



ROBERT COUTTS

AUTHORIZED HERITAGE

PLACE, MEMORY,
AND HISTORIC SITES
IN PRAIRIE CANADA

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Authorized Heritage: Place, Memory, and Historic Sites in Prairie Canada
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To my wife, Catherine, who can see from a great
distance what I cannot see close.
And to Margot and Hugh.

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INTRODUCTION

Landscapes of Memory in Prairie Canada

*Landscapes are culture before they are nature;
constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and
water and rock.*

Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory*

Landscape as culture. It is a concept that at first glance seems peculiar. Upon reflection, however, we realize that our Western view of landscape is the result of shared values and shared culture, a culture assembled from a rich accumulation of myths, folklores, events, and memories. Such landscapes of memory are cultural memories, and we all experience place and memory in different ways. One of my own encounters came from historical interest rather than personal familiarity. It was in August of 1983 that I found myself with a small group of people in a boat heading to Hudson Bay. We were travelling on the Hayes River in northern Manitoba, bound for York Factory, the once great trading post and entrepôt of the Hudson's Bay Company. Leaving from the junction of the Fox and Hayes rivers about 120 kilometres southwest of Hudson Bay, we travelled the river in the warm summer sunshine as the topography of the lowlands became flatter, the riverbank grew steeper, and the fir trees appeared smaller and

stunted, bent low by the winter winds off the bay. We travelled for hours and the wilderness around us seemed interminable. But as the river grew wider, a last bend revealed a remarkable sight; the massive, gleaming white Depot Building of York Factory appeared as if an apparition, its presence startling in the vastness of the surrounding wilderness. I had read much about this place and its history, but I found it exhilarating to finally experience it in person.

I thought about the Indigenous peoples who witnessed this same sight over centuries, though they journeyed from far greater distances and of course without the modern motorized transport that made our trip so comfortable. Although it is colonial space (even if I had not thought of it that way in 1983), York Factory remains a place of becoming, of memory both local and beyond, and a representation of place and community that embodies the persistence of the past in the present. Whether “the most respectable place in the territory”¹ according to one nineteenth-century observer, or “a monstrous blot on a swampy spot”² to another, less generous writer, York today remains a place of cultural memory that is central to the traditions of the Muskego Cree community in northern Manitoba. But unlike York Factory and so many other striking and meaningful locations in the West, not all places of significance are necessarily monumental or old or even aesthetically pleasing. They are places that do not have inherent value or convey a meaning that is innate. For those who have lived in or near these landscapes, or for those who might come to a particular place with a different

appreciation, it is historical reference—associative, personal, or imagined—that makes them physically symbolic and meaningful.



In her 2006 book *Uses of Heritage*, the Australian writer and archaeologist Laurajane Smith described her meeting with a group of Indigenous women from the Waanyi community on the banks of the Gregory River in Boodjamulla National Park in northern Queensland. The women, according to Smith, had come from some distance away to meet and fish at this traditional Indigenous site. In attempting to, as she writes, “pester people with maps, site recording forms and tape measures,” Smith soon realized that for these Waanyi women, the act of fishing was more than simply catching dinner; it was an opportunity to savour simply being in a place that was important to them. It was, as she comments, “heritage work” being in this place, renewing memories and sharing experiences with friends and family members to strengthen present and future social and family relations.³ Smith describes how the Elders related stories of the Gregory River location to younger Waanyi women and about the traditional events associated with that place. Their conversations, she comments, reminded her of her own heritage, of the family stories she had inherited and how she would transmit them to her own children. In such a process of receiving and passing on memories, a certain fluidity of meaning is understood, becoming characteristic of both personal and community heritage in much the same way that it informs

our perceptions of place. The significance that Smith drew from her own stories, the uses she made of them, and the places that resonated with her would, she wrote, “be different to the meanings and uses the generation both before and after me had and would construct.”⁴

My own experience with community memory and the meaning and significance of place was somewhat similar to Smith’s. A number of trips after my first visit to York Factory in 1983, while conducting ethnohistorical research at York Factory in northern Manitoba as a historian with Parks Canada in 2002, I met with a number of Muskego Cree Elders who had flown there for a reunion and with whom I had arranged informal interviews. The conversation was relaxed as we talked about the history of the place and the Elders’ experiences growing up at York. In these conversations I noticed that their memories often began with some reference to place, to a geographical entity or location that became the reference point for a story, a memory, a cultural observation, or even a joke. I realized that for these York Factory people, their history, their heritage, was more than just about the past or about physical things but was an act of engagement and a process of finding meaning that resonated in the present. And it was about place and the layers of memory and meaning we attribute to it. It was at such site visits that I first began to think about landscape, place, and memory, how history plays out on the ground, how the social construction of heritage is established and commemorated, and how the meaning of place is often contested. Most often one has to actually be at these sites and walk these

spaces. Like the historian Simon Schama, I have also drawn upon my own “archive of the feet” (as he calls it) and how it has informed much of the way I view the concept of heritage.⁵

The goal of *Authorized Heritage*, while at one level concerned with memory and place, is also to ask critical questions related to how and why certain heritage places were selected over others as significant. Do these perceptions of importance by governments, communities, and individuals change over time and, if so, how? I explore each of these questions within the thematic framework outlined in the various chapters and in the representation of different types of historic sites within a larger heritage context. It is my contention that most historic sites chosen by government relate to an authorized heritage discourse that is almost always based on those conventional messages that are part of national narratives and colonialist views of the past. I also explore the challenges over what is presented, the struggles of the marginalized regarding whose voice prevails, and how communities can form distinct and alternative perspectives on specific places. If an authorized heritage can still dominate and still influence those places we consider to be important, their significance is also affected by community perceptions and the emergence and persistence of social memory. Yet, often the two approaches are conflated, as a local perception that is no longer moored to social memory might simply echo the dominant discourse. It is then that an authorized heritage and a community perception become effectively one and the same.

The historic places chosen for this study are part of a larger space, a space we have come to know as the “prairie West” or the modern-day provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. But in a greater sense the concept of the West as a region might suggest, at a physical level, a certain unity of landscape, setting, and geography. Of course, the West as a distinctive territory is made up of multiple geographies that include the topographies and ecologies of prairie, of parkland, and of boreal forest, and even of the western Hudson Bay lowlands. As a modern administrative construction it might refer to the region we now call the “Prairie Provinces,” a modern and clearly bordered territory. In a historical construction, however, a more vague and indeterminate region comes to mind, one that includes the historic borderlands of the old “Northwest” as well as the broadly imagined West of culture, commerce, colonialism, literature, and social movement. At the political level I deal with a selection of historic places in what is now Manitoba and Saskatchewan, but in terms of geography these places cover the wide range of topographies and landscapes mentioned above.

In his 1999 book *The West: Regional Ambitions, National Debates, Global Age*, Gerald Friesen cites the geographer Cole Harris’s description of Canada as a country made up of regions “having only fuzzy locational meanings,” yet part of our spatial ambition (and resentment).⁶ If Harris is right that regions may be only indistinctly grasped, the various environments that constitute “the West” do have an impact on the way history and culture are established—most particularly with the sorts of places discussed in this book.

How these places, born of particular geographic, environmental, cultural, or political realities, have come to be known in a global digital age as “heritage places” brings a new dimension to any discussion of their past. It suggests that it is not purely landscape that defines the West. Rather it is the spirit of places and spaces that distinguishes this region, that tells sanctioned stories that are both conventional and unconventional, sometimes unified by perception and perspective and sometimes fragmented by history and culture, yet continuing to tell the individual and distinctive narratives of province, region, and community. In large part this book focuses on the way the interpretation of historic place in the West came to define attachment to the soil as private property, to the creation of capitalist labour markets, to the ascendancy of individualism, and to the view that the territories occupied by Indigenous nations were empty lands.

The sorts of historic sites in this work range from the local to the national and represent, I believe, effective illustrations of important themes in prairie history. While the bulk of the research for this study came from government records, along with archival and published sources, the overarching themes that inform my writing are influenced by my individual experience with historic places throughout western Canada and abroad. I link my many personal experiences at places in western Canada with the enormous documentation that records the establishment, the values, the physical settings, and the interpretation of specific historic sites in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and then contextualizing these realities and perspectives within

the growing national and international literature on place, heritage, and memory. Within the broad themes of each chapter I provide brief histories of the selected places, but I have included them only to help set the context for their later designation and their modern-day roles as historic sites. I offer no detailed or exhaustive history of these places.

It is important to note as well that the list of historic sites chosen for this book is not intended in any way to be comprehensive or all-inclusive in regard to the particular themes they might represent. For instance, my discussion of pre-contact Indigenous sites in Chapter 1 or fur trade sites in Chapter 2 highlights a handful of sites in Manitoba and Saskatchewan that I am familiar with through visitation and research and that more importantly are examples of heritage designation and commemoration. These chapters and others do not attempt to cover *all* places of historical significance in the West—clearly an impossible task. Moreover, this book is not intended to provide any kind of comprehensive history of Indigenous cultural sites, or fur trade sites, settler sites, places of resistance, or places related to gender and sexuality in the West but rather to examine how and why these places were commemorated by government, how they are interpreted, and how that interpretation might have changed over time. Therefore, a certain process of selection was required, and I have chosen particular places that best fit the themes of the book. If other authors were to tackle this topic, they would no doubt have alternative sites in mind, but the places discussed in this book are ones I had become

familiar with over the course of my career as a historian with Parks Canada.

The other question to be addressed is why I focus on Manitoba and Saskatchewan and not Alberta, even though the term “Prairie Canada” is used in my subtitle. As mentioned above, in choosing themes and sites, a certain process of selection is required, and the topics that were chosen are well represented by a variety of historic sites in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. The other reason is much more prosaic: my work did not involve Alberta sites (other than some brief research related to Rocky Mountain House, a designated fur trade site in west-central Alberta). I thought it best to not write about places I had never visited. I can add that because I use the term “prairie Canada” to mean the modern provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, I have included northern sites such as York Factory, Seahorse Gully, and others in my analysis. I effectively view the two provinces as bordered territories of current governmental construction.

Apart from my direct experience with historic places and the meanings they convey, to some degree the inspiration for this study has come from the writings of Laurajane Smith, whose book *Uses of Heritage* got me to think about the concept she labels the “authorized heritage discourse.” Of course, this is not a new idea, though it is a new label. It has been discussed over the years in a variety of forms by a variety of writers. I suppose, like my Parks Canada colleagues, I was aware that the history I was writing was a sanctioned undertaking—like a good civil servant I followed the directions of my managers—although also like my

colleagues I often attempted new (and sometimes naive) interpretations and innovative perspectives. Although in truth we might not have thought a great deal about the differences between the two, we generally believed we were writing “history” while leaving “heritage” for park managers, site interpreters, and park planners. Of course, that separation was often blurred, as the hoped-for goal of historical writing in an agency such as Parks Canada is to have it applied to the practicalities of conservation, programming, and the realities of on-the-ground interpretation. That was frequently not the case.

But it is Smith’s work that effectively situates these concepts within the larger discussions around heritage: heritage as a cultural (and bureaucratic) process, the authenticating institutions of heritage, and the culture and discourse of the heritage narrative. “Heritage,” although variously understood, is seemingly ubiquitous. At one time the concern of only a minority of devotees, broadly speaking, heritage is now widely valued in most cultures. How this process occurred, how factors such as style, age, monumentality, aesthetics, tourism, and political imperative came to naturalize selected narratives about place, privilege expert knowledge, and indeed confer historic significance provides the theoretical basis for the following discussions about particular themes and places that form part of the history of prairie Canada. Over the last half-century federal, provincial, and municipal strategies fill many thousands of pages of policy direction in the selection, designation, definition, quantification, and management of heritage. I discuss the impact of these

policies on the development and interpretation of historic places, and on heritage in general, in western Canada in the following chapters, and the impact of the more distinct and vernacular narratives of community-based heritage.

Generally, “heritage” is viewed as a process that characterizes places, spaces, people, events, practices, histories, objects, or ideas as a legacy from the past. Such legacies, according to cultural scholars Susan L.T. Ashley and Andrea Terry, are culturally produced, signified, and reproduced as heritage.⁷ Heritage can function as both a process of engagement with place and as an act of communication that helps to create worth in and for the present. It is a subjective and political mediation of memory and identity. Cultural memory and the idea of a collective past can advance and endorse consensus versions of history (usually by the cultural institutions of the state and its elites) to control and standardize modern social and cultural life or what might be called the “dominant heritage discourse.” I would argue that perceptions of place and memory are often related directly to those places in prairie Canada that we consider heritage. How does our view of the past influence the way we perceive authorized historic places and, conversely, how do these places affect our broad view of the past and the present, if in fact they do at all?

Understanding and unpacking the significance of a particular place is more easily done if one is actually there, and I have visited, usually multiple times, each of the sites discussed. To this last point the historian Simon Schama has written, “Historians are supposed to reach the past

always through texts, occasionally through images, things that are safely caught up in the bell jar of academic convention; look but don't touch."⁸ The places that we call "heritage" suggest a nuanced and often complex view of the past, but they do require a sense of touch that allows us to see history not just as a "thing" but rather as a cultural and social process. They suggest acts of remembering that are sometimes personal and sometimes official, the authoritative and imposing views of the past that are often created outside of the cultural identities shaped by personal attachment to place. Landscapes can have an aesthetic attraction for some and/or a cultural meaning for others, becoming sites of memory where an absence has become a presence.

Fittingly for this book, my first project for Parks Canada involved the writing of a landscape history of Batoche National Historic Site (NHS) in Saskatchewan, an attempt to research how the site landscape of the 1885 battlefield had changed over the roughly 100 years since the end of the Northwest Resistance. It was somewhat of a naive undertaking as I earnestly went about analyzing early descriptions of the battlefield, studied period photographs, and walked the area with the idea that Parks Canada would then alter the twentieth-century landscape to recreate for visitors what the battlefield looked like in May of 1885. It was a time, after all, of large heritage expectations and ambitions and even larger budgets. In the end, we discovered, unintentionally, that the history of that place included its evolution as a community and cultural landscape; that indeed change was part of its heritage.

Suffice to say that the hoped-for manipulation of the battlefield landscape—clearing acres of brush and planting new trees elsewhere at a place that had witnessed a century of farming—did not occur except in the artistic renderings contained in site brochures. Nevertheless, it allowed me to employ, to some extent, the “archive of the feet.”

Yet, my Batoche experience was an introduction for me to the significance of place as a social construct and the understanding of how history has played out or materialized upon the land. When one looked beyond the cultivated fields at Batoche, it was the shallow depressions of long-ago rifle pits and the vaguely discernable cart tracks of the old Carlton Trail that allowed the landscape to speak to another time and another reality.

Later, in my role as the historian for fur trade and Indigenous sites (places I would now call “sites of colonization”), I travelled to national historic sites in northern Manitoba, in Saskatchewan and Alberta, and eventually to the western Arctic. I was also very much involved in the interpretation programs at Lower Fort Garry, The Forks, Churchill, York Factory, and places such as the River Road Heritage Parkway just north of Winnipeg. While the work involved considerable research in various archives, just as importantly it entailed walking the length and breadth of these places, sometimes with site interpreters and visitors, often with archaeologists, and occasionally alone. Although I, like my Parks Canada colleagues, certainly subscribed to the Western idea that heritage can be studied, mapped, protected, conserved,

and managed through government policy and legislation, we realized that the places we thought important were also social constructions that at one level reflected official versions of history. The long list of national and international agreements, from the Athens Charter to the Venice Charter, and heritage organizations such as ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) and UNESCO (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization), as well as a variety of supranational cultural resource management strategies, all speak to this “scientific” view of heritage. At the same time, heritage is a concept that can challenge received beliefs where the significance and meaning of place can be contested. The work of my former colleague Diane Payment on the Métis people of Batoche certainly speaks to this latter interpretation.⁹

Of course, historic sites differ widely. Some, like Lower Fort Garry, embody a heavily manipulated landscape, its buildings, lawns, and gardens in many ways contrived to meet visitor anticipations and comforts. If, at its most superficial level, the past at the Lower Fort is presented as different from the present, at a deeper level it reproduces not the past in the present but more a manufactured attraction and movie set of fur trade entertainments than a place of meaning. As a “living history” site it displays little of what heritage professionals might call “authenticity,” a vague and imprecise concept that can be understood at different levels. At one level there is the physical and curatorial authenticity of buildings, rooms, landscapes, costumes, and the other choreographed material trappings

and artifice of living history. At another there is the authenticity of voice: who is speaking and for whom. What meanings are conveyed? Are they contrived for visitor recognition, or do they communicate different voices and different narratives? Do they challenge perceptions, or do they simply reinforce them? It is most often at living history sites that the constitutive performance experience of a heritage place engages with contemporary identities, revealing how heritage can legitimize national narratives and hierarchies.¹⁰ They are what the American historian Lisbeth Haas has called “aestheticized spaces” or the imagined pasts of heritage construction.¹¹

Writing about the concept of “authenticity,” Laurajane Smith argues that the search for cultural authenticity can paradoxically drive the heritage tourism experience at the same time as it constructs cultural experiences that in effect undermine it. She describes how tourists may comprehend authenticity quite differently from the way that it has traditionally been described, with its emphasis upon essentially material qualities. Tourism literature, she argues, invariably frames the complex issue of authenticity in marketing and consumer or consumption language, a language generally viewed as simplistic within those humanities that deal with ideas of heritage.¹²

However, other places, such as York Factory National Historic Site and the historic sites in the vicinity of Churchill in northern Manitoba, might, for example, represent a different dynamic.¹³ The historic sites near Churchill include Seahorse Gully and Eskimo Point, a 4,000-year-old Pre-Dorset, Dorset, and Inuit site of almost

continuous occupation, and the eighteenth-century European sites of Prince of Wales Fort, Sloop Cove, and Cape Merry. These places do not signify performance, and they do not attempt to freeze a moment or manipulate the sensory experience. They are just there. While protected, and to some degree conserved, such places present landscapes that have evolved over time and continue to evolve.¹⁴ They have different meanings, and although to some degree they are part of the dominant discourse, they present storyscapes that feel real. And it is just these multi-layered meanings that support what philosopher Michel Foucault has called “counter-memory” —that is, the individual’s ability to resist official versions of historical continuity.¹⁵



With collective memory so vital to pre-modern and modern Western culture, society has long articulated a version of the past that is enshrined at historic sites, in museums, in protected buildings and landscapes, in objects, and even in roadside plaques. Commemoration of such objects and spaces is a process that links societal views of history with memory and identity, promoting perceptions that are often authorized and accepted as unchanging or fixed in time. Memory and identity are frequently characterized as material things; memory is “kept alive” and identity, either in the collective or personal sense, can be lost and found.¹⁶

The memories and identities that shape concepts of heritage are socially constructed representations of reality and mould the cultivated pasts that help define

contemporary notions of identity and belonging. “Heritage” can be defined as a range of associations with the past. These associations are usually marked by an attachment to places, objects, and practices that, as a culture, we believe connect with the past in some way. As the American historian Rodney Harrison has noted, the word “heritage” is used to describe everything from the solid (buildings to bone fragments) to the intangible (songs, festivals, and language).¹⁷ Moreover, what is often labelled as “heritage”—living history sites are consistently an example—represent a creation of the past in the present, while more genuine heritage places and landscapes demonstrate a persistence of the past in the present. Exploring the dynamics of what is considered heritage and what is not, particularly in regard to place, reveals stories of hegemony and challenge, struggles over contested space, and even the eclipse of memory. These are the critical distinctions relating to how “heritage” is defined and used that I will explore throughout this book.

By examining the commemorative and interpretive history of some representative sites in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, I address such questions as how, as a culture, we determine which memories survive and become the authorized discourse, which are ignored or forgotten, which underpin traditional perspectives, and which challenge these perspectives; and specifically, how and why the meaning of place is often disputed. The dissonance between history and heritage—the idea that historic places are not inherently valuable but are the product of modern and cultural processes of meaning—can contest the

authorized, challenge accepted notions of progress, and undermine traditional Western perceptions of history and history making. At the same time, regional, national, and even international heritage narratives can fuel official views that are heteronormative or can often exclude or marginalize women, the working class, particular ethnic groups, and Indigenous peoples. The historic sites discussed in this work—from pre-contact Indigenous landscapes to settler sites and places of resistance—illustrate how at one level some heritage places reinforce the authorized discourse while at another level they can be interpreted as a challenge to that discourse.

Place provides an important touchstone for culturally constructed heritage and those spaces that a society considers historically significant. Designation, according to this model, is often an act of faith where places we consider to be heritage can give physicality to the values that reaffirm a community's view of itself. It is where places are given meaning and where we often speak of the “cultural landscapes” that can resonate with individuals, with communities, and with nations, and even at an international level. I tend to use the word “place” more so than “site” because, in my experience working in the federal historic sites program, “site” can be a restrictive term that invokes a sense of mapped boundaries, tightly defined and circumscribed landscapes, and a built heritage that often stands disconnected from its surroundings. “Place” has a broader connotation and suggests socially formed and culturally relevant and meaningful spaces of

memory that are often steeped in local and multiple constructions.

Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has argued that “place” can be created from “space” and it is in fact the localities that mark the historically and culturally defined pauses in a wider expanse. “Place is security, space is freedom,” he writes, “where we are attached to one and long for the other.”¹⁸ Space is an open arena of action and movement, Tuan suggests, while place is about stopping and resting and becoming involved. For Tuan, place is also a type of object and embodies the lived experience where whole landscapes and cityscapes can be seen as sculpted meaningful spaces.¹⁹ He believes that our sense of place has emerged from such concepts as rootedness, memory, veneration of the past, and nostalgia. Place is constructed from space when an event or larger value is attached to a space that historically has little or no significance. It can be defined by the spiritual, cultural, or ecological significance of a landscape or by direct human intervention through architecture and other examples of human engineering. Continuing in the humanist tradition, Canadian geographer Edward Relph views place as integral to human “being,” with space and place a measure that links abstraction (space) with experience (place). Employing phenomenology, an approach that focuses upon the study of consciousness and the objects of direct experience, Relph suggests that understanding the self comes only with understanding the self in place; to be human is to exist “in place.”²⁰

In a more broadly relational vein, Tim Cresswell, in studying the concept of place in Western thought, links

common understandings of place and identity, mobility, memory, and belonging with the more speculative discussions that have arisen, particularly in the field of geography, around place (and space) as ways of comprehending the world in almost epistemological ways.²¹ Cresswell highlights what he calls the “genealogy of place,” where significance is defined according to a variety of disciplines such as history, anthropology, geography, literature, and urban planning. For Cresswell, “place memory” describes the ability of a specific place to make the past come to life and thus contribute to the production and reproduction of social memory.²²

Between the polarities represented by geographers Tuan, Relph, and Cresswell is a vast and multi-faceted articulation of place that has moved into other disciplines such as history. For instance, Ian McKay’s and Robin Bates’s *In the Province of History: The Making of the Public Past in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* looks at how place is manipulated by a tourism industry to create a mythology that effectively misrepresents regional history to create an antimodernist past where “all the world was safe and happy” and where racial identities and class conflicts are discounted.²³ Building upon McKay’s earlier work *Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia*, their analysis looks at how governments and cultural figures cooperated to create “tourism history.” McKay’s work on the creation of the oftentimes mythical pasts of public presentation and consumption (to an extent related to Eric Hobsbawm’s and Terence Ranger’s *The Invention of Tradition*) resonates

with this study of authorized heritage, memory, and landscapes, especially in my analysis of heritage presentation and the tourism of place at fur trade and pioneer historic sites. However, McKay's study of antimodernism in twentieth-century Nova Scotia casts a wider net, going beyond my focus on how heritage is created and maintained and how it comes to support "founding father" narratives and national and regional mythologies. The various historical contributions to James Opp's and John Walsh's *Placing Memory and Remembering Place in Canada* underscore how "place memories and memory places" must, as Opp and Walsh indicate, "accommodate differences, acknowledge injustice and . . . share authority over 'the past.'" ²⁴

"Place" and "site" have a familial relationship. Arguably, "site" is a further refinement of "place" in which significance—real or imagined—is further detailed and defined, whether by perceptions of history and heritage or by current uses and more contemporary applications of meaning. Like Simon Schama's ideas around memory, "place memory" evokes a sense of the past in the present and thus adds to the production and reproduction of social or collective memory. ²⁵ With place, we see the establishment of meaning that reflects the significance of human intervention on the landscape in all its forms, from the less visually evident spiritual and cultural landscape to the more obvious intrusion of the built environment. The various chapters in this book look at the way place is realized within different forms of historical landscapes. From pre-contact Indigenous spaces to the heavily

manipulated topographies of settler society, each impacts our collective memory and the broad narratives that we use to define the past.

“Settler society” and “settler colonialism” are two terms I use in this book, especially in Chapter 3. They are both recent terms that have gained traction in describing the impact of colonial economies and cultures in the West. Of course, such terminology has a much broader usage outside prairie Canada and can be defined as an ongoing system of power that creates and perpetuates the repression of Indigenous peoples and cultures. In both historical and contemporary times, settler colonialism and settler society entail an oppression based on racism, patriarchy, and capitalism. Authoritative in its scope toward Indigenous peoples, settler colonialism is together assimilatory and exclusionary as it exploits lands and resources to which Indigenous peoples have age-old relationships. It is not an event but a process that over time characterizes settler society as “original,” in effect indigenizing and naturalizing newcomer status as it obscures the conditions of settler invasion.²⁶ In the context of this study, the normalizing of settler societies is often realized through the celebration of settler heritage and the commemoration of those places, events, and people that mark a continuous settlement tradition. While pervasive throughout the topics with which this book engages, this tradition is most evident in the establishment and commemoration of the settler culture described in Chapter 3 and in how an “authorized heritage” has endeavoured to construct tradition and authenticity.

Just as the significance of heritage place is cultural, it is a process that is also relevant to ecological places, the significance of a particular geographical feature or natural landscape also being a public construct.²⁷ The American historian David Glassberg comments that “a sense of history and a sense of place are inextricably intertwined; we attach histories to places, and the environmental value we attach to place comes largely through the historical association we have with it.”²⁸ Following Glassberg’s lead, I use the phrase “a sense of place” often in this study. For me, it represents how and why an individual or a community instills a particular location with meaning and resonance. It is conceptually bordered and perceived as different from the space that surrounds it. Of course, a sense of place does not always relate to heritage—natural landscapes can evoke the same sensations although they become cultural by virtue of their distinctiveness and identity. Yet, finding meaning in a “sense of place” can be at times ephemeral; places can have meaning(s) for some people that little resonate with others.

Landscapes are cultural because they evoke both meaning and memory. Heritage places in prairie Canada are not inherently valuable, and neither do they carry meaning that is natural but are the product of traditional and present-day processes, activities, and perceptions. Such a view is not, of course, uniform around the world, as different cultures and traditions look upon the concept of heritage, whether in relation to places, objects, or the less tangible examples of cultural significance, in different ways.