food sovereignty by limiting the self-determination and autonomy of the Blackfoot Nation.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

As I conclude my thesis, I find myself with more questions than I anticipated when I began researching this project—a pattern I should be accustomed to by now. In my thesis, I sought to examine how the destabilization of food security and the diminishment of food sovereignty occurred for the Blackfoot Peoples in Treaty 7 (the Blackfoot Treaty) territory between 1877 and 1913. Specifically, I examined how colonial policies and settler economies impacted Blackfoot cultural, social, and land-use practices. Methodologically, I approached the question by taking an ethnographic archival approach and analyzing colonial historical documents, predominantly the annual reports created by the Department of Indian Affairs. Through these records, I began to trace how Indian Agents documented, justified, and implemented policies, particularly those associated with the Indian Act, across the three Blackfoot reserves. In doing so, I sought to understand the implementation and variation of colonial policies on the three Blackfoot reserves and their role in the destabilization of structures vital to upholding Blackfoot food security and sovereignty.

First, in my literature review, I went over the definitions of food security, food insecurity, and Indigenous food sovereignty to help build a foundation for talking about these ideas in a historical context. For food security, I used the FAO's definition, which focuses on four main pillars: availability, access, utilization, and stability. I also brought in other perspectives, such as household food insecurity and native food security, which offer different ways of understanding food systems. Native food security highlights the importance of restoring land-based practices and relationships with the land and community as essential to achieving collective food security. From there, I looked at the concept of food sovereignty and Indigenous food sovereignty using frameworks from La Via Campesina and the Indigenous Food Systems Network (IFSN). Both of these emphasize the structural side of food sovereignty and how it is deeply connected to land,

cultural practices like agriculture and ceremony, and the right to make decisions about food systems.

Furthermore, I discuss the two theoretical lenses that shape my approach to this thesis: the landscape approach from historical ecology and settler colonialism from settler colonial studies in my literature review to create a theoretical foundation. The landscape approach emphasizes that landscapes are not passive but are shaped by land-use and human-environmental relationships; therefore, landscapes are artifacts. Through land use practices such as bison hunting, berry gathering, and prairie burning, the Blackfoot people created and maintained food systems that supported food security and various sociocultural practices. Settler colonial theory, especially Patrick Wolfe's definition, frames settler colonialism as an ongoing structure aimed at eliminating and replacing Indigenous ways of life, including cultural, social, and economic systems, with settler versions. These two frameworks together help show how colonial officials deliberately destabilized Blackfoot food security and diminished food sovereignty through policies that imposed settler systems and disrupted Blackfoot land-based practices.

The focus of Chapter 3 is on how the banning of the Sundance ceremony under the Indian Act disrupted all four pillars of Indigenous food sovereignty: sacred sovereignty, self-determination, participation, and policy. As previously mentioned, the Sundance is deeply connected with the land, seasonality, and collective well-being, and by extension, land use. As such, the ceremony plays a vital role in maintaining Blackfoot land-use practices by strengthening environmental and sociocultural relationships, which aligns with the landscape approach from historical ecology. From this perspective, the Sundance reinforces land-use practices that sustain the Blackfoot sociocultural and spiritual relationship with the land. In turn, this supports Blackfoot food sovereignty by upholding the four pillars outlined by the Indigenous Food Systems Network:

sacred sovereignty, self-determination, participation, and policy. The banning of the Sundance through colonial economic and assimilation policies further destabilized Blackfoot land-use practices, which echoes Wolfe's (2007) concept of the logic of elimination. Colonial policies aimed at eliminating Blackfoot land-use practices had effects that extended beyond the shift to agriculture. Specifically, the ban on ceremonies disrupted the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and the sociocultural relationships that supported Blackfoot food sovereignty. In short, Chapter 3 illustrates how colonial policies, such as the banning of the Sundance, structurally disrupted Blackfoot food sovereignty as part of a broader colonial effort to destabilize Blackfoot self-determination and self-sufficiency.

Chapter 4 examines how ration policies were used as a tool of colonial control to destabilize Blackfoot food security by restricting mobility, disrupting land-based practices, and reframing Treaty obligations as charitable support. In the chapter, the discussion of rations moves beyond viewing them as simply accessible food, focusing instead on their weaponization to undermine Blackfoot practices. From the perspective of the landscape approach, this weaponization disrupted Blackfoot land-use by restricting mobility and interrupting the intergenerational transfer of knowledge tied to seasonal harvesting, hunting, and gathering. These practices were seen by colonial officials as obstacles to social evolution and "civilization," which echoes Wolfe's (2007) concept of the logic of elimination. By replacing self-sufficient food systems with controlled distribution, colonial authorities further destabilized Blackfoot food security. In reference to the FAO's four pillars of food security (availability, access, utilization, and stability), the ration policies failed to meet any. First, food access was inconsistent, dependent on the decisions of individual issuers, as seen in the Skynner case, and some individuals may have avoided the ration house to lessen the risk of verbal or physical violence. Second, availability was conditional, and

safe food was not consistently provided, as briefly indicated in reports. Utilization was limited and often influenced by the views of Indian Agents, who were closely linked to assimilation policies. Additionally, stability is often dependent on policy changes and the discretion of Indian Agents, which was seen in the rapid reduction of rations in the 1900s. In summary, Chapter 4 demonstrates how colonial policies weaponized the ration system as a method of destabilizing the structures that upheld Blackfoot food security, including limiting access to traditional hunting and gathering sites, disrupting generational knowledge sharing and creating a dependency on colonial goods. In doing so, colonial ration policies actively created and maintained conditions of food insecurity rather than food security.

In Chapter 5, the focus is on how the imposition of settler economic systems, specifically agriculture, ranching, and wage labour, undermined Blackfoot food security and contributed to the broader diminishment of food sovereignty. The introduction of agriculture was directly tied to the elimination of Blackfoot economic systems, such as hunting and gathering, which also formed the basis for Blackfoot food security. Through the lens of settler colonial theory, specifically the logic of elimination, the replacement of the Blackfoot food system and land-use practices with the settler agricultural model is a vital component in Canada's colonial project. Additionally, the restrictions placed on Blackfoot agricultural and ranching activities, including limits on crop choices, seed supply, and the sale of produce; this in turn began to further diminish Blackfoot food sovereignty as colonial policies limited the Nation's control over the production and sale of agricultural and ranching products, as well as restricted the use of economic profits from the industries, which pushed people towards wage labour. In general speaking, from the perspective of the landscape approach in historical ecology, this shift altered the relationship between people, land, and food systems important to both food security and sovereignty. In other words, Chapter 5 illustrates how

colonial officials imposed and sought to erase Blackfoot economic models through agriculture, ranching and wage labour, while simultaneously constructing barriers that restricted land-use and economic decision-making. Although these policies were often presented as avenues to economic self-sufficiency, they instead produced instability and undermined the Blackfoot Confederacy's ability to participate within settler economic models—an impact that is known by Blackfoot Elders and community members.

Moreover, through the archives, I found that the destabilization of food security and the diminishment of food sovereignty for the Blackfoot Peoples were heavily influenced by the changing tides of settler colonial policies. While the larger state narratives on colonial policies presented a unified approach to the Dominion of Canada's assimilation goals, the archival documents revealed a fractured and Indian Agent-dependent approach to the implementation of those policies. The differences in each Indian Agent's approach to implementing policies, such as methods to deter ongoing participation in ceremonies and the reduction of rations, are evident throughout the three Blackfoot nations, despite them being under the same treaty.

6.1 LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The research in my thesis is a preliminary examination of the destabilization of food security and the diminishment of food sovereignty that occurred for the Blackfoot Peoples between 1877 and 1913. I chose to research this topic because I encountered gaps within the literature. The first gap is the limited research explicitly tracing the role of settler colonial policies on Blackfoot food security and later sovereignty. The second gap is the limited discussion of the variation in the implementation of settler colonial policies on reserves. Since the topic proved to be larger than I initially anticipated, I narrowed the scope by focusing primarily on the annual reports from the Department of Indian Affairs from 1877 to 1913. This decision enabled me to trace how colonial

officials documented and justified policy implementation over time, and to begin identifying patterns and variations in policies that became important structural components in upholding Blackfoot food security and sovereignty across the three Blackfoot reserves. In doing so, the variations between the implementations of colonial policies became apparent.

However, restricting the scope in this manner created several limitations. The most significant aspect is the use of annual reports, particularly how Indian Agents recorded information primarily through an economic lens. As a result, these records often obscure the lived experiences of the Blackfoot community, including the strategies individuals used to minimize the impacts of colonial policies. For instance, while Indian Agents provided some details on individual expenses, they rarely provided details about what kinds of food people purchased or how they used their income to maintain food security. Additionally, the reports often obscure details on the lived experiences of the Blackfoot community, particularly information on the supplementation of rations, the continuation of traditional hunting and gathering foods, and information on the maintenance of human-environmental relationships with the land. These omissions limit the understanding of Blackfoot agency and adaptability during this period.

There are several larger areas of interest for future research emerging from this project that I wish to highlight:

- **Expanding the examination of archival documents:** While my thesis predominantly focuses on the annual reports produced by the Department of Indian Affairs, future research could expand on the understanding of colonial policies and their implementation by examining less formal historical documents. Other documents that could be useful include diaries of Indian Agents, farm instructions, rations house logbooks, and other agency inquiries. These documents may provide further details on unofficial practices and

emulations of policy implementation that were omitted from the annual reports, as illustrated by the case of the ration issuer murder in Chapter 5.

- **Inclusion of Blackfoot Oral Histories and community knowledge:** The inclusion of Blackfoot Oral Histories and direction from Knowledge Holders is an essential component for future research. While this thesis aimed to provide a preliminary examination of the destabilization of Blackfoot food security and the diminishment of Blackfoot food sovereignty, its findings were limited by the archival sources used, particularly those authored by Indian Agents and colonial administrators. Throughout my thesis research, the scope and direction of the research changed as I faced the limitations of the annual reports, which often reflected the biases of colonial officials and what they deemed valuable to record. Although I engaged with Blackfoot-authored literature to help contextualize and critically examine the colonial archival records, this thesis does not claim to speak for or on behalf of Blackfoot communities. Instead, the project should be seen as a preliminary archival foundation upon which community-guided research can be built.
- **Comparison of colonial policies to other Nations in Canada and other global settler colonial projects:** Another area of interest I had going into this research was understanding how colonial policies were implemented differently across reserves. Even within the Blackfoot Confederacy, there were noticeable variations in how policies, like rationing or the suppression of the Sundance, were carried out across the three Blackfoot reserves. Future research could examine how similar policies were implemented across other Indigenous Nations in Canada to build a more site-specific understanding of colonial impacts. This is important because discussions of settler colonialism in Canada often rely on a homogenous or generalized understanding of its effects, when those effects varied widely depending on place, policy, and local dynamics.

Furthermore, expanding on this work to include comparisons with settler colonial projects in other regions could also be valuable. In some of these contexts, the detailed impacts of colonialism have been more extensively documented, which could offer helpful frameworks or points of comparison. By doing so, this would expand our understanding of how Canada's settler colonial project fits within other settler colonial projects. More importantly, comparing cases can highlight aspects of colonial policy and acts of resistance that may currently be underexamined.

- **Gendered impacts of colonial policies on Blackfoot food security and sovereignty:** An ongoing challenge throughout this thesis research was finding information within the archival documents about how colonial policies impacted Blackfoot women's experiences with food security and food sovereignty. As discussed earlier in the thesis, Blackfoot women are central to political decision-making and the sharing of knowledge that upheld the sociocultural and spiritual structures supporting Blackfoot food systems. However, their presence within archival documents is limited, as Indian Agents often focused on reporting the activities of Blackfoot men and, occasionally, children. While Indian Agents sometimes referenced women in relation to the adoption of settler domestic practices, such as colonial cooking methods, or through participation in artisan production, these mentions reflect colonial priorities rather than the scope and significance of women's roles in maintaining Blackfoot food systems. Future research should expand on these gaps by examining Blackfoot women's experiences with colonial food policies through extended archival research and Oral Histories, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how food security and food sovereignty were experienced across gender and how colonial policies realigned political power within Blackfoot communities.

- **Examining the relationship between the reduction of rations and urban formations:**

The differences in access to food between growing settler urban centres and Blackfoot reserves are briefly discussed in Chapter 4. Specifically, the diversity seen in Mrs. Allick Blaine's budget books between 1886 and 1888 suggests different food environments; however, the extent to which Blackfoot individuals were able to access these spaces, foods, or economic networks remains unclear. This is particularly significant as Indian Agents within the annual reports often discuss the use of colonial policies, likely through mechanisms such as the pass system, to restrict individuals' access to settler spaces, including growing urban centres. While this thesis does not delve into this topic extensively, a future avenue of research could involve examining the relationship between the rapid reduction of rations on reserves in the 1900s and the formation of urban centres.

6.2 RESILIENCE AND CURRENT INITIATIVES

While my thesis focuses on the historical destabilization of Blackfoot food security and the diminishment of food sovereignty, it is important to recognize the efforts of the Blackfoot Confederacy to restore traditional food systems and the landscapes that support them. Two Blackfoot initiatives working toward this restoration are the Buffalo Treaty and Naapi's Garden. I discuss both initiatives because they reflect the theoretical framework of my thesis. Both focus on strengthening cultural relationships that have been disrupted by settler colonialism. The Buffalo Treaty connects with food sovereignty and the landscape approach, as it emphasizes renewing relationships with other nations, culture, and the land through the restoration of buffalo to the plains (KEPA, 2020). Naapi's Garden connects strongly with the landscape approach and food security by focusing on the restoration of Blackfoot horticultural practices and the renewal of relationships with plants and prairie landscapes.

The Buffalo Treaty aims to reintroduce buffalo, or bison, to Blackfoot territory, allowing for the participation in cultural practices rooted in Blackfoot relationships with the buffalo (The Buffalo Treaty, n.d.). The reintroduction of the buffalo would also create opportunities for self-determination by supporting Blackfoot food systems and culturally appropriate diets. In addition to its cultural importance, the Buffalo Treaty functions as a policy document that calls on its signatories to take tangible steps toward bison restoration. It aligns with the Indigenous Food Sovereignty Network's framework by emphasizing participation, self-determination, and policy, while nurturing human-environment relationships that were disrupted by colonial land and food policies.

Naapi's Garden, meanwhile, focuses on restoring Blackfoot food security through Blackfoot horticulture and land stewardship (KEPA, 2020). By planting important cultural and ecological plant species, the project supports the restoration of prairie landscapes and the revitalization of relationships between Blackfoot communities and the land (MacLeod, 2023). Both initiatives approach food security and sovereignty as more than just access to food; they centre the sociocultural, political, and environmental structures that make those systems possible. The restoration of these relationships and responsibilities between people, land, plants, and animals, or the human-environmental relationship with the land, is vital to rebuilding the foundations that once supported Blackfoot food security and sovereignty. Finally, I wanted to conclude my thesis with this discussion of the ongoing efforts by the Blackfoot Confederacy to restore, reimagine, and reestablish food systems, as an important acknowledgment to exemplify the resilience and ongoing resistance of the Blackfoot Nations against the historical and contemporary impacts of settler colonialism.

6.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS

At the end of my thesis, I had the opportunity to attend the Piikani Days Community Celebration hosted by the Piikani Reserve, the University of Lethbridge, and the Government of Alberta. As part of the event, the organizers held a plant walk to share the importance of plants. The plant walks I attended before this often focused on naming or identifying plants on their own. This one was different. The focus was on reciprocity, offerings, and the sharing of knowledge as a way to strengthen cultural ties. While identifying plants was still part of the walk, what stayed with me was the reminder that plants exist within relationships between people, the land, and other beings. Therefore, if one is going to discuss plants, one must also discuss the other relationships connected to that plant.

The event directly related to my thesis and helped me deepen my understanding of theoretical concepts, as engaging with those theories allowed me to approach the experience differently than I might have previously. In particular, the emphasis on reciprocity, offerings, and the sharing of knowledge as a way of strengthening cultural ties resonated with me more strongly. On a personal level, the event provided me with the opportunity to step back and view my research as part of an ongoing process of learning, reciprocity, and my own journey of reconciliation. I began this thesis with the intention of addressing a knowledge gap and out of a sense of responsibility in my role as a public-facing employee. Over time, I came to view my thesis as part of my own journey of reconciliation, one that extends beyond the scope of this project.

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