

Man on the Spot: John Daly, Indian Agent in Parry Sound, 1922-1939

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Article abstract

In this article, the local application of Indian policy is examined through an analysis of the career of an Ontario Indian agent, John M. Daly, who served in the Parry Sound Agency from 1922 to 1939. While policy was decided in Ottawa, which closely monitored field officials, the agents were responsible for its practical implementation and for dealing with the contradictions and ambiguities which could arise in concrete situations. The Indian Department's reliance on information provided by the "man on the spot" meant that his recommendations carried a great deal of weight in decision-making. An in-depth analysis of the agent's day-to-day activities thus provides insights into the actual realities faced by Native people in their interaction with government. Daly's methods conformed well to the style of administration encouraged by the Department. A confirmed paternalist, he offered some protection to vulnerable individuals while opposing those who strove to assert self-determination. He was always very concerned to maintain the Department's authority, on which his own was dependent — in particular, this involved keeping aboriginal people and band councils "in their place". By the 1920s the failure of the federal policy of separation, civilisation and assimilation was readily apparent — aboriginal people remained a distinct, unassimilated population, still largely segregated on the reserves which were intended to be absorbed into the surrounding communities. The formerly stagnant or shrinking Native population was beginning to increase, while reserves remained fixed in size and their resources were already substantially depleted. This, combined with the marginalization of aboriginal people within the mainstream labour market, meant poverty and hardship for many Natives. Since federal policy was never adjusted to cope with the new realities, the agents found themselves approaching the problem of Native poverty on an ad hoc basis. Daly's negotiation of these difficult circumstances is analysed in the following paper.

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Résumé

In this article, the local application of Indian policy is examined through an analysis of the career of an Ontario Indian agent, John M. Daly, who served in the Parry Sound Agency from 1922 to 1939. While policy was decided in Ottawa, which closely monitored field officials, the agents were responsible for its practical implementation and for dealing with the contradictions and ambiguities which could arise in concrete situations. The Indian Department's reliance on information provided by the "man on the spot" meant that his recommendations carried a great deal of weight in decision-making. An in-depth analysis of the agent's day-to-day activities thus provides insights into the actual realities faced by Native people in their interaction with government. Daly's methods conformed well to the style of administration encouraged by the Department. A confirmed paternalist, he offered some protection to vulnerable individuals while opposing those who strove to assert self-determination. He was always very concerned to maintain the Department's authority, on which his own was dependent — in particular, this involved keeping aboriginal people and band councils "in their place." By the 1920s the failure of the federal policy of separation, civilisation and assimilation was readily apparent — aboriginal people remained a distinct, unassimilated population, still largely segregated on the reserves which were intended to be absorbed into the surrounding communities. The formerly stagnant or shrinking Native population was beginning to increase, while reserves remained fixed in size and their resources were already substantially depleted. This, combined with the marginalization of aboriginal people within the mainstream labour market, meant poverty and hardship for many Natives. Since federal policy was never adjusted to cope with the new realities, the agents found themselves approaching the problem of Native poverty on an ad hoc basis. Daly's negotiation of these difficult circumstances is analysed in the following paper.

Cet article porte sur l'application locale de la politique indienne à partir d'un cas ontarien, celui de John Daly, qui assumait la fonction d'Agent des Indiens à Parry Sound, entre 1922 et 1939. S'il est vrai que les directives émanaient d'Ottawa et qu'on y assurait la supervision des employés sur le terrain, il n'en demeure pas moins que les Agents

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responsables de la mise en pratique de ces politiques devaient résoudre sur le champ contradictions et ambiguïtés. En outre, le fait que les Affaires indiennes dépendaient exclusivement des renseignements fournis par leurs hommes sur les lieux donnait un poids considérable aux recommandations des Agents. L'analyse approfondie des relations entre Autochtones et gouvernement montre que les méthodes de Daly ne contredisaient en rien le style d'administration promu par la capitale. Paternaliste convaincu, il pouvait à la fois offrir sa protection à des individus dans des situations précaires tout en s'opposant à ceux qui tentaient d'affirmer leur autonomie. Toujours en mal de maintenir l'autorité du ministère, dont sa propre légitimité dépendait, il s'assurait de confiner les Autochtones à la place que le gouvernement leur assignait, malgré la multiplication, au cours des années 1920, des signes de l'échec de la vieille politique fédérale de séparation, de civilisation et d'assimilation. En effet, les Autochtones demeuraient une population distincte et la ségrégation des réserves continuait au lieu de l'assimilation souhaitée aux communautés avoisinantes. De plus, la taille de leur population, après avoir longtemps stagné, voire diminué, commença à s'accroître. La superficie des réserves n'augmenta pas pour autant, un problème d'autant plus grave que leurs ressources étaient épuisées. Enfin, la marginalisation croissante des Autochtones à l'intérieur du marché du travail s'ajoutait à ces circonstances, pour entraîner la pauvreté de plusieurs. Comme la politique fédérale ne s'ajusta pas à ces réalités, les agents durent approcher les problèmes de bien-être à la pièce. L'analyse des actions de Daly permet d'explorer leurs méthodes.

In the study of Native-white relations in Canada, tracing the development of federal Indian policy has absorbed a great deal of scholarly attention. Through the work of such scholars as John L. Taylor, John L. Tobias, Sally Weaver, and others,¹ the intentions and specific provisions of Canadian Indian policy have been well documented, their contradictions exposed and the self-serving motivations behind the humanitarian rhetoric brought to light. Now that this essential groundwork has been laid, historians such as Ken Coates and Sarah Carter have pointed to the necessity of examining the implementation of federal goals as well.² In the attempt to put contradictory policies into

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1. John L. Taylor, "Canada's North-West Indian Policy in the 1870s: Traditional Premises and Necessary Innovations." in D.A. Muise, (ed.), *Approaches to Native History in Canada: Papers of a Conference held at the National Museum of Man, October 1975* (Ottawa 1977); John L. Tobias, "Protection, Civilization, Assimilation: An Outline History of Canada's Indian Policy," *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 2 (1976); Robert Surtees, "The Development of an Indian Reserve Policy in Canada," *Ontario History* 61: 2 (June 1969); Sally Weaver, *Making Canadian Indian Policy: The Hidden Agenda 1968-1970* (Toronto 1981); John Leslie, "The Bagot Commission: Developing a Corporate Memory for the Indian Department," Canadian Historical Association, *Historical Papers*, (1982); John Milloy, "The Early Indian Acts: Developmental Strategy and Constitutional Change," in Ian A.L. Getty and Antoine A. Lussier, (eds.), *As Long As the Sun Shines and Water Flows: A Reader in Canadian Native Studies* (Vancouver, 1983); J.R. Miller, "Owen Glendower, Hotspur and Canadian Indian Policy," *Ethnohistory* 97: 4 (Fall 1990).
 2. Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal and Kingston, 1990); Ken S. Coates, *Best Left As Indians: Native-White Relations*

practice, decisions were inevitably made which gave priority to one goal over another, thus resulting in alterations to the actual policy applied to Native people. Moreover, field officials were faced with varying conditions and personalities which they were compelled to take into account. In the case of the Yukon, for example, Ken Coates has demonstrated that "federal officials often sought to modify national directives to suit territorial realities and, equally important, that the Natives were often reluctant to accept government services and programs."³ The application of Departmental initiatives on the local level is an area which has received little systematic analysis, and which promises to yield a more detailed understanding of the effects of government policy on the aboriginal population. This paper examines the career of John McLean Daly, Indian agent for the Parry Sound agency from 1922 to 1939, as a contribution towards such an in-depth analysis of the concrete activities and practices of federal officials in the field.

The figure of the Indian agent receives frequent passing mention in studies of Native-white relations, but has attracted very little attention in itself. In its earliest incarnation, in the era of William Johnson and his sons,⁴ the role of the Indian agent was effectively that of ambassador to the First Nations, maintaining good relations and a military alliance without any mandate to modify aboriginal culture or everyday behaviour. However, this role ceased to be relevant once the military strength of First Nations went into irreversible decline following the War of 1812. By 1830 Britain had developed a new approach to aboriginal people, based on the assumption that they were to be assimilated into the now-dominant Euro-Canadian society. While an important part of this task was entrusted to Christian missionaries, an equally significant acculturative role fell to the agent of the Department of Indian Affairs. No personnel change accompanied this shift in priorities, for the existing superintendents, mostly military men, were considered to have invaluable experience in dealing with Native customs and societies.⁵ Nevertheless, the job now took a new form.

Where the early British representatives had an interest in appearing to respect the cultures of First Nations people (cultures whose military aspects often suited Great Britain's purposes), their successors were charged with the task of altering them in pursuit of the new aims. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the burgeoning legislation related to aboriginal people reflected the Indian Department's desire to impose Euro-Canadian ways on its charges, and the growing degree of coercion considered necessary to pursue these goals in the face of aboriginal resistance.⁶ As historians of the

in the Yukon Territory, 1840-1979 (Montreal & Kingston, 1991).

3. Coates, *Best Left As Indians*, 159.

4. William Johnson was appointed Chief Indian Agent by the Governor of New York in 1744, and was made Superintendent of Indian Affairs, Northern Department, in 1755. At his death in 1774 his son, Colonel Guy Johnson, succeeded him, followed in 1782 by another son, Sir John Johnson.

5. Peter S. Schmalz, *The Ojibwa of Southern Ontario* (Toronto, 1991), 164-5.

6. The various laws related to aboriginal people were first consolidated in 1876 as the Indian Act, which was amended almost yearly from that time on. Indian Affairs, which was a federal

Indian Act have demonstrated, “The general intent of the almost yearly additions to the power of the Governor-in-Council was to overcome the apparently increasing reluctance of band councils to do what the Department deemed desirable. . . .”⁷ These powers of intervention were assigned to the Governor-in-Council, but were typically exercised in the Governor’s name by his local representatives, the Indian agents. These individuals were expected to provide reliable data to facilitate informed decision-making, and then to carry out the policies and instructions of their superiors at headquarters. Although the Department was well known for its strict enforcement of hierarchy in the decision-making process,⁸ the agent’s position offered numerous opportunities to exercise personal power, especially in day-to-day matters in which headquarters took little interest. For this reason these officials are worth studying not only to investigate the implementation and impact of federal policies, but also to examine the ways in which aboriginal people were subject to the petty, arbitrary authority of their appointed overseers. It appears from some writings of Native people that this aspect of wardship status was a very personal and immediate source of demoralization and oppression.⁹

The Indian Act’s provisions were of sweeping scope and facilitated interference in practically every aspect of both reserve communities and individual lives. On a political level, Indian agents could — and were expected to — exert substantial control over band councils, calling band meetings, chairing them, and expressing both their own and the Department’s views in deliberations; they were excluded only from voting. The Department was forthright in describing the purpose of the agent’s presence on these occasions: “It is the duty of Agents to attend the monthly Council Meetings of the band, to advise and instruct the members of the Council in matters pertaining to Departmental policy.”¹⁰ All band council resolutions were subject to the approval of the Superintendent General, who thus enjoyed a veto over the political activities of these bodies. Resolutions were conveyed to the Department of Indian Affairs by the agents, and were generally approved or rejected based on their recommendation. As one commentator has analyzed the system, “Band councils were intended to serve as a pliable instrument that would

responsibility assigned to the Secretary of State after Confederation, became a separate department in 1880. In 1936 it became a branch of the Department of Mines & Resources. It was transferred again in 1949, this time to the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, and finally re-emerged as a separate entity in 1966, when the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development was established.

7. John Leslie and Ron Maguire (eds.), *The Historical Development of the Indian Act* (Ottawa, 1978), 100.
8. “The Politics of Indian Affairs,” abridged from ch. 17 of H.B. Hawthorn (ed.), *A Survey of Contemporary Indians of Canada*, Pt 1, (Ottawa, 1966), in Getty and Lussier, *As Long As The Sun Shines*.
9. See, for example, Harold Cardinal’s sketch of an Indian agent making a Native client wait all day for an interview “just to show him who was boss. . . .” in “Hat in Hand: The Long Fight to Organize,” in J.R. Miller, (ed.), *Sweet Promises: A Reader on Indian White Relations in Canada* (Toronto, 1991), 393-4. Originally published in Harold Cardinal, *The Unjust Society: The Tragedy of Canada’s Indians* (Edmonton, 1969).
10. “General Instructions to Indian Agents in Canada,” 1 September 1933, 12.

advance the general aims of federal tutelage and support the particular day-to-day objectives of field officers.”¹¹ The agents generally did everything in their power to ensure that the councils in fact fulfilled this purpose.

Besides controlling the council’s deliberations and recommending for or against its resolutions, the agents could exercise authority over the individuals who composed it as well. From 1884 on, the Superintendent General was empowered to depose chiefs and councillors for “incompetence, intemperance or immorality.” Again, it was frequently the Department’s local representative who advised the Department as to the “competence” and “morality” of unco-operative chiefs and council members, an assessment which was naturally contingent on the tenor of relations between the two. Since many bands were internally divided for reasons of religion or unequal access to resources, field officers could often marshal the support of some band members in an effort to have fractious council officials deposed. While this measure was not resorted to frequently, the threat of deposition was employed as a means of imposing limits on the political leadership exercised by the elected representatives of aboriginal communities.

The Indian Act gave the agents opportunities for exerting economic power over their charges as well, ostensibly in the interest of teaching Native people to handle money and other resources responsibly. Moneys from the trust funds held in Ottawa for the collective benefit of the band could be spent only for limited, specific purposes, upon the passage of a band council resolution which was approved by the Department. The specified amount was then released to the agent, who spent it on the band’s behalf; sums of any size were never handled by aboriginal people themselves. Since reserve land could not be mortgaged or sold, Native people who needed capital for any undertaking could only turn to band funds or to the Department for a loan. Here again, the council could agree to make such a loan, but if the agent recommended against it, the individual in question was usually out of luck. The range of powers available to field officers allowed them to wield an influence beyond their actual authority, because opposing their will could lead to countless annoyances for an individual band member: “Since so many aspects of Indians’ lives have been controlled by tutelage agents, the options available to those who would resist too openly or vigorously have not been appealing.”¹²

In the Department’s view, the natural resources located on reserves were there to be exploited, under the watchful eye of its field officers. In much of Ontario, the chief resource was timber, which long served as the mainstay of many reserve economies. Each winter, band councils would submit resolutions requesting permission to cut pulpwood, lumber, or whatever type of wood products might fetch a price on the local market. Generally speaking, the agents recommended for or against such permission

11. Noel Dyck, *What is the Indian “Problem”?: Tutelage and Resistance in Canadian Indian Administration* (St. John’s, 1991), 91.

12. *Ibid.*, 27.

based on their perception of other employment opportunities: if wage labour off the reserve was deemed to be plentiful, permits to cut wood products on the reserve were denied. Such authority could be applied in individual cases as well. Band members who wished to cut wood for any purpose, even cutting stovewood for their own use on their own property, were often required to secure a permit. This was not necessary according to the Indian Act,¹³ but Native people's lack of knowledge regarding the exact provisions of the Indian Act allowed many agents to enforce their own regulations. They could thus, for example, prevent individuals from securing fuel for their stoves, cutting lumber to repair houses and barns, or using wood from the reserve for any other project which might require lumber.

A final crucial source of the agents' economic power lay in the distribution of rations and relief. In the area examined in this study, the precarious seasonal economy of most reserve residents left them perennially short of funds at certain times of the year. When the vagaries of weather prevented such important activities as hunting, trapping, and lumbering, periods of severe scarcity set in. In addition, many people were unable to work for extended periods due to poor health, a difficulty experienced by aboriginal people since contact, and particularly since their confinement to reserves. The only recourse for those in need was to the Department's representative, who enjoyed wide discretionary powers in choosing whether to extend assistance or not. Ironically, the only apparent check on an official's ability to deny aid was public opinion in the white community. As John Daly wrote to a fellow agent, "you know how it is with the general public, when they see a case like this [an impoverished Native elder], they think the Indian Agent should be able to look after him. . . ."¹⁴ In practice, the destitute clearly were afforded relief when absolutely necessary (in exceedingly small quantities). Others who suffered periodic shortages received varying responses to relief requests, based largely on the agent's impression of the options open to them, as well as on his opinion of a supplicant's character.

In addition to controlling the political and economic affairs of the bands under their charge, the Department's representatives were expected to exert moral and cultural influence over the people. Predictably, the primary area of moral concern was that of sexuality, in particular the women's choice of companions: being seen frequently with

13. "Under the said section 119 of the Indian Act an Indian has the implied right to cut timber on a reserve without a licence, for building, fencing and fuel; but, in cases where larger quantities are applied for, it would be desirable to have the consent of the band in council by way of resolution." ("General Instructions to Indian Agents in Canada," p.20).

14. John M. Daly to H.J. Eade, Nov. 29, 1930. Unless otherwise stated, Daly's letters were found in the private files of Franz Koennecke, located at Wasauksing (formerly Parry Island) Reserve, near Parry Sound, Ontario. Dr. Koennecke was kind enough to give me unlimited access to his material, which was originally taken from the Shannon Files of the Department of Indian Affairs. The files at the National Archives are now organized differently, so that I am unable to provide the correct volume and file numbers for these letters at the National Archives.

white men, or with more than one different man, was sufficient for a woman to acquire the reputation of being an “immoral character.” This label could have serious consequences, including the withdrawal of rations if she was receiving them, and withholding of the annuity and interest payments which were normally her due. Until 1924, the widow of a Native man who died intestate had to be judged “of good moral character” in order to inherit.¹⁵ Men and women who lived in heterosexual partnership outside marriage experienced the censure of the Department, and all available means were utilized to separate such couples. If both belonged to one band and lived on their own reserve there was little the agent could do besides denying them the privileges and assistance extended to the more “respectable” people, which could nevertheless make a substantial difference in their standard of living. Frequently, however, at least one of the parties belonged to another band, and in these cases she or he was ejected from the reserve. In fairness, it was often other band members who called for such action, having internalized the Judeo-Christian moral code preached by generations of missionaries. Still, the enforcement of moral standards had been transferred from the community to an outsider backed by the authority of the federal government.

Perhaps the most striking instance of the Indian agent’s power lay in the dispensing of justice. In 1881, an amendment to the Indian Act made agents *ex officio* justices of the peace for the reserves under their charge. An 1894 amendment specified that this jurisdiction extended to Indian Act offences as well as certain sections of the 1894 Criminal Code.¹⁶ This meant that for minor offences (most often for the consumption of alcohol), the agent frequently laid the charges himself, investigated them, examined the evidence, pronounced the verdict and, if applicable, assigned a penalty. From 1930 on, such an appearance before the justice of the peace could have remarkable consequences. In that year a new section in the Indian Act provided that a Native person who was summoned before a court, where evidence made it appear that s/he was “misspend[ing] or wast[ing] time” by “inordinate frequenting of a poolroom,” could be banned from the poolroom for a year!¹⁷ No application of this section came to light in my researches, but its existence is a fine example of the lengths to which agents were empowered to go if they so chose. Mr. Daly, the subject of this study, did patrol the local poolroom to discover who spent time there, and was much gratified by the flight which his appearance precipitated. He then informed them “that if they can pay for playing pool, they can pay for something to eat, and they need not come to me for relief I would not give it to them.”¹⁸

Above all, the agent enjoyed a position of strength because First Nations people always had limited credibility at the Department when attempting to state their grievances or appeal the decisions of the agent. Historian Sarah Carter has outlined the characteristic attitude which had developed at headquarters by the 1890s: “By this time a formula

15. Leslie and Maguire, eds., *The Historical Development of the Indian Act*, p. 120.

16. *Ibid.*, 97.

17. *Ibid.*, 123.

18. John M. Daly to Department of Indian Affairs, 25 March, 1933.

response to all Indian grievances was well entrenched. Indians were dismissed as chronic complainers and lazy idlers willing to go to any lengths to avoid work. At the same time, nefarious outside agitators — usually unnamed — were blamed for any discontent.¹⁹ From 1933 on, it was official Department policy that no person of Indian status could communicate directly with headquarters; all inquiries, requests and complaints had to be made through the Indian agent. Those who ignored this regulation and wrote directly received a letter back advising them of their transgression; the letter was sent to the Indian agent (with a copy of the Indian's letter enclosed) to be handed to the offender. In addition to humiliating Native people, this manoeuvre ensured their exclusion from any avenue of redress in their relations with their overseer. While some resourceful people were able to find ways around this system (by complaining to the local Inspector of Indian Agencies, for example, or engaging a lawyer or member of parliament to intervene), the policy embodied and enforced the subordinate position in which the Department intended Native people to remain. As Helen Buckley has described this position, "[t]he role assigned to the people for whose benefit the system was designed consisted largely of following instructions and refraining from making trouble."²⁰

In the years with which this paper is concerned, the agent system was a well-entrenched institution, with established practices passed on from one incumbent to the next. The policies which these officials were attempting to apply were also timeworn, but the achievement of the Department's goals seemed no closer than ever. In the latter part of the period, it has been plausibly argued that the Department of Indian Affairs was effectively operating without a properly elaborated policy.²¹ It was long since clear that the original plans had not been realized: Native people remained a distinct group living largely separate from the mainstream population, on reserves which were intended to be absorbed into the surrounding white communities.

In the Parry Sound area, First Nations had been deprived of much of the game and fish on which their traditional economy depended; but while their agriculturally marginal land had denied them a living based on cultivation of the soil, they had been only partially integrated into the economy of the dominant society as seasonal wage labourers and guides. Most pursued a mixed economy based on seasonal male labour in the lumber industry or guiding, while women could often earn cash selling baskets, taking in laundry,

19. Sarah Carter, "Two Acres and a Cow: 'Peasant' Farming for the Indians of the Northwest, 1889-1897," in Miller, *Sweet Promises* 370.

20. Helen Buckley, *From Wooden Ploughs to Welfare: Why Indian Policy Failed in the Prairie Provinces.* (Montreal and Kingston), 43.

21. "With the economic crisis followed by a major war in the period 1933-45, little attention was paid to Indian matters. In fact, in that period the government and the civil servants in what became the Indian Affairs Branch appear not to have had any policy. They left this whole area of government-Indian relations in a state of flux and made only ad hoc decisions. Perhaps this situation was a result of the realization that all previous policies had failed to attain the goal established for Canada's Indian administration." John L. Tobias, "Protection, Civilization, Assimilation: An Outline History of Canadas Indian Policy," in Miller, *Sweet Promises*, 138-9.

or “working out” as domestics for the whites. The diet was supplemented by hunting, fishing, and gardening. The few jobs available on the reserve carried salaries which were too low to subsist on, so even these individuals were compelled to find additional sources of income to sustain themselves.

It was the field officials who were confronted most directly with the problems which resulted from this situation. Their negotiations between the Department’s unchanged but non-viable policies and the aboriginal objects of those policies merit closer study. In practice, they adopted a rather *ad hoc* approach, which involved more or less abandoning certain official aims (such as the establishment of self-sufficient agriculture), while pursuing one immediate goal above all others: holding expenses at the lowest possible level while maintaining the appearance of discharging the Canadian government’s obligations. A further crucial objective was to maintain the authority of the Department of Indian Affairs over its involuntary Native clients. Noel Dyck has conveyed the prevailing attitude in stark but realistic terms: “In responding to aboriginal resistance and to changes in the broader social and economic environment, tutelage agents and institutions tend to lose faith in the likelihood of their official objectives ever being achieved. . . . Tutors’ primary concern shifts to remaining in charge of those whom they are supposed to help.”²²

These generalizations apply well to the career of our sample Indian agent, whose actions and attitudes will be examined in the remainder of this paper. John McLean Daly presided over the agency of Parry Sound from September, 1922 to his retirement in September, 1939 at the age of sixty-five. Born in Ardraschaig, Scotland in 1873, Daly moved to Canada in 1904, leaving his wife and first four children to follow later.²³ After settling initially in North Bay, where his employment is not known, he worked from 1909 to 1914 for the Transcontinental Commission, apparently in some kind of supervisory position.²⁴ When World War I broke out, Daly (aged forty-one) volunteered along with his eldest son, and served for three years and three months as a quartermaster in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. By 1922 he was working in the Customs Department, where he was employed for only three months before being named to the position of Indian Agent in Parry Sound. It is not clear how he obtained the posting, but since his previous known employment in Canada was all government-related, there is ground to speculate that he was politically active in some capacity and benefited from the local patronage network. Daly was president of the Canadian Legion of the British Empire Service League in Parry Sound for some time, and was later nominated for mayor of the town, which suggests some prior experience with politics. In addition, he seems to have been acquainted with the Secretary to the Deputy Minister in the Department of Indian

22. Dyck, 31.

23. Two of these children died while still in Scotland. With his first wife, Daly had in all eight surviving children.

24. In one letter he writes, “For seven years, during construction of the Transcontinental, I kept law and order from Cochrane to Doucet, with all nationalities on the construction.” John M. Daly to the Secretary, Department of Indian Affairs, Oct. 17, 1934.

Affairs, A.F. McKenzie, to whom he appealed in 1924 in an unsuccessful effort to obtain a posting as Indian agent in British Columbia. Daly himself later advised an acquaintance against accepting a job as Indian agent, in part because, "very few who are recommended from a political point of view are liable to last for [more than] four years, so it is not worth a man's time particularly if he has a small family. Even returned soldiers holding these positions are at the mercy of politicians and unless you are very well posted, you are better to keep clear of it."²⁵

The Parry Sound Agency contained seven different reserves: Gibson (also known as Watha), Henvey Inlet, Lower French River, Magnetawan, Moose Deer Point, Parry Island, and Shawanaga. Gibson is a Mohawk community whose members chose early in the twentieth century to leave the troubled Oka (Kanesatake) reserve. The remainder of the bands in the agency are Anishnabe, with ancestors from all three branches of that nation — Chippewa, Odawa, and Potawatomi.²⁶ Of the seven reserves, Parry Island was the most readily accessible to Daly, lying a few hundred feet off the Georgian Bay shore right by Parry Sound. The people here attracted the lion's share of Daly's attention, while the others generally received monthly visits; those living at remote Moose Deer Point might see their agent once or twice a year.²⁷ It was a very large agency, reaching ninety miles from north to south, and as Daly reminded his superiors, it kept him pretty busy: "They all require constant attention and this keeps me on the road a great part of the time."²⁸

In personal character, John Daly was a man of great energy and determination, raised in the high era of British imperialism and steeped in its paternalistic and patriarchal notions. He raised a large family which he valued highly, as his self-description in 1933 indicates: "I am the father of ten children, and four grandchildren. My youngest son is 8 months old, and my oldest boy living is over thirty years of age. My wife is a good looking girl crazy about her returned soldier husband, and her daughter and son."²⁹ Like many paternalists, he was genial and affectionate to those who obeyed him, but responded with wrath when his authority was challenged. Both from his family and from his Native clients, Daly expected a sort of filial obedience and deference.³⁰

Perhaps the most striking illustration of his patriarchal expectations appears in his words to Emily Donald, a young Native school teacher who was sent to him by the principal of a residential school. Daly and his wife took a personal interest in this young

25. JMD to Rev. F. Reed, Toronto, 5 February, 1929.

26. See Franz M. Koennecke, "Wasoksing. The History of Parry Island, an Anishnabew Community in the Georgian Bay, 1850 to 1920." (M.A. thesis, University of Waterloo, 1984) 13.

27. JMD to Mrs. Fulcher, 16 January, 1929, & JMD to Prof. C.B. Grant, Dept. of Anatomy, University of Toronto, 2 May, 1933.

28. JMD to The Secretary, DIA, 5 September, 1926.

29. JMD to Arthur C. Poste, 15 March, 1933.

30. Personal conversation with Daly's granddaughter, Nonie Bristol., 15 November, 1992.

woman's welfare, which for Daly meant attempting to direct her affairs in the way he deemed best. To this end he endeavoured to force her to send him money which he would place in a savings account as a fund to pay for her enrolment in normal school. Writing to her of his plans, he concluded: "It is only fair to say to you, Emily, that if I find out any trickery in this arrangement, I shall have no mercy, and . . . what I mean by no mercy, you can get the meaning of this out of your Bible, which clearly defines the meaning, in describing the love of God and that when the love of God is rejected how he will have no mercy."³¹ Daly does not appear to have noticed the implied parallel drawn here between himself and the deity, but his words convey a vivid picture of his overall approach towards those placed under his control. He was willing to go to considerable lengths to assist the people in whom he took an interest, but he conceived such relationships in strictly hierarchical terms: the agent, as patron and superior, made the decisions, while the client followed his guidance unquestioningly and expressed proper gratitude. Such an attitude rendered him an eminently suitable agent from the perspective of the Department of Indian Affairs.

In his approach toward the Department, its officials and its goals, Daly was an equally desirable employee. His letters were generally extremely ingratiating, full of praise for the wisdom and generosity of his superiors and ostentatiously deferring to their authority: "The wishes of the Department are my law."³² In this he demonstrated an accurate understanding of his position, for the officials at headquarters responded with remarkable sharpness to the slightest suggestion of a reproach, or of an agent presuming to usurp their decision-making prerogative. Daly once remarked on the caution with which he expressed himself in official correspondence: "In writing a letter one has to be careful, particularly if they know anything about the system of the Civil Service, and how apt your letter is to be referred to as proof of statements made."³³ On occasion his flattery went to absurd lengths, as for example when he praised the Department for its "generosity" toward the First Nations in extending relief to them from their own band funds.³⁴ Another tactic with which he protected himself from official censure was to present convincing arguments on both sides of an issue in the same letter, thus providing the Ottawa bureaucrats with justification for whatever course of action they might choose to pursue.³⁵

31. JMD to Miss E. Donald, Moose Point, Ontario, 4 April, 1932.

32. JMD to The Secretary, DIA, 15 July, 1932.

33. JMD to Department of Indian Affairs, 2 January, 1931.

34. "I am conscientiously satisfied that the Department has acted in a very generous manner with the Indians of my Agency. Some of the families are not satisfied, and others are very grateful. Those who are not satisfied — nobody in God's earth could satisfy them." JMD to DIA, 25 March, 1933.

35. One example may suffice: "I take this opportunity of stating that I think the ration, which amounts to \$5.00 is hardly sufficient (but, it is the ration). John Manitowaba and his wife are getting two rations. I cannot see where he has any kick coming unless it be that the ration might be too small, but so long as it is the ration, I consider that John Manitowaba is very well looked after." JMD to Sec. DIA, 23 December, 1930.

In return for his dedicated and obliging service, Daly attempted to enlist the Department's support in cases of conflict with individuals in his agency. Well aware that his own power position was based solely on the influence he wielded at headquarters, this agent took care to present a united front between himself and Ottawa, always stressing to his superiors his interest in maintaining their authority. "This was an opportunity for the Department to show that the Department rules the Band and not the Chief."³⁶ When he experienced difficulties with members of his agency, Daly tried to obtain written testimony from Ottawa to bolster his authority: "I would suggest to the Department that they . . . write and tell [a band member] that the Indian Agent is representing the Department and that they are quite satisfied that his heart is in his work and they have no doubt that his wants will be looked after."³⁷ In disputes with chiefs and councillors, even of a minor nature, Daly sometimes endeavoured to invoke the Indian Act to have his opponents deposed. For instance, when two band councillors had a letter published in the local newspaper which criticized his administration, Daly wrote to Ottawa suggesting that men who took such an action might be considered unsuited to serve on the band council.³⁸ This initiative was unsuccessful, for the officials at headquarters did not perceive their own authority to have been attacked, and were not concerned enough about the personal reputation of a subordinate to intervene in the band's political affairs. However, where he was able to portray an issue as affecting the maintenance of Departmental control and authority, Daly almost always succeeded in influencing Ottawa's decisions to suit his agenda. This selective presentation of the issues was a skill in which he excelled.

This, then, was the character of the Indian agent whose career will be examined here: a peremptory, rather self-important man concerned to maintain his position in the hierarchy, genuinely interested in "helping" aboriginal people along the lines laid down by the Department of Indian Affairs, but an active opponent of any initiative among Native people to assert control over their own affairs. Daly's attitude toward First Nations was one of superiority, which took a patronizing but benign form toward those who appeared to accept his authority, and led to sincere outrage when his right to rule was questioned. His sense of superiority had racist overtones, but appears comparable to the contemporary attitudes of Canadians in general toward aboriginal people. In fact, if anything he was less racist than most of his contemporaries, for he believed in the capacity of Natives to adapt to Euro-Canadian standards and values. A sentimental streak in his nature led him to romanticize his charges at times, as a picturesque people deprived of their formerly independent way of life. Nevertheless, far from denouncing the changes that had brought them to this point, he felt that the solution for aboriginal people was to embrace the new dispensation, adopt the culture of the invaders, and assimilate into mainstream Canadian society.

36. JMD to DIA, 21 November, 1934.

37. JMD to The Secretary, DIA, 18 December, 1930.

38. JMD to The Secretary, DIA, 8 January, 1934.

In a revealing passage, he once compared the situation of Canada's indigenous people to that of the Scottish highlanders, summarizing his (and the Department's) long-term strategy as he did so:

Being born and raised in the west Highlands, Argyleshire Scotland where the history of the clans is told over the peat fires, on the long winter nights, I can understand somewhat of the thoughts that pass through John Manitowaba's head and heart, and for that reason I sympathize with him and with all the Indians who live in the past, such as he does, like the Highlanders with their traditions of past glories. I do not know of anything that can be done with this Indian except that the Indian does the same as the highlanders of Scotland have done, and that is get out and hustle around, accept conditions as they are, and prepare themselves to take a place in their country and its affairs.

This seems to be the only thing they wont [sic] do, and the only hope I see for this is to educate the young and din into the heads and hearts of the older people the pressing need of their children attending school, so that when they have to get out and make a living they will be able to compete with their white brethren.³⁹

In keeping with this general perspective, Daly differentiated between segments of the Native population in terms of his expectations of each. People of the older generation, who "lived in the past," were viewed as unlikely candidates for assimilation, and were therefore primarily objects of care rather than of guidance or indoctrination. Unless they expressed dissatisfaction with the Department's aims or with Daly himself, they received a reasonably sympathetic hearing when they experienced difficulties, and at other times could probably keep clear of the agent's ministrations if they chose. Older women in particular, an extremely vulnerable group economically, clearly awakened his solicitude as long as they displayed the proper gratitude and stoicism. Daly spoke respectfully of many of these women and seems to have provided for them as best he could within the parsimonious limits set by the Department. Younger band members required closer attention, since the assimilation of the rising generation was one of the agent's most important tasks. Like their white counterparts, young women were destined for marriage, housekeeping, and child-rearing. After the failure of his efforts to mould Emily Donald's future, Daly was inclined to discourage women who showed an interest in career-oriented education.⁴⁰ The young men were enjoined to support themselves, adopt the much-vaunted European work ethic, and integrate into the local wage economy. Their work and leisure habits were a matter of great interest, especially because of the provisions against alcohol consumption in the Indian Act. As Daly once wrote the

39. JMD to Duncan C. Scott, 18 March, 1930.

40. In 1935, for example, Daly wrote the Department about the case of a young girl in his agency who wished to become a teacher and hoped to receive financial assistance to do so; he advised against such support: "At the present time, there is an urge among the Indians [sic] girls to be teachers the same as Miss Donald. Miss Donald takes for granted all that has been done for her . . . The same would happen with all the young Indians who have this urge to become teachers, doctors, and such. . . . There may be exceptions to the rule. Miss Donald is my guide that there are not." JMD to DIA, 25 October, 1935.

Department after catching some young men drinking and making examples of them, “the young bloods I will have to keep in line, even if I have to put them in gaol.”⁴¹

Certain individuals gained his respect and sympathy, generally by staying away from politics and asking for nothing from the Department. It appears that Daly often formed the best rapport with those reserve residents who did not possess band membership, and who therefore lived on the reserve essentially at the agent’s pleasure.⁴² David King, for instance, a reserve constable on Parry Island where he was a non-band member, enjoyed Daly’s patronage and protection against other reserve residents who wished to have him ousted as constable. This man depended for his well-being on the continued support of the agent, and for this reason, no doubt, proved very faithful to his patron’s wishes. Since this placed him in opposition to other Natives who strove to exert indigenous control over band affairs and community policing, his efforts apparently earned him the enmity of many of his neighbours. One can only guess at the social price he paid for the economic benefits provided by the powerful outsider. But this and other amicable relationships between Daly and Native people also indicate that he was not an adherent of what has been called “scientific racism,” that is the belief in the genetic, biological inferiority of non-white “races.” Daly operated on the assumption that aboriginal people were quite capable of successful assimilation to Euro-Canadian ways — that they possessed sufficient intelligence, adaptability, and initiative to “compete with their white brethren.” It is not insignificant that this agent was remembered with fondness by some members of his agency long after his passing. Although he sometimes wrote disparagingly of First Nations in general, in practice his attitudes and behaviour were premised on the conviction that they were capable individuals. When he expressed contempt, it was with reference to those who were unable to support themselves, or to those who challenged his right to administer their lives.

These last were the “agitators” and “troublemakers,” the men⁴³ who were involved in the band council and felt that their election to these offices ought to qualify them to make decisions affecting their reserve. Daly battled with these men, for they posed a direct threat to his position. As we have seen, Daly repeatedly stressed the supremacy of

41. JMD to DIA, 1 January, 1935.

42. In the “General Instructions to Indian Agents in Canada” of 1933, Deputy Superintendent General Harold W. McGill directed the reader’s attention to section 34 of the Indian Act, “which provides that no person, or Indian other than an Indian of the band, shall, without the authority of the Department, reside or hunt upon, occupy, or use, any land or marsh, or reside upon or occupy any road, or allowance for road, running through any reserve belonging to or occupied by such band. Reside, for the purposes of this section is interpreted by the Department of Justice to mean remaining on a reserve over night. . . . Agents will be held responsible for all unauthorized persons or Indians of other bands being allowed to take up residence on Reserves under their jurisdiction.” [“General Instructions to Indian Agents in Canada,” 1 September 1933, 8-9]. The Superintendent General could, however, extend permission to individual non-band members to reside on a reserve.

43. In this period women were entirely excluded from the political process.

Departmental authority, both in his correspondence with Ottawa and in his interaction with Native people. Nothing made him more indignant than the attitude he discovered among some bands who “[had] the idea that what is passed by the council should be accepted by the Department.”⁴⁴ Daly’s career was marked by ongoing disputes with the more persistent leaders, since he pursued his work with the idea that Natives needed to be kept in their place. In a private letter he once listed as part of his job:

the continual endeavour on the part of the Agent, particularly in this section of the country where there are so many tourists, to try and impress on the Indian that he is still an Indian. You can understand . . . that when an Indian is out fishing with millionaires, or near millionaires, smoking his cigars, it is hard for him to get back to earth, particularly when the snow flies and there is no high flaunting talk about wealth. The tourists are very welcome here but they give the Indian the wrong steer and a false idea of what he is.⁴⁵

It is clear that John Daly did what he could to fulfill his self-appointed duty of “getting the Indians back to earth.” As an informant who knew him stated, “he was not a man that you got to know very well. . . . he didn’t mix with the common man. And I believe him to be stern with the Indians. . . . [He was] like an overseer or something.” One could hardly expect otherwise from an agent who was known to appear on the nearby reserve dressed in cavalry pants, high leather boots, and a fedora hat.⁴⁶

This attention to the character and attitudes of the Indian agent is necessary because so many decisions in both banal and significant matters were left to the discretion of the man on the spot. There were other agents who took a distinctly bureaucratic approach to their work and lacked the pronounced personal investment in its results that Daly had. These men were often inclined to let well enough alone, intervening in band politics and community affairs only under unusual circumstances. However, Daly’s actions in office bore the imprint of his overbearing personality, particularly in the close supervision he maintained over the activities of band councils. The chiefs and councillors in his agency often chafed under his autocratic administration, and expressed outrage at the notion that their election to leadership positions did not entitle them to control affairs on their own reserves. A chief who was embroiled in a dispute with Daly wrote to him: “. . . I am forwarding a copy of this letter to the Department as you made statement to certain parties you don’t give a damn to any of the member of the Parry Island Band you as much to tell me this morning if the Chief and Council has no voice in the affairs of the Reserve this will have to be explained fully by the Dept.”⁴⁷ Unfortunately, no support could be expected from the Department, for it shared Daly’s conception of the subordinate, accessory role assigned to band councils.

44. JMD to DIA, 2 February, 1924.

45. JMD to Prof. J.C.B. Grant, University of Toronto, Dept. of Anatomy, 3 March, 1932.

46. Personal interview with Lyle Jones of Parry Sound, 7 October, 1993.

47. Chief John Manitowaba to JMD, 11 October, 1934.

Not surprisingly, the fate of band council resolutions was an issue of central importance. One chief wrote a note informing the agent of his council's resolution that each family should receive five dollars when in need; on the bottom Daly noted simply, "rushing the agent nothing doing."⁴⁸ Daly claimed to make a point of reading the Department's decisions on resolutions aloud in council meetings in order to show that the Department was both receiving and responding to them.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, more than one chief suspected him of delaying the submission of resolutions, or even of withholding them. On one occasion the agent actually admitted to submitting resolutions selectively: "There were other resolutions passed by the Council, which are too frivolous and nonsensical to send forward."⁵⁰ To his great annoyance, some chiefs took the step of conveying resolutions to the Department themselves. Daly's response to such action was characteristic: "Chief Judge has proven that he is of sneaky disposition. The very fact of him taking down to the Department, the resolutions which I had already sent in, goes to show his disrespect for this office."⁵¹

Above all, Daly was concerned to prevent organized political activity among aboriginal people, particularly when it involved co-ordinated action between bands. He consistently harassed and persecuted Native activists who trespassed on his political domain. In this endeavour the Indian Act proved a highly effective tool, providing as it did for the removal from the reserve of anyone not belonging to the band. When a well-known activist from Christian Island came to Parry Island and apparently became involved in interpersonal disputes, the agent was immediately on the alert:

Owing to the trouble that [Henry] Jackson caused on the Christian Island last winter, and seeing that he is residing on the Parry Island Reserve at the present time, and being desirous of maintaining the peace and good will of the Indians belonging to the Band, and believing that Jackson is liable to cause trouble on the Island, I instructed Chief John Manitowaba to advise Henry Jackson to get off the Island and to give him 24 hours, to do so.⁵²

When he met with widespread community resistance in this matter, Daly's determination to expel Jackson was redoubled, and his suspicions about the ramifications of the man's presence only heightened. Shrewdly, in presenting his case to his superiors he emphasized not only the political, but particularly the financial "difficulties" Jackson was supposedly already causing:

... (the fact that Chief John Manitowaba and his people do not find fault with Henry Jackson, makes me more determined to have this man put off the reserve as it would

48. Note from Stanley Manitowaba to John M. Daly, 3 January, 1925.

49. JMD to DIA 1 October, 1934.

50. JMD to DIA, 1 December, 1934.

51. JMD to The Secretary, DIA, 11 July, 1932.

52. JMD to The Secretary, DIA, 10 October, 1934.

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appear to me that he is liable to cause trouble. Resolution No. 1, passed by the Parry Island Council, on October 9th, is a start of the trouble, they demand to be given relief).⁵³

This was one of the occasions on which the attempt of the chief to assert authority over the reserve caused Daly to propose his removal from office:

It appears to me that Chief John Manitowaba is not a fit and proper person to be Chief of the Band. . . . He is absolutely no use to me as Chief. He disregards the Department of Indian Affairs in everything he does and says. He talks as if he and the Band were all sufficient to themselves, and unless something is done to put John Manitowaba in his place, as long as Henry Jackson is around, there is liable to be trouble here.⁵⁴

While Chief Manitowaba was not removed from office, Daly was able to use the opportunity to assert the supremacy of his own will. In spite of an appeal from Manitowaba to the Department, to the effect that Jackson was “causing no trouble” and that “[t]he Chief and Council are the proper body to say who is and who is not desirable on this Island.”⁵⁵ Henry Jackson was expelled from the reserve.

In the case of Parry Island, in particular, the Indian Act’s provisions regarding band membership supplied the agent with a great measure of control. Whole families resided on this reserve, many of them for several generations, without enjoying band membership, and were thus theoretically subject to expulsion from their homes at any time. I have already mentioned David King, the constable who was in this position and rendered the agent loyal service. When the band passed a resolution to replace King as constable, they were successful in having him removed from their own payroll, but Daly countered by having him appointed as “Constable for the Georgian Bay District,” thus completely removing him from band control. A band member, selected by the council, was appointed in his place as reserve constable, but lost the position as a result of being intoxicated. The next appointee, apparently Daly’s choice, was another protégé of the agent and ran afoul of the council by absenting himself (with Daly’s permission) from the reserve for some time. The council’s attempt to have him replaced was opposed by the agent on explicitly political grounds:

Chief Frank Judge is desirous of having all Roman Catholic officials in his Band. There are no Protestants in the council and had he got Johnnie Miller appointed as Constable, Chief Judge would have been the power on the Parry Island Reserve, not the Department of Indian Affairs.⁵⁶

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. John Manitowaba to The Superintendent General, Department of Indian Affairs, 10 October, 1934.

56. JMD to The Secretary, DIA, 13 July, 1932.

The issue of policing was, of course, a critical one, and Daly exercised strict control over the constables and the appointment process. Not content to rely on the band constable alone, the agent maintained cordial relations with the local RCMP officers as well, and called them in whenever he felt the need for outside reinforcement.

During Daly's term in office, several organizing efforts centred around the Robinson Huron Treaty of 1850 and the question of the islands surrounding Parry Island, which many believed had never been surrendered. In 1925, Daly learned that the chiefs of Shawanaga and Parry Island Bands, both in his own agency, were preparing to go to Ottawa to present their concerns on this matter. In discussion with the Shawanaga chief regarding their plans, the agent inquired who were the "chief movers in the matter," attempted to discredit one of them, and declared that he "did not approve of it:"

I advise[d] him to call his Band and put the matter before the Department but he seemed to think otherwise. I explained to him that the Department would not like paid officers of the Department [sic!] . . . stepping over the head of the Department to go to Parliament and strongly advised caution. He said that they were about all ready to go to Ottawa now and he thought they would go.⁵⁷

It would seem that a number of local Native people were approached by the leaders in an attempt to enlarge the movement. Although Daly was not able to prevent the trip to Ottawa, it apparently remained without consequence; his warning to the Department no doubt allowed the officials there to take their own measures to contain reaction within Parliament. The issue resurfaced in 1932, when several individuals in his agency obtained copies of the Robinson treaty and began to work with what Daly called "The Union Council of Ontario Indians." The agent complained that there had been "a great unrest among the Indians and I have endeavoured to explain to them that these treaties are past and done with." In traditional fashion, he attributed the dissatisfaction to a few, claiming that "so far as the Band is concerned, that is, all the Band, they do not give a hoot for these treaties, it is just this contemptible sneaking representative . . . of the Parry Island Band, who would like to make trouble."⁵⁸ Again the movement showed no concrete results, and the question of the islands surrounding Parry Island (Wasauksing) remains unresolved to this day.

In the sphere of economic power, the agent's handling of the relief question is a rich and revealing subject for analysis. As noted above, the dispensing of relief was left to the discretion of the Indian agent (although he had to justify all expenditures to the Department). Like most Canadians of his time, Daly was opposed to relief in principle: "In my opinion it is the worst thing that ever happened to the Indian, getting relief without having to work for it, in fact I think it is a bad thing for any person to get something for

57. National Archives, Record Group 10, vol. 1982, file 6174 (Reel C-11127), JMD to DIA, 8 June, 1925.

58. JMD to The Secretary, DIA, 15 July, 1932.

nothing, either whites or Indians.”⁵⁹ Accordingly, this agent was predisposed to follow Departmental policy in avoiding relief payments whenever possible. In reality, contrary to the Department’s conception of Native people as being eager to resort to handouts,⁶⁰ most seem to have secured their own living as long as economic conditions permitted, requesting assistance only in dire need. Certainly until the onset of the Great Depression the only people mentioned as receiving aid were elders who were no longer capable of working, people who were seriously ill or incapacitated, and women raising children without male financial support. In writing of these cases Daly generally expressed sympathy for the plight of the individuals concerned and sometimes remarked that he has himself helped out where he could: “It is only fair to state that over and above the requests to the Department for assistance that I have to give a little assistance myself. My reason for doing this is, that being President of the Canadian Legion here in town, I know that conditions are pretty hard on the poorer people.”⁶¹ Where the able-bodied were concerned, Daly was happy to act as an employment broker when he heard of vacancies in lumber camps, but generally he does not seem to have been involved to any great degree in the work lives of his clients, except in his Departmental role as supervisor of timber contracts.

When the economic collapse began to occur around 1930, the role of relief in the agent’s routine expanded enormously. In the Parry Sound area, conditions appear to have become critical in the winter of 1930-31, when Daly wrote his superiors alerting them to the desperate situation people were facing due to lack of employment: “the conditions in this part of the country are very bad at the present time, as there is no means of employment for either whites or Indians. . . the mills are all closed down and nothing in sight. . . .”⁶² The mixed economy which had sustained the Natives up to this point came under attack from every quarter: not only was wage labour practically unobtainable, but the poverty of the local whites led to unprecedented competition for the region’s game resources, which had remained an important part of the Native livelihood. Under these circumstances there was nowhere to turn but to assistance from the Department. Daly’s initial sympathy gave way to resentment as requests for relief absorbed ever-increasing portions of his time: “I am swamped with letters from the outlying reserves, and the Parry Island Indians are on the track [sic] here all the time.”⁶³ It was during this period that Daly experienced his heaviest workload, and his moment of maximum power and influence.

His primary response to the employment crisis was to endeavour to arrange for relief in the form of labour. A very prevalent type of relief work in the Depression was the building of roads, and Daly spared no effort in agitating for road work in his own area, contacting government officials and occasionally enlisting the Department of Indian

59. JMD to A.S. Anderson, 6 March, 1933.

60. Coates, *Best Left as Indians*, p. 171.

61. JMD to DIA, 8 February, 1929.

62. JMD to The Secretary, DIA, 20 January, 1931.

63. JMD to DIA, 22 November, 1933.

Affairs to press other departments for new projects. New and improved roads suited his purposes admirably in any case, since Daly had always spoken enthusiastically of the need to "open up the country," primarily in order to expand the tourist industry. In addition, the long hours of travel which his job occasioned would be shortened enormously by the advent of roads, and by the acquisition of a car, something Daly for years requested annually from the Department. It is difficult to judge how much influence he actually wielded in the initiation of road projects (in his correspondence he claimed a great deal of credit), but he apparently did agitate successfully for Native participation in the work crews engaged in the labour.

The road work saved sizeable amounts of money in relief payments at a time when band funds were so depleted that unemployed Natives were being supported in part from the public purse. Daly also exploited the opportunity to dispatch those he personally disliked to distant locations to perform arduous and unpleasant labour. He made no secret of his relish for this power:

If the Department officials could see as I have seen often, and only yesterday, when it registered 89 in the shade, Indians sweating and working on the road, who have told me in the past that they would not work at road work, I am sure they would admit a change for the better in the Indians also the youth of the Agency . . . being broken to do an honest man's work.⁶⁴

When road work was in progress, Daly initially attempted to spread it evenly among the unemployed men, particularly those with families to support. As time went on, however, he grew more interested in seeing that those who were reluctant were forced to take part in this labour. Giving instructions to a Native foreman, he remarked:

Isaac Rice was here at this office the other day stating that he was sick (I never saw him looking better) and that he had substituted his nephew. While this is all right in the case of severe sickness, or satisfactory explanation to me, I do not think that Isaac Rice is very sick and he can go ahead with his work. . . .Get after Rice and see that he attends to his work. Also get a note from Stanley Manitowaba [a longstanding political opponent of Daly's] that he is sick. He particularly, cannot substitute without sending a note that he is sick. Get a note from him and cut him off if he does not attend to his work.⁶⁵

Isaac Rice, however healthy he may have appeared, in fact had tuberculous ulcers on his legs, as a doctor attested not long after.⁶⁶ That Daly was well aware of his condition is proven by a letter he wrote the previous year, in which he stated that Rice was "in very poor health" and "not able to keep himself. . . ."⁶⁷ The change from one year to the next appears to be in the agent's attitude, not in this individual's state of health. Two returned

64. JMD to Secretary of the DIA, 20 August, 1935.

65. JMD to Joseph Partridge, 1 March, 1935.

66. JMD to DIA, 30 September, 1935.

67. JMD to The Secretary, DIA, 11 January, 1934.

soldiers also aroused the agent's distrust, for he declared, "[they] are both supposed to have ruptures which would not keep them from working, but they are malingering . . . and I will not stand for it if I can get work for them."⁶⁸ A fourth man, who suffered from tuberculosis and received relief for two years due to his illness, was cut off relief payments and forced to do road work largely because of Daly's unsubstantiated suspicion that he had chosen not to work, or **would** do so if he were capable of working:

I am under the impression that this man would try to take advantage of his physical disabilities and I do not think he is very willing to work anyway, so I am having him in the position of guessing [whether his rations would continue or not]. . . [he] does not look very good and I believe that what the Doctor says is right, but he might try to get something to do. . . . This is one of the Indians that you might call "the bush lawyer type" so I am keeping at his heels like an irritated Scotch terrier.⁶⁹

The concluding sentence reveals the true nature of the agent's objection to this individual: he had written to Daly claiming authority to speak for other members of his family and making "demands," and for this he must pay.⁷⁰ The Department obligingly deduced from Dalys inconclusive remarks that "Apparently this Indian has made up his mind that he will not work but look to the Department for his full maintenance."⁷¹ In consequence, it was suggested that "if it is absolutely necessary to give him supplies that he not be treated generously. . . ."⁷² Daly's response was characteristic: "I have cut off [this man's] rations (he was supposed to be a T.B. Case) since he started working on the road on the rotary Plan. . . . He has played this sick game to a finish. I have him working now and will keep him that way."⁷³

Even when he had no work to dispense, Daly ensured that relief recipients felt their dependence and humiliation. A man from another agency who resided on the Parry Island Reserve wrote his own band's agent about his need for assistance. This was, in fact, the correct procedure, but Daly took offence: "[This man] is not likely to get any work until May, so I will give him an order for \$10.00, but not before I see him. He will have to come to this office and I will have a little talk with him. . . . He knows that I can look after him, but he will know it more so when I am through this time."⁷⁴ In the leanest periods of the year, at least, such methods produced the effect Daly desired: "In the beginning of the winter the Indians were very autocratic here telling me what they wanted. Now, they come in a respectful manner asking if they can get some relief."⁷⁵

68. JMD to E.J. Hosking, District Engineer, Department of Northern Development, Huntsville, Ontario, 20 March, 1935.

69. JMD to The Secretary, DIA, 2 June, 1934.

70. JMD to H.J. Eade, 23 January, 1934.

71. A.F. MacKenzie to JMD, 9 June, 1934.

72. *Ibid.*

73. JMD to J.A. Allan, 12 February, 1935.

74. JMD to Arthur C. Poste, 22 March, 1933.

75. JMD to H.J. Eade, 23 January, 1934.

While aboriginal men could hope at least for assistance in the form of poorly paid labour, the women were never supplied with jobs of any sort. The gender assumptions of the time dictated that most women's primary economic support should be provided by a male relative or a husband in return for unpaid domestic labour. Native women who did not conform to this model were extremely vulnerable economically, but aid from the agent was extended very unwillingly and then in small amounts. In the worst of the depression years Daly delayed and prevaricated, although he was well aware of the unfortunate position of some women in his agency: "There are a number of Indian women who are living alone who are in need of relief, but on general principals [sic] I am staving them off as long as I can."⁷⁶ Even in better years there were practically no economic options for women in this area at the time, so these women could hardly be blamed for failing to conform to the Euro-Canadian work ethic. Nonetheless, "on general principles" help was postponed, adding further humiliation, anxiety, and deprivation to their already difficult situation. Those who refused to accept poverty in silence incurred the wrath of the agents:

Our friend Julia wrote to one of the Councillor [sic] about not getting sufficient relief and the letter was brought to the Council, I think this woman is getting more than her share now in comparision [sic] with other Indian women, further I hear she is doing some running around with other men, I would ask you to watch her very closely and if this is the case please stop her relief altogether. I am getting very tired of this woman's constant complaints and I think she is trying to put one over us.⁷⁷

This passage provides a reminder of the ongoing preoccupation of agents with aboriginal women's actual or suspected sexual behaviour. There was never any suggestion that a Native man should be punished economically for sexual liaisons. For the women, however, the risks of socially unsanctioned sexual activity were very high, for in addition to the immediate financial penalty proposed above, there was the danger of conceiving children, a financial burden which forced some to turn to Departmental assistance. The agents tended to perceive these women as in some way manipulating matters to their own advantage. A widow who had just given birth to a child sent an older son to Daly, apparently inquiring about the possibility of receiving assistance. Daly reported to another agent, "I told the son to tell his mother that she would not require any relief as she is all right now. She is like a lot more of the Indians around this section, she is trying to work a racket, and there will be no relief given to her by me at the present time, but I presume that something will have to be done from a humanitarian point of view when she is released from the hospital."⁷⁸ This woman was in a particularly difficult situation, having been married to a non-treaty Native man, so that she was legally no longer able to claim Indian status. This meant she could be banned from living on her home reserve and from enjoying other privileges of band membership. In practice, the agents frequently treated such individuals as though they had Indian status, for their guiding principle was

76. JMD to Department of Indian Affairs, 21 November, 1935.

77. H.J. Eade to JMD, 14 September, 1933.

78. JMD to V.M. Eastwood, 24 January, 1935.

that it was their job to look after Native people: "The officers of the Department are reminded of their responsibilities as guardians of the Indians entrusted to their care."⁷⁹

This tendency highlights the overall attitude of Indian agents, John Daly included, to their work. They were there to enforce the will of the Department of Indian Affairs, "encourage" self-sufficiency among Native people, and ensure that Canada appeared to be pursuing a just and humanitarian policy in its relations with First Nations. In spite of the legal distinctions between status and non-status Indians, band members and non-members, the agents tended to see the people whose lives they administered simply as "Indians," with little differentiation according to legal categories. The one distinction they drew was between those who complied outwardly with the wishes of the agent and the Department, and those who challenged the system by seeking to assert aboriginal or individual control. Even those agents who were not inclined by nature to exercise power were constrained to maintain Departmental authority and perceive aboriginal people as incompetent to run their own affairs, for otherwise their own position was nonsensical:

In order to justify the manner in which they were granted power by their agencies over aboriginal peoples, they had to commence by denying the worth and abilities of Indians. Unless they accepted the proposition that native peoples could not lead a decent life without the direction that they provided, tutelage agents were cast in a role in which they would arbitrarily and self-consciously exercise power over other human beings for no good reason."⁸⁰

Men who could not reconcile themselves to this reality did not last long as Indian agents.⁸¹ The rest presumably justified their actions by the wise and benevolent intentions of federal Indian policy and the benefits which were supposed to accrue to their involuntary aboriginal clients. The very tragedy of Native-white relations in Canada, in fact, is that many hundreds of reasonably well-intentioned people worked together for generations to enforce a policy which was directly responsible for the poverty and hardship faced by this country's First Nations. The history of this process deserves to be studied in detail, not to pass judgment on our predecessors for their poor analysis or short-sightedness, but in order to comprehend how the dismal conditions on many of today's reserves were created and sustained.

John Daly is notable for his zeal in asserting his authority, but in other respects his behaviour resembles that of his fellow agents in this era. Far from encouraging the evolution of self-governing reserve communities, their political agenda was shaped by their personal interest in maintaining Departmental control over the reserves. Lacking realistic strategies from headquarters for improving Native economic prospects, most left the people to their own devices and restricted their economic intervention to relief work and direct aid to the elderly and incapacitated. Above all, the need to keep

79. "General Instructions to Indian Agents in Canada," p. 2.

80. Dyck, 77.

81. Ibid.

expenditures to a minimum dictated their terms of reference, an objective which rendered large-scale economic development projects unthinkable. The agents of this period thus participated in the “custodial” approach to aboriginal people that has been identified for the Indian Affairs Branch as a whole during World War II.⁸² The ostensible goal of self-sufficiency and independence for aboriginal people was supposed to be achieved in part through the work of the Indian agents. Yet their position, by its very nature, compelled them to quell any aboriginal attempts at political self-assertion, and to restrict the expenditures from band funds which might have allowed First Nations to develop economic autonomy. Little wonder, then, that when aboriginal leaders began to press for changes in the 1960s, one of their first and most successful campaigns was the elimination of the Indian agent system.

82. “The Politics of Indian Affairs,” p.164.