

## W. M. Graham: Indian Agent Extraordinaire

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**ABSTRACT.** W. M. Graham was one of the best known officials in the Department of Indian Affairs in his day. In the early decades of the twentieth century he rose to prominence in Western Canada as a result of his success in leading the native people to "civilization" and agriculture. His dedication to government aims was matched by his personal ambition and he sought ultimately to occupy the position of Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs as a fitting climax to his career. This paper examines Graham's rise in the Indian service in the context of prevailing federal policy.

### RESUME

W. M. Graham était un des officiels le plus reconnu de son jour dans le Département des Affaires Indiennes. Au début du vingtième siècle, à cause de son succès dans la direction du peuple Amérindien vers "la civilisation" et l'agriculture, sa renommée s'est répandue à l'ouest du Canada. Son dévouement aux buts du gouvernement équivalait son ambition personnelle. Comme le haut point de sa carrière il cherchait d'atteindre la position de Député Surintendant Général des Affaires Indiennes. Cette thèse étudie le progrès de M. Graham dans le service du gouvernement dans le contexte de la politique fédérale de son temps.

The first consolidated Indian Act of 1876 and the subsequent growth in the federal Department of Indian Affairs resulted in increasing bureaucratic control of the lives of Canada's native population. Special legislation, which was repressive and restrictive in character, underlined the fact that they were denied full citizenship and were treated as a conquered people.

The Indian Department was the responsibility of the Minister of the Interior until 1936. However, effective administration and policy-making usually lay in the hands of the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs—in most instances a career civil servant. This was a tradition that was firmly established during the tenure of L. Van-koughnet, Deputy Superintendent from 1874 to 1893.

Indian policy was very much inspired by the assumptions of nineteenth century evangelical religion, cultural imperialism, and laissez-faire economics. The Indians were to be led to "civilization"—which meant that they were expected to abandon their own traditions for the trappings of European culture, including Christianity. They were also to become economically self-sufficient—hopefully by the adoption of agriculture—so that they would no longer be a burden on the public purse. The triumph of Bible and plough would be followed by "amalgamation" with the rest of the population and the eventual disappearance of the Indians as a separate people.<sup>1</sup> The reserve system, while apparently insulating the native population from society at large, was a step towards this ultimate destiny. It was perceived as a transitional phase during which Indians still required the paternal guidance of church and state.

Efficiency and economy were always prime considerations in

Indian administration. And they acquired even greater significance when Clifford Sifton became Laurier's Minister of the Interior in 1896. Among his first acts of office was a far reaching re-organization of the Department of Indian Affairs which was accompanied by budget and staff cuts.<sup>2</sup> It was in the west, in particular, where treaties had committed the government to regular if not substantial, financial obligations, that measures of economy were most effected. Here Sifton tended to dispense with incompetent officials while granting greater responsibility to those who showed initiative.<sup>3</sup>

Conspicuous in the latter category was a young Department employee named William Morris Graham. A man of considerable ability and relentless ambition, he was to rise quickly in the Indian Affairs bureaucracy and to become its leading figure in Western Canada for several decades. W. M. Graham was born in Ottawa on 11 January 1867 and joined the Department of Indian Affairs in December 1885 as a clerk in the Moose Mountain agency in the old North West Territories. His performance was deemed satisfactory by his superiors and in March 1895 he was transferred to the Indian Commissioner's office in Regina. In the autumn of the following year an unexpected opportunity arose for the ambitious young clerk. In the absence of the agent at File Hills, Graham was sent there to act in his place.<sup>4</sup> After proving himself, he was recommended for appointment as agent by the Indian Commissioner for Manitoba and the North West Territories in June 1897 at a salary of \$900 per annum. His appointment became effective on 13 July of that year.<sup>5</sup> The satisfactory completion of his period of probation in December 1899 brought his annual salary to \$1000.

Further opportunities for advancement waited. In February 1901, the Minister of the Interior, Clifford Sifton, decided to dispense with the services of J. A. Mitchell, agent at Muscowpetung, and amalgamate that agency with File Hills. The united agency would be known as Qu'Appelle and it would be placed in the hands of Graham, who had not only discharged his duties satisfactorily, but had "shown particular ability in leading the Indians to become self-supporting." His salary would be increased to \$1200 on 1 March 1901 as a consequence of these added responsibilities.<sup>6</sup>

Graham lost little time in making plans for his new domain. Obviously aware of the moves that were afoot, he wrote to Sifton on 4 February with a list of suggestions which he felt were vital to the successful amalgamation of the agencies. Among his proposals was that a sum of money be appropriated for the purpose of enabling young graduates of Indian residential schools to commence farming on the reserves. Headquarters evidently concurred and on 2 March, J. D. McLean, Secretary of the Department of Indian Affairs, informed David Laird, Indian Commissioner at Winnipeg, that Graham's pro-

posals were to be adopted and that the agent would be given \$1500, when sanctioned by parliament, in order to help young Indians adopt agriculture.<sup>7</sup>

This led directly to one of Graham's most interesting projects—an experiment in radical social engineering known as the File Hills colony. Residential schools were viewed by both secular and ecclesiastical authorities as the great crucibles which would enable young Indians to shed their ancestral ways. But a major fear of missionaries and government officials was that native boys and girls upon graduation would return to their parents losing those painfully acquired advances in civilization and Christianization. Graham established his colony to prevent this “retrogression.”

The File Hills colony was a farming settlement made up of carefully selected boys and girls who had graduated from residential schools in the area. Graham was involved in the selection of the colonists and was assisted in this task by the principals of the File Hills Boarding School and the Lebret Industrial School. The young Indians were married off and settled in houses equipped with appropriate effects. They were also assigned tracts of land which they were expected to farm. On the Peepeekisis reserve 19,000 acres were granted by the government for that purpose.

The entire experiment was carefully supervised by Graham. There was to be no contact between the colonists and the older Indians who adhered to the traditional culture. And social interaction among the colonists themselves was closely monitored to prevent any lapse into tribal ways. For example, visits between households were strictly limited. Pow-wows, dances or any other form of native ceremony considered “a hindrance to progress” were forbidden.<sup>8</sup>

The objective of the colony was to produce a group of Indians who had internalized the whiteman's religion and culture and who were self-sufficient farmers. The economic aims were advanced not only by the activities of departmental farming instructors, but also by the deliberate fostering of the work ethic. Competition among the colonists was encouraged by an annual exhibit at which prizes were awarded for achievements in grain growing, cattle breeding, cooking and sewing. Competitive sports also helped to promote individualism and provided alternative non traditional recreation. A brass band served a similar purpose.

In 1907 Graham wrote a report on the File Hills experiment. Its success in preventing ex-pupils “regression” was in his opinion, “phenomenal.” At that stage there were twenty young families in the colony producing good crops and raising their children in the English language. One of the colonists, Fred Dieter, had even hired white men as farm help.<sup>9</sup> From the perspective of its objectives, the colony was

undoubtedly a success. In fact it became a *cause célèbre* of its day. Earl Grey, when he was Governor-General of Canada, paid it an annual visit and donated a shield which was presented to the farmer producing the best crop of the year.<sup>10</sup>

In 1903 the *Winnipeg Telegram* described the Indians of Qu'Appelle agency as the "most prosperous" of the time and attributed that "satisfactory state of affairs" to the work of Graham. The newspaper was particularly impressed with the ex-pupil colony which meant that graduates from the residential schools "do not lapse into their old habits as is often the case on other reservations where they return to the parental teepee, take up their old habits, and soon forget any good they have learned at school." Moreover, at Qu'Appelle the Indians were self-supporting and the ration system was abolished.<sup>11</sup>

There was also recognition of Graham's work from abroad. In 1914 F. H. Abbott, Secretary of the Board of Indian Commissioners in the United States, made a study of Indian administration in Canada and in his report reserved special praise for the File Hills experiment:

"At File Hills near Balcarres, on the Grand Trunk Railroad, in the Province of Saskatchewan, is a small reserve, where I found an illustration of Indian administration which approaches nearest to the perfect ideal I have seen whether in the United States or in Canada. This agency is distinguished particularly because of a Colony of ex-pupils from Canadian schools, which has developed into a unique Indian community. The methods of the Canadian government in dealing with the ex-pupils in this colony, as well as its methods of dealing with the old Indians on the same reserve, I shall present in detail as the best illustration I can give of the simplicity and efficiency of the Canadian system."<sup>12</sup>

Graham's success at Qu'Appelle did not go unnoticed in Ottawa and he was promoted to the position of Inspector of Indian Agencies for the South Saskatchewan Inspectorate in February 1904.<sup>13</sup>

One of the greatest obstacles to the successful accomplishment of Indian Affairs policy aims at this time was the persistence of native rituals which centred on dancing. The sundance and similar customs had both sacred and social roles in the plains Indian culture. According to Jacqueline Gresko, they also served as mechanisms of resistance to the religious and cultural assimilation which threatened them at the hands of schools, missionaries and government agents.<sup>14</sup> The most vehement opponents of the dances were the churches, both Catholic and Protestant. It was the "heathen" or "pagan" features of these gatherings which aroused the most ecclesiastical wrath and the missionaries waged a tireless campaign for their suppression. The state generally concurred with missionary sentiment and an amendment to the Indian Act outlawed the dances. Patrols by the North-West Mounted Police attempted to ensure prohibition. But petitions to Ottawa by Indian groups in the first decade of the twentieth century

secured some relaxation of the ban. The Indians, who in some instances had hired lawyers to present their case, argued that they too should be allowed days of sport and recreation.<sup>15</sup>

Ottawa's uncharacteristic permissiveness on the question of dancing was prompted not only by the Indian protests, but also by reports filtering in from some agents in the field that seemed to suggest that the traditional gatherings were relatively harmless, especially, when shorn of their torture elements. However, no such toleration was evident in Graham's case. Throughout his career in the west, he waged a constant campaign against the practice which he regarded as an unmitigated evil. In 1898, when agent at File Hills, he informed the Commissioner in Winnipeg that he had heard of plans to hold a sun dance on one of the reserves in June. But he had gone around warning the Indians that the department "would not tolerate" such an event. It never took place.<sup>16</sup>

Graham remained a strong advocate of the suppression of the dances even when headquarters became less adamant on the issue. In February 1909 he wrote to Department Secretary J. D. McLean criticizing the notion that dances should be permitted under certain circumstances. Not only would such activities "demoralize" the Indians, but they would waste time better spent on agricultural pursuits. Later in the same year he wrote again to McLean complaining that the department was not diligent enough in stamping out dancing. And he reiterated the economic argument: "Every minute of the summer is so important to farmers."<sup>17</sup>

A similar correspondence took place in the summer of 1911 and illustrated Graham's growing exasperation with his superiors. On this occasion Graham complained to McLean that a delegation of the Pasqua band had recently returned from Ottawa under the impression that they were permitted to revive the circle dance. He felt that the department's attempt to merely discourage the dance was insufficient and a firm prohibition was necessary. After all, that particular ritual involved painting the almost nude bodies of the male participants! And there was the additional danger that it would cause the cultural relapse of his graduate farming colonists. Graham deplored the ambiguous attitude of headquarters and suggested that chiefs who allowed dancing on their reserves should be deposed from office. McLean responded that the department was not prepared to take those measures.<sup>18</sup>

If Graham was rebuffed on this issue it was certainly not the end of his influence. When Arthur Meighen, who was related to Graham's wife, became Minister of the Interior under Robert Borden in 1917, it opened the door to further opportunities. The creator of the File Hills colony came forward once more with another grand design. In a letter to Meighen in January 1918 he outlined a plan to increase food production in order to assist with the war effort. It involved the

efficient use of "idle" Indian lands for that purpose. Graham claimed that in the South Saskatchewan Inspectorate there were 340,000 acres of pasture land of which only about 120,000 acres were being used by the Indians. The proper use of those lands could raise cattle production to three times the existing level. And just think what could be accomplished by the maximum utilization of Indian lands all over the prairies?<sup>19</sup>

This project, known as the "greater production" scheme, won official approval and in February Graham was appointed Commissioner for Greater Production for the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. A sum of \$362,000 was granted to Indian Affairs from the War Appropriation for the purposes of administering the scheme.<sup>20</sup> But Indian lands could not be expropriated for any purpose, however worthy or patriotic, without the consent of the band members involved. To overcome this obstacle an amendment to the Indian Act was quickly passed in the spring of 1918 making such consent unnecessary. The confiscation of reserve lands was then a simple matter.

There were two aspects to the greater production scheme. One involved the leasing of Indian lands to white farmers, and 255,000 acres were leased in this way. The other involved the establishment of greater production farms on Indian land. These were directed by the department's agents employing Indian labour and the most modern machinery. These curious experiments in state agricultural entrepreneurship were set up at the Blood, Blackfoot, Muscowpetung, Crooked Lakes and Assiniboine reserves and occupied a total area of 20,448 acres.<sup>21</sup>

The farms were not without their problems. It was certainly a misfortune that the winter of 1919-20 was particularly severe in Alberta resulting in considerable livestock losses to both Indians and whites. In some cases up to forty per cent of herds perished. While the scheme could not be held responsible for the vicissitudes of climate, it seems that the losses incurred aggravated an already unsatisfactory situation from the native point of view.

The Blood Indians of southern Alberta were especially aggrieved by some of the outcomes of Graham's plan. On 31 May 1920 they presented a memorandum to the department outlining their complaints. The Commissioner was obliged to reply in detail.<sup>22</sup> The Blood's pointed out that on 30 May 1918 about 4,800 acres of their reserve had been taken for the creation of a greater production farm. Indian labour was used on the farm, and so was Indian farm machinery which had been virtually commandeered by the agent at great inconvenience.

The Indians complained about gross mismanagement of the government farm, as well as official highhandedness. They disclosed that a wheat crop had been left unfenced during the summer of 1919

and that cattle and horses had destroyed most of it. Graham admitted that this had happened but blamed it on the slow delivery of fencing materials by a railway company.

There were further instances of incompetence. In September 1918, for example, a mixed herd of cattle had been sold for \$44,000. The Indians were told that their share of the profit would be \$50 per head of cattle. But some of this money was subsequently used to purchase more cattle which were later sold at \$20 a head—a considerable loss. Graham did not deny the accusation but suggested that the local agent, who had since been fired, was to blame.

The litany of complaints by the Blood Indians was a lengthy one and while Graham attempted to dismiss most of their allegations as being either exaggerated or absurd, he admitted to some mismanagement.<sup>23</sup> Nor were the financial returns all that impressive. A statement submitted by Graham to Deputy-Superintendent General Duncan C. Scott on 26 March 1921 gave the following figures:<sup>24</sup>

Summary of receipts and expenditures  
re: Greater Production Farms, 23 March 1921

Amount advanced from war appropriation . . . . .	\$362,000.00
Revenue from sales as of 28 February 1921 . . . . .	<u>\$576,192.07</u>
Total . . . . .	\$938,192.07
Expenditure . . . . .	<u>\$826,838.94</u>
Balance on hand . . . . .	\$111,353.13

Even after three years of operation, total expenditure far exceeded the revenue from sales. And the balance on hand was less than one-third of the initial investment from the war appropriation. As a business venture the government farms had been less than a resounding success.

Of course Graham continued to defend the project and hoped that the farms could continue even when their original *raison d'être* had disappeared. If they made little sense financially, they at least served the function of providing for Indians supervised experience in agriculture. But the department did not concur and in February 1922 Deputy Superintendent Scott informed Graham that there could “scarcely be further justification” for the continuation of the experiment. The farm machinery should be sold and the policy of securing the surrender and arranging for the sale of “idle” Indian lands should be pursued.<sup>25</sup> Much of the reserve lands that had been leased to white farmers under the other aspect of the greater production scheme had by that time been turned over to the Soldier Settlement Board.

The greater production farms were consequently phased out in the 1920s. It was a blow to Graham but he at least had the compensation of being promoted to Indian Commissioner for the prairie provinces at an annual salary of \$4,800 in July 1920 when his friend and patron Arthur

Meighen was Prime Minister.<sup>26</sup> However, the demise of his scheme was regarded by the commissioner as an example of unwarranted interference by headquarters in his domain. Such intrusions were far too frequent for his liking and they were often both frustrating and embarrassing.

An incident which further illustrates Graham's dilemma occurred in 1924-25. Part of the Blackfoot Reserve in Alberta that had been surrendered in 1911 had not been sold, but then been leased to white farmers. The department occasionally attempted to sell such lands and in 1924 Graham was instructed by headquarters to so dispose of some of the Blackfoot properties. In November of that year an Alberta farmer by the name of W. M. Lyle arrived in the Regina office and arranged to purchase  $3\frac{1}{4}$  sections of the land in question at the "upset price" (the minimum price set by the department). Ottawa approved of the sale and Lyle made his downpayment and received receipts. Some of the land in question was already under lease and the department approved of the rentals being assigned to the new owner.

However, when the lessees of the land, the Thorsssen brothers, discovered the sale, they offered Indian Affairs six dollars more per acre for the property than Lyle had paid. It seems that the Thorsssen's had already purchased Indian land and were at the time in arrears with their payments. In spite of that, headquarters instructed Graham to cancel the arrangement with Lyle and to accept the higher offer. The Commissioner was angered by this interference and argued, reasonably enough, that the original contract should be upheld. Heated correspondence on the question ensued between Ottawa and Regina throughout the spring of 1925. Graham could make no headway with the arguments he advanced and actually discovered that some officials in headquarters believed he had deliberately undervalued the Blackfoot lands in return for bribes from prospective purchasers. He wrote to Interior Minister Charles Stewart complaining that he seemed to have lost the confidence of the department and that his actions were "viewed with suspicion." It was only the fear of adverse publicity that prevented him from taking legal action against his accusers.<sup>27</sup>

This was but one of many instances in which Graham was overruled or snubbed by his superiors. It suggested a growing alienation between the Commissioner in Regina and the Ottawa bureaucrats. Graham himself was hardly blameless in all of this. His relentless ambition, his determination to be the final authority on policy development and implementation in the west, and his almost paranoid sensitivity to criticism were well known. In fact his relationship with Duncan C. Scott, who was Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs from 1913 until 1932, was particularly tempestuous. As early as 1914 Scott was promising Interior Minister W. J. Roche that he would attempt to ensure that his future correspondence with Graham would

"be void of offence so far as possible." However, he explained that Graham "cannot be written to as we would write to a different inspector, but our directions must be expressed with as much care as if we were diplomatists addressing a foreign power."<sup>28</sup>

Part of the problem was that Graham strongly resented Scott's success and coveted the position of Deputy Superintendent for himself. The pinnacle of the bureaucracy would have proven an appropriate culmination to such an illustrious career in the Indian service. And the Commissioner's expectation of this ultimate elevation was not without foundation. Political patronage was by no means an extinct custom at the time and Graham was blessed with a connection of impeccable pedigree. His wife, Violette, was a sister of Arthur Meighen's wife's step-father. Though perhaps a relationship that was somewhat odd, she was regarded in the family as Meighen's aunt and in her correspondence with him (in which she addressed Meighen as "Dear Arthur"), she signed herself "Aunt Vi." The two were obviously on intimate personal terms. In fact Meighen acceded to a request by Violette Graham to address the Canadian Women's Club in Regina (of which she was president) on a western visit in 1922.<sup>29</sup> Alice Tye provided a further connection with the Conservative leader. Tye served as Graham's secretary for almost three decades. She was also a cousin of Violette Graham and was related to Meighen with whom she corresponded frequently.

Both women were keenly interested in the advancement of Graham's career and shared his hope that he would one day occupy the top rung on the Indian Affairs ladder. The relationship with Meighen was seen as the key to this ultimate promotion. Unfortunately for the Graham faction, McKenzie King's Liberals held the reins of power throughout most of the 1920s, except for one brief interlude in 1926 when Meighen attempted to form a government. This debacle ended with Meighen losing his seat in the Commons and retiring from politics to pursue a career in business. His relations with the new party leader, R. B. Bennett, were not amicable. In fact both men were old rivals and had been known to quarrel bitterly in public. But Meighen still had many friends in politics and when the Conservatives returned to power in 1930, he could not be ignored. The great depression had dulled the lustre of his business ventures and when Bennett offered him a Senate appointment with the cabinet post of government leader in that chamber early in 1932, he accepted. Even though he was only fifty-eight at the time, he had acquired the status of party elder statesman and might be expected to wield some influence with the Prime Minister.<sup>30</sup>

What was particularly auspicious was that Deputy Superintendent Scott was likely to retire in 1932 upon reaching the age of seventy, although this was by no means a foregone conclusion. Graham would

be sixty-five in that year and could look forward to five years in Ottawa as department head—a fitting reward for a life devoted to the service. And were it not for the scandal that marred his reputation on the eve of Scott's retirement, the dream might indeed have been realized. The Antapa shooting club affair was the incident which ultimately sealed his fate.<sup>31</sup>

In 1924 the Antapa shooting club of Regina, of which Graham was a member, attempted to secure a lease for duck hunting purposes to Antapa Point, part of the Pasqua Indian reserve. A document was drawn up offering the sum of \$150 per annum to the band for these rights and it was submitted to Indian Affairs headquarters in Ottawa for approval. But in January 1925 D. C. Scott returned the proposed lease to Graham explaining that it was not properly executed as the Indians had not agreed to the terms.

In the following year a rival claim to the property was made. In that instance, local politician D. H. McDonald brought forward an offer of \$550 per annum for shooting privileges, and in a meeting with the Pasqua band won their approval. However, Ottawa refused to sanction the agreement on the grounds that McDonald represented a group of New York millionaires. And shortly afterwards Scott wrote to E. B. Jonah, who represented the Antapa club, enclosing a copy of the McDonald agreement and suggesting that the club draw up a similar document and obtain the signature of a majority of voting band members.<sup>32</sup>

A new Antapa lease which raised the rental to \$550 was subsequently put together. But such were the connections of club members that it was considered unnecessary to secure band approval. The document was forwarded to Ottawa and on this occasion the lease was granted, to be effective 14 January 1928. This was not an unusual course of action as departmental high-handedness with Indian land has a well-established lineage. As the Minister of the Interior at the time, Charles Stewart, explained:

It is the practice of the department whenever possible and within reason to act in accordance with the wishes of the members of the band, but, in this case it was felt that in the general interest an exception should be made.<sup>33</sup>

This unconvincing apology was followed by refusal to seriously entertain the objections of the Indians to the agreement. Scott wrote to Chief Ben Pasqua in February 1931 in the following manner:

It has been decided that this lease is of decided advantage to your band and sufficient reason has not at any time been advanced which, in our estimation, would justify cancellation.<sup>34</sup>

The department's authoritarianism was only part of the problem in this complex affair. Clause 6 of the Antapa club's lease harboured

the embryo of far greater controversy. It read as follows:

It is further agreed that the lessee shall not nor will sell or permit or suffer to be sold on the said premises any spirituous liquors, ale, beer, or any intoxicating liquors whatever, except to members of the said club.<sup>35</sup>

Even though prohibition had met its unmourned demise some years earlier, public phobia about the availability of alcohol was still a concern. And the association between Indians and alcohol was even more contentious. In fact, the Indian Act forbade taking liquor onto reservations. Yet here was a lease, secured for a privileged club through the influence of a leading government official, which seemed to allow liquor on Indian land. The Antapa club house, it should be pointed out, was located on private property. However, access to it was by a road that crossed the reserve. The lease seemed to suggest that liquor could be taken to the club, thereby crossing Indian land. It was also sufficiently ambiguous to allow members to take liquor to the reserve property leased for hunting purposes. Undoubtedly, the situation was one rife with potential controversy.

It might never have entered the public domain but for the intervention of J. S. Woodsworth, MP for Winnipeg North Centre. The MP had been apprised of the situation by P. N. B. Galwey-Foley, a Saskatchewan resident who was highly critical of the government's Indian policy. On 4 May 1931 Woodsworth asked a series of questions in the House of Commons regarding the Antapa lease and requested a copy of the document and all related correspondence. With this information in his hands he exposed the sordid details of the affair in the House on 13 July. In Woodsworth's opinion Graham was the villain of the piece:

I would charge this: that there has been a series of misrepresentations by the department; that Commissioner Graham, a member of the Antapa club, through misrepresentative, managed to secure the refusal of the lease to one party, and to secure the lease for the club of which he was a member. I think that is a matter which requires departmental action. I know this cannot be settled today, but I have taken this occasion to lay it before the house, and I think the minister would be well advised to consider the statement that his own commissioner, a public official, who is a member of the club, has managed to secure these privileges through misrepresentation of the general situation.

I have already pointed out that the clause with regard to liquor violates the terms of the Indian Act, a copy of which I have under my hand and which I can read if necessary. The lease is illegal as being granted without the consent of the band and undoubtedly the whole transaction constitutes a grievance which the Indians feel deeply.<sup>36</sup>

These accusations were mainly directed at the previous regime. The events that Woodsworth related had taken place when the Liberals

were in power and, after all, the Winnipeg socialist was a well-known critic of corruption in King's administration. Nonetheless, Prime Minister R. B. Bennett took a particular interest in the case. While leader of the opposition he had been critical of Indian administration in the west. Patronage was rife in the system according to the reports he had received. It is certainly possible that his opinions were influenced by letters such as the one addressed to him in May 1930 from Regina building contractor J. Mayoh. Mayoh disclosed that Graham was known locally as the "Kaiser of the West." The Commissioner was a job holder who knew nothing of Indians even after more than forty years in the service. He generally avoided reserves, except for File Hills, his special project, where he was wont to dispense supplies lavishly. In fact, his advancement in the department had been largely due to the connection with Arthur Meighen.<sup>37</sup> These accusations were likely exaggerated but they introduced Bennett to the negative features of Graham's activities and led him to greet with some scepticism the representations he received on behalf of the Commissioner when the question of Scott's replacement arose.

Graham's most vigorous and persistent promoter was his long-serving secretary, Alice Tye. She took the initiative in advancing his claim to the Deputy Superintendency in January 1932 in letters addressed to the Prime Minister. She argued that the Commissioner deserved the position. In her opinion Scott was "fonder of Arts and Letters than of Indians" while Graham was "fonder of Indians than of Arts and Letters."<sup>38</sup> She urged the Prime Minister to permit Graham to plead his own case as forces "near the centre of the wheels" were conspiring not only to block his appointment, but to force his early retirement. This was the first of many indications from the Regina faction that it believed that Scott was deliberately attempting to sabotage Graham's career.

Bennett's reply was far from reassuring. He commended Tye for her loyalty to Graham, but was obviously less than happy with the Commissioner's role in the Antapa affair:

That you desire to help Mr. Graham is comprehensible; that he deserves to be helped is incomprehensible. During the last session of parliament the allegation that he was a member of a club, the members of which, with his knowledge, were carrying liquor across the Indian Reserve, caused the government much embarrassment, and I have seen no adequate explanation of the fact.<sup>39</sup>

Graham was evidently shocked at the Prime Minister's response to his secretary's representations. He contacted his friends in the Antapa club and appealed for their support. Membership of the club was drawn from the local elite—lawyers, judges, businessmen and so forth—people whose opinions were calculated to carry some weight in Ottawa. As a consequence of Graham's request several letters from

Regina dignitaries were sent to Bennett in February exonerating the Commissioner from any blame in the affair. Some of the correspondents attempted to blame Scott for what had happened as he had signed the lease containing the liquor clause.

The Prime Minister was initially sceptical at what appeared to be an orchestrated campaign. However, he was obviously impressed when one of Graham's supporters turned out to be Sir Frederick W. G. Haultain, Chief Justice of the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal and the former chairman of the North-West Executive Committee in the days of territorial administration in the west. Like the others, Haultain argued that the Commissioner had not been involved in the lease negotiations and he expressed surprise at Scott's acquiescence in such an agreement in view of prevailing liquor laws.<sup>40</sup> Bennett replied that "so far as Mr. Graham is concerned the explanation apparently affords a complete answer to any complaints that may be made against him."<sup>41</sup>

Meanwhile Graham had protested his own innocence to the Prime Minister. He insisted that the lease negotiations had taken place between department officials in Ottawa and club members without his personal involvement. He had been unaware of the liquor clause until he had received a telegram from Scott on 15 July 1931 (by a strange co-incidence two days after Woodsworth's speech in the Commons) proposing its deletion from the lease.<sup>42</sup> Graham's complete innocence on the liquor question is implausible. He must have been aware that alcohol was consumed regularly at the Antapa club premises, a fact that was frankly admitted by several of the members that wrote to Ottawa on his behalf. It seems that both he and Scott had blundered. In Graham's case it was probably his arrogant assumption that he could bend the rules to his liking in his own domain. As for Scott, he was likely guilty of an uncharacteristic oversight in not carefully reading the contents of a document prior to its approval.

It is possible that the letters from Regina may have partly rehabilitated Graham's reputation in the Prime Minister's eyes. However, the whiff of scandal was a poor omen of things to come. If their hopes were to be realized the Commissioner's wife and secretary quickly realized that the Meighen card was the one to be played.

Violette Graham wrote to Meighen on 30 January urging him to intercede with Bennett on behalf of her husband. The family had hoped that the Commissioner's "wonderful record" would be recognized with the Conservatives back in power and that he would get the promotion he deserved. Mrs. Graham was convinced that the entire Antapa affair and the hostility evident in the Prime Minister's recent letter to Alice Tye was the sinister work of Duncan C. Scott who had always had "an uncanny ability to make Bill (Graham) appear in a wrong light." She felt that the Deputy Superintendent was manoeuvring mischievously

behind the scenes to prevent her husband's promotion. It made her sick that "a sneak like Scott" could put that over.<sup>43</sup>

Alice Tye was equally convinced of a Scott conspiracy and the necessity to invoke Meighen's aid. She wrote twice to the former Conservative leader at the beginning of February appealing for his intervention. She even accused the Deputy Superintendent of deliberately inserting the liquor clause in the Antapa lease in order to discredit Graham! Now that Meighen was in the Senate, he could surely make certain that justice was done. "We know that Scott would do anything to keep cousin Bill from being Deputy, and it may be too late now to counteract his influence—I hope not."<sup>44</sup>

And at the same time, Graham received news that suggested Scott was indeed working against him. On 3 February the Deputy Superintendent wired, ordering him to close the Muscowpetung greater production farm and to discharge all staff. This was the surviving remnant of Graham's grandiose scheme of 1918 and its enforced demise was perhaps a portent of his own fate. He protested against Scott's orders, explaining the difficulty of selling stock during the depression and so forth, but to no avail. Scott was adamant and further instructions arrived demanding the immediate sale of the farm regardless of the arrangements that would have to be made.<sup>45</sup> This was depressing news for Graham and he too felt obliged to take up his case with Meighen, protesting Scott's attitude and outlining the agricultural progress he had made with the Indians.<sup>46</sup>

Senator Meighen was willing to help his despairing friends and impressed on the Prime Minister that Graham had been "for many years the best man in the Indian service" and wouldn't dream of tolerating violations of liquor regulations.<sup>47</sup>

But the news arriving in Regina continued to be bad. A rumour, apparently well-founded, that the Regina office was to be closed was the cause of particular alarm and Tye's letters to Meighen began to take on an increasingly despairing tone. The Senator had also heard of the proposed closing but was reluctant to interfere too much with another man's portfolio.<sup>48</sup>

Worse was to come. On 16 March the newspapers announced the imminent retirement of D. C. Scott. Graham was prominent among the list of his possible successors but it was believed his age was against him and that he would be superannuated. Both Tye and Violette Graham felt that "Bill" could serve the department for at least another five years. Hysterical phone calls and letters to Meighen followed in which, predictably enough, Scott was blamed for this turn of events.<sup>49</sup>

On this occasion Meighen took up the matter with Interior Minister Thomas G. Murphy and even showed him Mrs. Graham's letter with the accusations against Scott. On 22 March Murphy informed the

Senator that the office of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs at Regina would be closing on the last day of the month—by a strange coincidence the same date as Scott's retirement. Graham would also be retired on that occasion at an annual pension of \$4,200, and the work of the office would be divided among three inspectors. Murphy insisted that the decision to close the office was entirely his. He assured Meighen that Scott had always "spoken well of Mr. Graham's ability as a businessman" although the Minister was aware that the relations between the two men "were not of the best."<sup>50</sup>

Graham took his enforced retirement badly. Bitter and disillusioned, he took the advice of his doctor and spent a few months vacation in England during the summer of 1932. Upon his return in September he met Meighen in Toronto and complained again of Scott—"a most impractical man" who had never given him any assistance "in carrying on a most difficult work."<sup>51</sup>

Graham had been living in a house owned by Indian Affairs in Regina for some years. He considered the rent, \$100 per month, excessive and before embarking on his overseas trip had inquired if he might now be entitled to the accommodation rent free or perhaps at a nominal sum. A. S. Williams, the department's legal clerk who was acting as Deputy Superintendent until Scott's permanent successor was chosen, not only judged this request inappropriate, but felt that the house should be vacated to make way for another department official. This discouraging news awaited Graham when he arrived back in Regina. On this occasion Meighen refused to intercede on his behalf in view of the rebuffs he had received in the past.<sup>52</sup>

It was with this final humiliating blow that W. M. Graham receded into the oblivion of retirement. A career which had begun with so much promise was thus brought abruptly to an end at the very moment when its crowning achievement seemed so elusively within grasp.

It is improbable that many Indians regretted his fall. Among the many testimonials to his abilities and achievements that arrived in Ottawa during those crucial months of 1932, there were none from the native population. The Indians had been merely pawns in the grandiose schemes with which Graham attempted to enhance his reputation and advance his career. In his moments of crisis, they were not there to raise a helping hand.

Graham should not be selected for particular condemnation in that regard. The agents, inspectors, and commissioners who directed the lives of Indians at the behest of the federal government were invariably dedicated to the organization's objectives and to their own worldly comfort, rather than to the expressed wishes of those whom they professed to serve. And Graham was the quintessential organiza-

tion man. His determination and dedication, while undoubtedly inspired by career considerations, were also indicative of his faith in the ultimate wisdom of federal policy. He shared the belief of many of his contemporaries that the government knew what was best for the Indians. If the Indians themselves happened to disagree, it was regrettable, but hardly grounds in itself for compromise. As mere wards of the state, the native people could not reasonably expect their opinions to be considered.

## NOTES

- 1 This view was expressed on a number of occasions by Deputy Superintendent D. C. Scott.
- 2 D. J. Hall, "Clifford Sifton and Canadian Indian Administration, 1896-1905," *Prairie Forum*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1977), p. 129.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 145.
- 4 Public Archives of Canada, RG10 (Records of Department of Indian Affairs), Vol. 3908, file 107, 241.
- 5 PAC, R. B. Bennett Papers (MG26.K), Indian Affairs file D-200, memo D. C. Scott to T. Murphy, 15 March 1932.
- 6 PAC, RG10, Vol. 3878, file 91,839-7.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Eleanor Brass, "The File Hills Ex-Pupil Colony," *Saskatchewan History*, Vol. 6 (1953), p. 67.
- 9 Jacqueline Gresko, "White 'Rites' and Indian 'Rites': Indian Education and Native Responses in the West, 1870-1910," in A. W. Rasporich (ed.), *Western Canada: Past and Present*, (Calgary: McClelland and Stewart West, 1975), p. 175.
- 10 Brass, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
- 11 *Winnipeg Telegram*, 25 April 1903.
- 12 PAC, Bennett Papers, Indian Affairs file D-200.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 Gresko, *op. cit.*, p. 175.
- 15 *Ibid.*, pp. 177-78.
- 16 PAC, RF10, Vol. 3825, file 60,511-1, W. Graham to D. Laird, 4 August 1898.
- 17 *Ibid.*, file 60,511-2, W. Graham to J. D. McLean, 14 August 1909.
- 18 *Ibid.*, file 60,511-3, W. Graham to J. D. McLean, 24 July 1911; McLean to Graham, 9 August 1911.
- 19 PAC, Arthur Meighen Papers, series 1, Vol. 4, 2223.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 PAC, RF10, vol. 4069, file 427,063, D. C. Scott to A. Meighen, 28 February 1919.
- 22 PAC, Meighen Papers, series 2, vol. 31, 17702, A. Meighen to J. Lougheed, 31 January 1921.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 17692.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 017710.
- 25 PAC, RG10, vol. 4069, file 427,063, D. C. Scott to W. Graham, 22 February 1922.
- 26 PAC, Bennett Papers, Indian Affairs file D-200, memo D. C. Scott to T. Murphy, 15 March 1932.
- 27 PAC, Meighen Papers, series 3, vol. 98, 56097-56104.
- 28 PAC, RG10, vol. 4070, file 427,063-A, D. C. Scott to W. J. Roche, 7 February 1914.
- 29 PAC, Meighen Papers, series 3, vol. 110, 63799, A. Meighen to V. Graham, 4 September 1922.
- 30 John English, *Arthur Meighen*, (Don Mills: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1977), pp. 46-48.
- 31 The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Bennett McCauley in bringing this incident to his attention.
- 32 *Debates of the House of Commons*, (Vol. CXC for the period 1875-1931) Vol. IV, 1931, pp. 3674-3677. These details were divulged in the speech by J. S. Woodsworth, 13 July.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 3677.
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 3674.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 3678.
- 37 PAC, Bennett Papers, Indian Affairs file D-200, J. Mayoh to R. B. Bennett, 31 May 1930.
- 38 *Ibid.*, W. M. Graham file D-207-G, A. Tye to R. B. Bennett, 13 January 1932.
- 39 PAC, Meighen Papers, series 5, vol. 159, 97542, R. B. Bennett to A. Tye, 25 January 1932.
- 40 PAC, Bennett Papers, W. M. Graham file D-207-G, F. W. G. Haultain to R. B. Bennett, 11 February 1932.
- 41 *Ibid.*, R. B. Bennett to F. W. G. Haultain, 15 February 1932.
- 42 PAC, Meighen Papers, series 5, vol. 159, 97533, W. Graham to R. B. Bennett, 2 February 1932.

- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 97526, V. Graham to A. Meighen, 30 January 1932.  
<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 97545, A. Tye to A. Meighen, 5 February 1932.  
<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 97543, 97544, 97549, 97570, correspondence between W. Graham and D. C. Scott, February 1932.  
<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 97567, W. Graham to A. Meighen, 29 February 1932.  
<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 97553, A. Meighen to R. B. Bennett, 18 February 1932.  
<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 97558, 97571, 97577, correspondence between A. Tye and A. Meighen, February March 1932.  
<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 97585, V. Graham to A. Meighen, 18 March 1932.  
<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 97591-2, T. G. Murphy to A. Meighen, 22 and 29 March 1932.  
<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 97598, W. Graham to A. Meighen, 3 October 1932.  
<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 97599, A. Meighen to W. Graham, 14 October 1932.