“Two Wests, one-and-a-half paradigms” is a variation on One West, Two Myths, one of the growing number of histories that explore what has linked and separated the Canadian and U.S. Wests. The intent here is to explore class and labour across the 49th parallel, which requires entering a longer historical conversation about class and region that until now has been largely contained within two separate national histories. American and Canadian historians crafted two Wests with different meanings for each nation. At times, the U.S. emphasis on frontiers denied Western class differences and working-class radicalism. Partly because the Central Canadian metropole exercised greater influence than the Western frontier in Canadian histories, the representation of Western labour was somewhat different. From mostly nationalist perspectives, but sometimes using continental frameworks that followed workers across the 49th parallel, Canadian and U.S. labor historians wrote separate but sometimes connected accounts of Western labour, sometimes crossing the borders that national histories erected. Hence, two Wests, one-and-a-half paradigms.
In both countries, the past generation of social, ethnic, women’s, and working-class histories challenged these paradigms, and labour historians have been more open to transnational approaches than many Western historians, especially historians of the U.S. West. Here I summarize what connected and divided older histories of class and region, and some strategies suggested by recent working-class histories that might cross the boundaries of national histories.

Like most historians, I was trained in a national history; this essay will surely demonstrate the limits of that approach. I strive, as an American historian, to compare U.S. and Canadian histories. Still, my focus is inevitably skewed south of the 49th parallel. My questions about how to bridge the border flowed from American origins, particularly from the tensions between Western and working-class histories in the United States.

National, state, and provincial policies helped construct class formations in the North American Wests. But for all the importance of state power and national identities, their frameworks distort Western workers’ histories. If we focus on a nation or the West as the subjects of history, we cannot follow the workforces, industries, economies, and ecologies that cross national and regional boundaries. Transnational and comparative approaches are more unsettling for histories of the West than for histories of class. It is less disruptive to national and regional narratives to imagine workers crossing borders than to imagine transnational regions or histories.

Mainstream Western labour histories begin with national development and organized labour. The national “creation stories” authored most famously by Frederick Jackson Turner in the United States and Harold Adams Innis in Canada emphasize Western resource industries. The formative labour histories in both countries were written by economists allied with reformist labour unions and progressive politics: John R. Commons and the Wisconsin school of labour history in the United States and Canadian historians such as Frank Underhill, Eugene Forsey, Stuart Jamieson, and Kenneth McNaught. National histories and labour histories combined in both countries to narrow the focus of labour history to organized labour and to cast organized Western workers as exceptional deviants from the national mainstream. The workers and unions in the same industries became exceptional on both sides of the border but differently exceptional in separate national historiographies.

Neither Turner’s “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” nor Innis’s The Fur Trade in Canada was intended as Western history, but rather as narratives of distinctive national development. Both sought to establish what made his country unique; despite similarities, their narratives differed in important respects. Both began with the fur trade. Starting with his MA thesis on the Wisconsin trade, Turner went on to elaborate how the frontier uniquely
shaped the nation. Free land on a series of westward-moving frontiers forged America’s distinctive democratic institutions and national character. Innis located Canada’s distinctive development staples economies managed from distant metropoles in Europe and Central Canada. Both based national development on key resources—furs, fish, timber, land, and minerals—with similar male workforces. For Turner, each successive frontier progressed from Indian traders, to soldiers, ranchers or miners, to farmers (and on the Atlantic frontier alone, fishers). The men who laboured on Innis’s resource frontiers were simply workers directed from distant metropoles. For Turner, the same men became mythic national archetypes, rugged individuals who shaped national character. Turner’s narrative virtually erased Native peoples, but some of Innis’s workers were Aboriginal or Métis.

The divergent paths of U.S. labour and Western histories intersected at Johns Hopkins University, where both Commons and Turner attended graduate school, and at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, where they both taught. Despite many differences, both Commons and Turner emphasized American exceptionalism—how the United States was different from everywhere else—especially the opportunity it offered for upward mobility, which undermined the significance of class. For Turner, opportunity comes from acquiring free land; for Commons, from negotiations between labour and management that prevent conflict. While Turner focused on a frontier that had ended, Commons turned to the dislocations of industrialization that drew a new workforce of former slaves; immigrants from Europe, Asia, Canada, and Latin America; and “immigrants” of another kind who left farms for urban labour. These changes stimulated a growing labour movement, organized through the National Labour Union (1866), Knights of Labour (1878), and American Federation of Labor (1886).

Commons taught at Indiana University from 1892 to 1895, and then at Syracuse University. But in 1899 Syracuse, apparently irritated by his outspoken politics, eliminated Commons’ position, and he could not find academic employment until the University of Wisconsin hired him in 1904. The rest would be labour history, as Commons led the influential Wisconsin school of labour history that produced a ten-volume Documentary History of American Industrial Society and a four-volume History of Labor in the United States. Believing that scarcity increased the value of labour and property, Commons saw as normal the segment of organized labour represented by the American Federation of Labor (AFL), skilled workers who tried to control the market for their crafts by limiting access to apprenticeship and who withheld their labour as a strategy to win “bread and butter” reforms. Commons considered the U.S. labour movement exceptional: pragmatic, self-interested, and self-protective, seeking
incremental gains, not fundamental change. In contrast, the Knights of Labour, the Western Labor Union/American Labor Union (WLU/ALU), and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) organized all the workers in a community or all the workers in an industry, regardless of skill, in order to match the growing power of economically integrated corporations. These unions, prominent in the U.S. and Canadian Wests, were considered outside the moderate mainstream. The Commons school marginalized most workers—all who weren’t skilled, white, male, waged, or organized—and also historians outside the academy, notably women progressives such as Edith Abbot and Sophonisba Breckenridge, whose histories of women workers remained outside the academic mainstream. And it marginalized most Western workers, including the workers of Turner’s and Innis’ staple resource industries. Vilified for their “un-American” strike violence, the WFM, WLU/ALU, and IWW all, at various times, endorsed the Socialist Party, syndicalism, and the General Strike, and became the exceptions to Commons’ exceptional moderate “mainstream.”

Canadian historiography likewise considered Western labour exceptional for the radical politics and tactics of the WFM, United Mine Workers of America (UMW), and One Big Union (OBU), culminating with the 1919 Calgary Labour Congress and the Winnipeg General Strike. The debate about Western Canadian labour, like the history of Western Canada, was caught between histories of national development and continental approaches that linked the workforces and unions active in both countries. From a nationalist perspective, the question became what separated the Canadian West from both Central Canada and the United States. In 1940 George F. G. Stanley distinguished an orderly and peaceful Canadian West from its more violent and unruly neighbour. Histories of Canadian resource industries emphasized either the institutional links between the Canadian and U.S. labour movements or the more peaceful character of Canadian labour relations compared with violent strikes in the U.S. West.

Much of the debate concerned mining, and the “heritage of conflict” of the Western Federation of Miners (1893–1916)/International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers (1916–67). Historians in both countries found the roots of miners’ radicalism in their failure to find frontier opportunity. But the legacies of Turner, Innis, and Stanley separated the two exceptionalisms. In the United States, the weird Western labour radicals got explained as the products of the frontier or of the peculiar demography of Western struggles. In Canada, Innis’ metropolitan staples framework explained similar “exceptional” labour movements. Daniel Drache, for instance, explained differences in regional labour, and Western radicalism in particular, as the products of particular staples economies. Others, including Paul Phillips and Stuart Jamieson, focused on Prime Minister John A. Macdonald’s National Policy, which relegated the
Western provinces to staples production, thus reinforcing the power of Central Canada to doubly exploit workers as Westerners and as labourers. Eastern Canadian workers, in Phillips’s view, benefitted from tariffs that protected their employers from international competition, inclining them to accommodate labour. Western resource-extracting employers sold in international markets and extracted their profits from the hides of their workers, who were further burdened by the high costs of protected Eastern manufactured products.17

Canadian scholars’ reliance on Innis’ framework rather than Turner’s made sense: trade union militancy persisted in Western Canada well beyond the “frontier period,” which made it hard to locate radicalism in a brief period of post-frontier disillusionment. U.S. historians came to similar conclusions by the 1960s, questioning frontier and exceptionalist explanations of Western labour radicalism. The WFM, long considered a radical exception, was not founded until 1893, three years after the superintendent of the U.S. Census declared that the frontier had closed.

In the 1960s and 1970s, new working-class histories in Canada and the United States challenged nationalist and union-centered labour histories, drawing particularly from British historian E.P. Thompson, who emphasized the cultural roots of working-class consciousness and organizing. Thompson influenced American historians Herbert Gutman, David Montgomery, Melvyn Dubofsky, and others who influenced new interpretations of Western labour histories. The new working-class history was not monolithic. It included historians who focused on working-class culture and community, on rank-and-file organizing at the point of production, on working-class radicalism, and on unorganized workers, including women and people of colour. And it generated new debates about Western workers.

Melvyn Dubofsky began the conversation in 1966 with his article “The Origins of Working Class Radicalism.” Insisting that “reform and revolution need not be mutually exclusive,” he disrupted the Commons school’s binary that separated moderate American unions from un-American working-class radicalism.18 Tracing the IWW to its roots in Western hardrock mining, Dubofsky linked the histories of radicalism and Eastern and Western workers to industrial class relations, not the frontier.19 Richard Lingenfelter, chronicling the WFM’s antecedents, concluded that wages, health, and welfare were dominant concerns. He, too, found that radicalism and violence came not from frontier lawlessness but increased with industrialization.20

Miners and their unions crossed the 49th parallel. So did the debate about Western working-class radicalism. Canadian labour historians were more mindful than Americans of scholarship and unions from the other side of the border and, not surprisingly, wrestled with the power that American-based unions
wielded in Canada. U.S. historians have paid less attention to the Canadian members that made the same unions “international.” This difference mattered in the 1970s, as U.S. labour histories entered the Canadian academic mainstream more than the reverse. Though no Canadian scholars unquestioningly applied new American analyses, U.S. scholarship influenced new histories of Western Canadian labour, such as A. Ross McCormack’s Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries, and David J. Bercuson’s “Labour Radicalism and the Western Industrial Frontier: 1897–1919,” which was influenced by Dubofsky and likewise concluded that rapid industrialization fostered Western Canadian working-class radicalism.

Historians on both sides of the border challenged interpretations of Western labour as exceptionally radical and Western industrialization as exceptionally rapid and brutal. Gregory Kealey, Jeremy Mouat, Craig Heron, Norman Penner, and others argued that militancy and violence occurred elsewhere and that the radical/reform binary distorted Western workers’ experiences and strategies. Some suggested that the larger contexts of post-war demobilization, the Russian Revolution, and government repression linked the Winnipeg and Seattle General Strikes and similar upheavals in Calgary, Regina, Vancouver, and throughout Ontario. Kealey challenged Bercuson’s conclusion that the Winnipeg General Strike grew from local and regional grievances, arguing that larger national and international contexts sparked workers’ revolts in many Canadian cities. Heron’s anthology, The Workers’ Revolt in Canada, 1917–1925, documents this larger movement. Norman Penner, dealing with Winnipeg alone, challenged clear divisions between reformists and radicals during the strike. Jeremy Mouat’s “The Genesis of Western Exceptionalism” dislodged the false dichotomies of radicalism and reform in Western hardrock mining. And a few historians began to explore how capital, workers, and unions crossed the 49th parallel in specific resource industries.

Much earlier, in 1937, Walter Sage had suggested that the contiguous cross-border regions had more in common than they did with the eastern U.S. or Central Canada. And in 1955 U.S. historian Paul Sharp argued that the U.S. frontier did not close in 1890 but moved north to Canada. Despite such pioneering scholarship, until recently few histories followed cross-border economies and workforces. According to Sharp, cowboys sought employment with outfits in Alberta as freely as with those in Wyoming and Montana, yet the focus on national differences narrowed the gaze to the very different ownership, society, and scale of Canadian ranching compared with the United States. More recent works suggest that while the structure and management of the Canadian ranching industry differed from the United States, the mobile ranching workforce transported the technologies and practices of working cowboys across the border. Similarly, Richard Rajala has studied the timber workers
whose movements and organizing crossed the 49th parallel in the Pacific Northwest, Chris Friday has documented the cross-border migrations and organizing of fish cannery workforces, and Gunther Peck has explored international and continental labour migrations. Their work joined the “new” Western, social, working-class, women’s, and racial-ethnic histories that challenged previous approaches to labour, the West, and the nation. New Western histories introduced multicultural perspectives, imperialism and conquest, environmental impacts, and economic dependency. The new working-class history broadened the focus of labour history from strikes and labour unions to daily acts and to working-class cultures and communities. Histories of women and people of colour vastly expanded the historical casts and shifted the focus from male labour in resource economies to service work, agriculture, and domestic and unwaged labour, and to resistance and organizing beyond organized labour.

Nonetheless, labour history and Western history have remained largely disconnected. Western workers remain marginal in new labour histories, and work and class are not central to most new Western histories. Despite a wealth of new histories of workers of colour, it is hard to dethrone white male industrial workers or to shift the narrative from a linear tale that moves from industrial development to post-industrial decline. Despite the work of Chris Friday, Dianne Newell, Vicki Ruiz, and Zaragosa Vargas, for instance, on multi-ethnic food processors, I cannot think of a labour history that features Western food-processing workforces.

Still, an expanding cross-border conversation addresses intersections of race and gender in Western workforces, and how migrations, within and across borders, have constantly reconfigured workforces. Immediately before the “West and Beyond” conference, the program of the fourteenth “Berkshire Conference on the History of Women” in June 2008 included a session featuring new work on Native women’s wage work in Montana and Manitoba, and the joint meeting of the Pacific Northwest Labour History Association and the Labour and Working-Class History Association featured papers on migratory workers in Western Canada and the Washington apple industry, on the anti-Asian riots in Vancouver and Bellingham in 1907, on Indigenous workers in both countries, and on organizing Asian Pacific islander workers in the United States and Canada (among others).

Such new scholarship provides fruitful contexts in which to push beyond two separate Wests to think comparatively and transnationally about topics such as accumulation, workforce formation and reproduction, and the intersection of histories of class and place. A first step involves connecting the state with these processes and critiquing how national histories have obscured them. Turner and Innis distorted key processes of class formation. Assuming that the
subject was the nation, they erased eons of prior history and occupation to normalize and legitimize appropriating the land that provided the territory and resources for state formation. Both nations gave land “free” to homesteaders, thus underwriting small-scale capital accumulation. Both governments used the appropriated land to capitalize east-to-west railroads. The United States gave 129 million acres for Western railroad development. Canada gave the Canadian Pacific Railroad alone 25 million acres, government-built lines worth $38 million, tax exemptions, and a twenty-year ban on competing rails south of the CPR main line. From 1903 to 1915, the Prairie provinces offered cash subsidies and guarantees on railway bonds totalling $215 million.

Western ecologies generated similar resource industries; state policies charted their development. National treasuries supported the North West Mounted Police and the U.S. cavalry that policed both Wests and secured the land grabs, regardless of their different images since George Stanley distinguished the peaceful and orderly Canadian West from its violent neighbour to the south. Both governments became prime customers for Western staples such as metals to back the currency and beef to feed the troops and Native peoples on reserves. During the “Open Range” era in the United States, the federal government bought about fifty thousand head of cattle a year to distribute on Indian reservations. Both nations kept vast territories and offered their resources for private profit through timber leases in national forests and Crown lands or through the 1881 amendment to the Dominion Lands Act that allowed British subjects to lease up to a hundred thousand acres for a penny an acre, a policy that underwrote huge spreads for wealthy British and Eastern Canadian ranchers. During World War II, new defence industries changed the economies and workforces in both countries; afterwards, the U.S. government funded military and scientific industries that fundamentally reshaped Western workforces and economies, and differentiated them from post-war Canadian West.

This example underscores the importance of historicizing Western economies and workforces. National policies affected workforces and class relations. At various times, both countries alternately sought and banned Asians, Mexicans, and other workers. State policies that governed who could claim land and jobs impacted relationships of race and gender as well as class. As the example of Chinese and Japanese immigrants suggests, labour forces and class relations changed as workers and capital migrated. Canadian and U.S. histories emphasize that railroads linked the nations and forged east-to-west economies. Canadian histories may record concerns about U.S. economic control and the fact that Cornelius Van Horne was American, but few American histories mention that James J. Hill was Canadian or consider that fact significant. Neither focuses on how Chinese and Irish men came to lay the tracks. A second chal-
The new social histories highlighted linked constructions of race, class, and gender. Applying these analytic lenses to Western workforces, it becomes clear that traditional labour histories erased workers who were either, like Mexican and Chinese workers, banned from Western labour unions or who performed unwaged labour.43 The focus on the white male workers of staples frontiers oversimplified a much messier grid of human labour. The women of the fur trade tanned hides, made snowshoes and pemmican, and gardened.44 On miners’ frontiers, women also gardened, raised dairy cows and chickens, sold sex, cooked, and did laundry for wages.44 Focusing on the staples themselves erased the labour that underwrote their workforces. That “service work frontier” remains an unrecognized but hugely significant sector of Western infrastructure.

Another challenge is analyzing what connects productive and reproductive labour. I use “productive labour” in the technical sense: work that produces a commodity, including labour power sold for wages. By “reproductive labour,” I mean all the work necessary to create human labour power, whether paid or not—preserving and preparing food, making clothes and washing them, hauling water for baths—all the work required for people to get up and go to work every day with the energy to do their jobs. I mean, too, the labour of reproducing the next generation of workers and of creating social relationships by raising and teaching children, building institutions such as schools and hospitals,
and enacting or changing the daily behaviours that knit communities together. Sylvia Van Kirk and Jennifer Brown offered a useful model, as they linked Aboriginal women’s productive and reproductive labour in the fur trade, from making pemmican to creating families and social networks.45

For women, the defining characteristic of resource frontiers was a demographic imbalance: there were too many men, which narrowed women’s options to providing sex and domestic labour.46 Canada recruited domestic servants (and potential wives) from Europe. In both countries, ads for housekeepers on ranches and farms drew women workers, sometimes eventually to perform the same work without pay as wives.47 The male excess supported sex workers who crossed national boundaries to the next resource boom.48 Besides circumscribing women’s wage work, the skewed sex ratios also fostered interracial intimacy and marriages that forged the changing racialized class hierarchies of both Wests. Albert Hurtado, Peggy Pascoe, and Sarah Carter have examined how regulating intimate relationships was inseparably linked to class formation.49 For example, the Asian exclusion laws of both Canada and the United States so restricted the immigration of Chinese and Japanese women that few working men could marry and only the middle class could reproduce itself.50 Always taking into account gender and reproductive labour makes it much easier to trace how classes formed and changed. It also introduces human bodies as sites where labour power is generated, and likewise the next generation of workers.

I was first led to Canadian history by a mining hoist engineer named James McConaghy, who migrated from Ireland to Leadville, Colorado, to the Cripple Creek District, to Rossland, back to Colorado, and then to Nevada. And I was led to him by his daughter, May McConaghy Wing, the keeper of family memory, who shared his journeys and his story.51 The McConaghys represented millions of workers who forged transnational workforces with different racial–ethnic hierarchies in each locality and brought organizing experience with them. Farmers’ migrations back and forth across the 49th parallel wrote similar language into (the U.S.) Omaha Platform and (the Canadian) Farmers Platform. Men who marched to Washington in 1894 with Coxey’s Army later joined the On-to-Ottawa Band.52 Work and labour movements propelled Arthur “Slim” Evans from Toronto to the 1913 coal miners’ strike in Ludlow, Colorado, to the OBU in Alberta, to the Communist Party in British Columbia, to the On-to-Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot.53 The migrants who carried ideologies and tactics across international borders recast labour histories that have been anchored to the places where workers only sojourned.

National and regional boundaries have not provided the most useful frameworks to understand the historical processes of accumulation, workforce formation and reproduction, or, for that matter, work itself. Communities and
regions are constantly reconstructed by economic and social relationships, and national borders have been open and closed at different times to the people and the movements that forge class and community. From these perspectives, the subject becomes not the West or the nation, but how people build and transform social relationships. The older stories of frontiers, staples, and organized labour are not nearly large enough to hold this complexity. By broadening concepts of labour, organizing, and resistance, and looking beyond national and regional borders to the sites of labour and the factors that pushed and pulled workers on their journeys, we may gain more than a more accurate history of workers and of Western social and economic development. We may imagine new and more complex ways to map regions that have thus far been defined largely by their geopolitical boundaries. We may imagine many constantly changing Wests, the geographies of which have been as intensely local as the distance from home to work, from the kitchen to the garden, and at the same time as large as the global geographies that brought people to work and build social relationships. To map these regions, we need many more stories, multiple paradigms, and far fewer myths.

Notes

1 Thanks to the organizers of the “West and Beyond” conference, especially Alvin Finkel, for the invitation and for ideas, references, and terrific comments. Thanks, too, to the helpful anonymous reviewers and to Amy McKinney, copy editor extraordinaire.

2 Carol Higham and Robert Thacker, eds., One West, Two Myths: Essays on Comparisons (Calgary and Lincoln: University of Calgary Press and University of Nebraska Press, 2005) and One West, Two Myths II: Essays on Comparison (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006).


4 Forsey, Underhill, Jamieson, and McNaught were all associated with the CCF, but Underhill and Forsey were also Liberals at times, and Forsey a Tory. Like Commons, they might be characterized as “liberal progressives.” Forsey and Underhill were founding members, in 1931, of the League for Social Reconstruction, which carefully distinguished itself from communists and socialists. Underhill helped draft the CCF’s Regina Manifesto in July 1933. See Bryan D. Palmer, Working-Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian


8 Innis, Far Trade in Canada, esp. 393.

9 Turner was born in Wisconsin in 1861, Commons in Ohio in 1862. Turner earned his BA and MA at the University of Wisconsin; Commons graduated from Oberlin College, which was founded by abolitionists.


The Western Federation of Miners (WFM) was the largest affiliate of the Western Labor Union (WLU, 1898–1902), which it helped found as a western alternative to the American Federation of Labor (AFL). The WLU changed its name to the American Labor Union (1892–1905), signalling a national challenge to the AFL. In 1905 the ALU and WFM helped found the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The WFM withdrew from the IWW in 1908 and joined the AFL in 1912 in an unsuccessful attempt to merge with the United Mine Workers of America.


The 1862 U.S. Homestead Act and the 1872 Canadian Dominion Lands Act were similar. Both offered male heads of families or single men (age twenty-one in the United States and eighteen in Canada) a 160-acre homestead in return for a small filing fee and living on the land (five months a year in the United States, three months in Canada) and improving it for a period of time (five years in the United States, three in Canada). In Canada, until 1889 a homesteader could “pre-empt” a second adjacent quarter section. In the United States, single women and women heads of families could claim land in their own names. In Canada, the restrictions on women homesteaders were stringent; very few qualified.


White, It’s Your Misfortune.
These included the laboratory in Los Alamos, New Mexico, that developed the atomic bomb; scientific labs in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Hanford, Washington; the Nevada nuclear test site; the Rocky Flats nuclear weapons plant; Pacific Coast ship- and airplane-building facilities; and Western military bases. This military/defense economy continues to characterize local economies throughout the U.S. West.

The United States and Canada, for instance, both discouraged Chinese immigration after the railroads were built, the United States through the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 and Canada through the head tax imposed in 1885. The United States expelled many Mexicans and Mexican Americans—including U.S. citizens—during the 1930s and then invited them back in 1942, when an executive agreement between the United States and Mexico created the Bracero Program, under which some three hundred thousand Mexican labourers came to do mostly agricultural labour. Nearly five million migrated under the program by the mid-1960s.


46 Women were outnumbered from the onset of European colonization well into the twentieth century. In California, a year after the gold rush, the census counted 123 men for each woman. In Colorado, a year after the Pike’s Peak boom, there were 165. By 1930, Kansas had 101 men per 100 women; Texas had 104; Utah, 105. These figures, however, omitted most Indians. Calculated from *Bicentennial Edition, Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Time to 1970*, ser. A (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, 1970), 195–209. See also Albert Hurtado, *Intimate Frontiers: Sex, Gender, and Culture in Old California* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999); Jameson, “Where Have All the Young Men Gone?”, 203–04; Johnson, *Roaring Camp*, 163, 280, 313; Mouat, *Roaring Days*, 110–11.


53 Born in Toronto, Evans apprenticed as a carpenter and worked in the midwestern United States as a young man, where he became involved with radical labour. He was wounded during the tragic climax of the 1913–14 Ludlow strike. Returning to Canada in 1919, he became the B.C./Alberta representative for the One Big Union (OBU). He moved to British Columbia in 1926, joined the Communist Party, served as district organizer for the Workers’ Unity League in the Great Depression, and was a leader in the On-to-Ottawa Trek. See Waiser, *All Hell Can’t Stop Us*, 44–46 and passim. Evans was jailed in 1923 for alleged theft of OBU union dues, which he apparently used for relief in Drumheller. The miners he allegedly robbed petitioned to secure his early release. That story is chronicled in a song by Maria Dunn, “Do you know Slim Evans?” on Maria Dunn, *We Were Good People* (2004).