

A City That Doesn't Apologize for Itself

Rethinking Tourism Strategies for Winnipeg¹

Slow Growth and Self Deprecation

It is an unfortunate reality of North American politics that rapid growth and a highly dynamic economy have become the all-but-universally accepted measure of a city's worth. Most Canadians are in some way caught up in the belief that "the big apple"—Toronto, New York, Los Angeles, or the nearest major urban centre, wherever one happens to be—is deserving of rapt attention. "Lesser" cities are seen, in an ill-defined but fundamental way, as less worthy, and identification with them produces a curious mixture of defensiveness and feelings of inferiority. Winnipeg is a good example of this phenomenon.

A combination of defensiveness and abnegation shine through in many efforts to promote the city. An undercurrent of desperation is palpable, both in advertising campaigns on such themes as "Winnipeg: 100 reasons to love it" or "love me, love my Winnipeg" and in the declaration of recent years that it was the Jets that kept Winnipeg "on the map." What comes through most clearly are two contradictory messages, often asserted simultaneously: 1) since Winnipeg is not Toronto, or Vancouver, there

must be something wrong with it and 2) there is absolutely nothing the matter with Winnipeg. Good intentions to the contrary, the sense of our own inferiority is often the message that comes through most clearly.²

The notion that cities can only be "world class" if they are large and economically dynamic constitutes a mental pathology that is a product of North American history. It stems from a long history of preoccupation with growth. In both Canada and the United States, the settlement of the west and the industrial revolution were marked by a phenomenon known to urban historians as boosterism—noisy self-promotion in the competition for population and economic growth. (Artibise, 1981; Wade, 1959) Within metropolitan areas, a similarly growth-oriented and competitive environment was evident. From the earliest days of suburban development, much of the outward expansion of cities took the form of competition among urbanizing municipalities vying for residential, commercial and industrial development. (Binford, 1985; Markusen, 1984; Logan and Molotch, 1987, 179-99) Throughout, growth was the overriding goal.

Boosterism, and the elevation of growth to the status of a primary virtue, however characteristic it is of North America, is not necessarily the way of the world. To make that point, we need only to think of Europe, where a glance at the

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map will allow us to make a list of cities that are neither economic powerhouses, nor centres of rapid growth, but are nevertheless among the world's great cities, by almost anyone's standards. Obvious entries on such a list are Vienna, Copenhagen, Florence and Rome. (Leo and Brown

2000) The idea that growth defines a city's worth is not accepted in Europe and the excellence of many European cities suggests that we need not accept it either.

Moreover, the plausibility of the idea that growth equals value appears to be diminishing with the passage of time. In the past, smaller cities had to do without important things that could be taken for granted in larger centres. For example, as recently as 40 years ago, the

chances of finding quality theatre productions outside of New York, Montreal or Toronto were not good. At that time, regional theatres were the still struggling creations of such visionaries as John Hirsh in Winnipeg and Tyrone Guthrie in Minneapolis. Similar points could be made about dance, opera, classical music, and everyday entertainment. As recently as the early 1970s, anyone familiar with the conventions of popular music could usually tell by listening whether a rock, folk or country record had been produced in New York, Los Angeles, or Nashville, or whether it had come from a smaller centre. The differences in production values were unmistakable.

Even then, faster-growing and more dynamic cities had problems of their own: higher costs of living, more dangerous streets and more pollution, as well as the personal loneliness that many will experience amidst masses of strangers. These were compensated for by the fact that the best things available in many fields could only be found there. In time, however, the corresponding disadvantages of smaller cities have been reduced substantially. Today, it requires a well-tuned ear indeed to hear a difference between the production values of Winnipeg and those of Toronto, Los Angeles or Nashville. Regional theatre no longer struggles as it did, and first-rate music, art and dance can be found in most larger cities, and certainly in Winnipeg.

The disadvantages of smaller cities, if such they are, have diminished greatly, but the sense of inferiority persists. That sense is manifest in many things, but it is our contention that it is no longer justified, if it ever was.³ If we are to overcome it, we must confront it wherever it is found, and in this study, we confront the sense of inferiority implicit in the way Winnipeg is promoted for purposes of the tourist trade. These promotions provide a good example of well-intentioned efforts that often inadvertently convey a message of self-deprecation. A casual observer, considering Winnipeg's tourist promotions, could be pardoned for thinking that the height of our ambitions is to bring in American hunters and fishers to spend a night here on their way to a northern lake, and busloads of tourists from North and South Dakota for Folklorama. It is a premise of this research that Winnipeg can do those things, and do a great deal more in addition.

Winnipeg has glorious summer weather, typically warm and dry during the day and cool at night, with a density of trees that, from a height, often makes the city appear to be located in a forest. Winnipeggers, true to their self-deprecation, appear not to notice these charms and instead spend their summers complaining of mosquitoes. Restaurants, meanwhile, offer a range and selection of food that by-passes no area of the world and no palate, however refined or robust, at prices that would make jaws

drop in Chicago or Toronto. We have every conceivable form of arts and entertainment, including an internationally recognized ballet company, as well as chamber music, choral and symphonic music, theatre and visual arts that one would expect to find in a city four times Winnipeg's size. With winter snowfall that is not subject to Southern Ontario's alternating melts and freeze-ups, we are one of the few major cities in the world that, at Christmas time, actually looks the way Christmas cards look.

In short, it is our view that Winnipeg, collectively, suffers from entirely unwarranted feelings of inferiority and that these feelings are manifest in the way the city promotes itself as a tourist destination. In this study we investigate existing tourist promotions and consider alternatives.

Study Method

The study falls into two parts. The first is an investigation of existing methods for the promotion of tourism in Winnipeg, including policies, objectives, methods of promotion and the promotions themselves. Because of the length and detail of our report of this investigation, we have included much of it in Appendix A. The second part of the study began with a two-day brainstorming session by a group selected for their possession of relevant expertise.

The authors met in September 1999 after having reached agreement that Winnipeg's history, its arts community, its multicultural milieu, and its location at the edge of a wilderness with many unique features, constituted potential tourist attractions that, thanks to our collective sense of our own inferiority, were not being promoted to their best advantage. We set ourselves the task of identifying opportunities and roughing out alternative strategies. The results of this session were followed up by further research as we developed the final form of our recommendations.

Appendix B provides brief biographic sketches of participants in the meeting. Christopher Leo, who has broad knowledge of urban politics and policy across North America, but claims no expertise in tourism, acted as moderator at the meeting and prepared final drafts of a preliminary discussion paper and this paper. Jennifer Fultz, an honours student in Political Science at the University of Winnipeg, was responsible for background research, writing an initial draft of the discussion paper, and preparing a precis of the meeting. Maureen Bundgaard offered some particularly helpful advice on tourism strategies as the study neared its end. The other authors contributed their careful deliberations and their expertise in subject matter, or in the tourism industry itself, as set out in Appendix B.

Promotion of Tourism: A Critique

Following from our major premise, that Winnipeg has no need to apologize for itself, and much to offer, we believe that effective promotion of the city as a tourist location must begin with a focus on things that are unique, interesting, or excellent about Winnipeg and Manitoba. We begin by making the case that this is not being done as well as it might be in current tourist promotion efforts. In order to do so, we assess existing tourism promotions, paying particular attention to initiatives (or the absence of initiatives) within those areas that we have identified as representing Winnipeg's uniqueness, or excellence: the rich, intertwined histories of Winnipeg and the Red River Valley; Winnipeg's widely-acknowledged status as a centre of the arts and entertainment; the uniqueness and diversity of Manitoba's natural attractions, and our multicultural milieu.

Our assessment, undertaken in the summer of 1999, consisted of a user-centred survey of the materials and information actually available to someone touring or planning a tour. In carrying out the survey, we visited all Winnipeg offices of Tourism Winnipeg and Manitoba Industry, Trade and Tourism and surveyed all relevant web sites. At the offices, we asked for available information and collected brochures and other promotional materials. The web site has been updated

since our initial survey, but, as best we can determine, the themes of tourism promotion have changed little, if at all.

Both the provincial government and Tourism Winnipeg are active and energetic in the promotion of tourism, but marked differences in tone and style were evident. In general, Manitoba promotions had a generic feel and were lacking in originality. Promotion concentrated on obvious items and on attractions that are invariably promoted everywhere: hunting, fishing, camping, parks, golf, conventions, museums, historic sites. One could read through the provincial materials with place names blocked out and not be certain it was not Saskatchewan or Ontario—or Ohio or Nebraska—that was being promoted. Manitoba's tourist promotions, far from focussing on things that are particular to Manitoba communities, tended to be imitative of the least imaginative tourist promotions for other parts of North America.

Winnipeg promotions were more imaginative, and they reflected a variety of things that are unique to Winnipeg, including its lively and varied cultural scene, the wide variety of restaurants, and its distinctive neighbourhoods. The variety and liveliness of these promotions was encouraging, but they fell short of presenting an unmistakable profile, because they lacked emphasis. They had an everything-but-the-kitchen-sink quality, that made a positive impression,

but still left Winnipeg less clearly defined than we would like to see it. In addition, we argue that they omitted some of Winnipeg's most unique, as well as potentially attractive, features.

In Appendix A we examine the evidence that led us to these reflections, beginning with provincial tourism promotions and then turning to those of the City of Winnipeg, looking separately at brochures and on-line promotions.

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In Search Of a Better Way

Overcoming Self-Deprecation

Manitoba's travel opportunities must compete with similar industries all over the globe. It is therefore extremely important to identify and promote unique features which will motivate people to choose Manitoba over other places. We must ascertain which of our assets are the most significant and unique, and build our promotional campaigns upon those elements.

In doing that, we must begin by overcoming our long-standing penchant for self-deprecation, which was discussed at the beginning of this study. This effort should involve a preliminary learning process about who we are (and were) as a province. The objective would be to build local pride and interest in self-promotion, while developing a theme or themes that will mesh together to create a cohesive image.

Themes and images are essential for the development of a local demand for tourism opportunities within Winnipeg and Manitoba. At the moment, we have little faith in ourselves as a viable tourist spot. If local interest is developed, outside visitors will be motivated to investigate our assets.

We need not aim at international excellence in all of the attractions we offer. Rather, we should be aiming to develop synergy among them. Our various unique attractions must be allowed to feed off each other. For example, if a visitor comes to Winnipeg for a conference and some restaurant and night club visits, tourism promotions could be aimed at making him or her aware of Winnipeg's arts scene and some part of the unique history of the Red River Valley. It must be demonstrated to the visitor that, once someone decides to visit the region for one purpose, a host of other opportunities will present themselves.

A variety of images can be promoted extensively, so that people will immediately associate them with Manitoba (the 'cultural heart of North America'; a 'land of opportunity' for residents and visitors; a 'gateway' to the North and West; a 'cradle' for high achievers, creative thinkers and cultural development; and a home for great natural beauty and diversity). However not enough has been done to establish any of these images in the minds of potential consumers.

Social Context

Tourism offers a number of well-understood economic benefits: It provides business opportunities, creates jobs and contributes to many related businesses. However, it is equally important to place tourism in a wider social and political context.

In addition to the obvious economic benefits, tourism offers potential social pay-offs. According to Statistics Canada, the proportion of Winnipeg households in poverty rose from 21 per cent of the total to 28 per cent from 1971 to 1996. Poverty in the inner city was even higher, rising from 33 per cent to 51 per cent.⁴ There has been a considerable amount of controversy surrounding the methods used to determine the poverty line, but the fact that steadily growing numbers of people find themselves in need, by

whatever measure of need, is difficult to dispute.

Winnipeg also has the largest Aboriginal population of any Canadian city, representing almost 20 per cent of the total Canadian urban Aboriginal population, and that population is increasing rapidly. In 1996, the city's Aboriginal population was 52,500, or about 8 per cent of the total population, having risen to that level from 6.9 per cent in just five years.⁵ The inner-city Aboriginal population is growing even more rapidly, having increased from 10 per cent of the total population in 1986 to 13.9 per cent in 1996.⁶ The Statistics Canada poverty rate for Aboriginal households in 1996 was 65 per cent and that for inner-city Aboriginal households was 80 per cent.

Tourism is not a magic wand that can be waved to abolish these problems. But for Winnipeggers struggling with poverty and underemployment as well as for that part of the Aboriginal population, whether in poverty or not, that is wrestling with the problems of making a constructive adaptation to urban, off-reserve life, tourism opens business and other opportunities to individuals of many ages and educational levels, ranging from those with few formal educational credentials to those with high levels of formal education or high levels of skills training. Even for people with minimal formal qualifications, employment in the tourist industry need not necessarily be

menial, but could include such things as story-telling by an elder.

In the process, tourism can bring "new money" and self-reliance into an economy excessively dependent on government transfer payments and services. It is also capable of supporting many cultural events and contributing to their economic viability.

It can secure economic viability for infrastructure that can be used by residents as well as visitors, including parks, interpretive centres, a drama stage and the preservation of historic buildings.

In the introductory section of this paper, we argued that unjustifiably lowered self-esteem stemming from slow growth contributes to ineffective tourism promotion policies. It has been our argument that we need to sideline our self-deprecating habits of thought in order to design a more effective approach to the promotion of tourism. The process of policy development that we recommend can itself contribute to the raising of self-esteem.

A respectfully and intelligently-designed tourism program can teach people about their own history and culture and raise collective self-esteem. It can also bring generations together, through

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jobs, volunteer activities, historical interpretation and story-telling; and promote international understanding by bringing people of different nations together in positive surroundings and under positive conditions. Although tourism will not somehow transport us into a more perfect world, its obvious economic benefits can go hand-in-hand with the pursuit of social objectives. It is our view that these objectives should be given equal weight with the economic ones.

In the following pages, we suggest a number of themes that we believe should be central to the promotion of tourism in Winnipeg, emphasizing things that are unique to Winnipeg. The development of these will achieve their best results if they are combined into a cohesive advertising strategy that offers a coherent approach to Winnipeg tourism as a whole. Our focus is on history and Aboriginal life, arts, entertainment, and adventure. We end our discussion, in the section entitled “Marketing Winnipeg,” with some practical suggestions for program development and implementation.

Winnipeg Arts and Entertainment

Winnipeg has an exceptionally lively cultural scene, possessing a degree of excellence and a range that one might expect to find in a city four times or more Winnipeg’s size. Excellence is achieved in the literary, visual and performing arts, of which the performing arts are

particularly likely to be useful in the promotion of tourism. The arts scene, in part, is a draw in its own right, and is also useful as an additional attraction aimed at tourists passing through the city on their way to other locations, or here for other reasons. Visiting conventioners should be targeted as well.

Among the performing arts our most notable seasonal attractions, and ones that draw tourists on the strength of their individual appeal, are the Winnipeg Fringe Festival, Folklorama (which is not unique to Winnipeg, but has unusual depth and scope), the Winnipeg Folk Festival, one of the largest of its kind in North America, and the Winnipeg Jazz Festival featuring international jazz stars. Another jazz series “On the Rooftop” of the Winnipeg Art Gallery is virtually sold out every summer.

The summer Broadway productions of Rainbow Stage regularly draw tourists from hundreds of miles away. In addition, the summer months see many concerts and other performances at new outdoor stages at The Forks and Assiniboine Park. There is also a Winnipeg Contemporary Dance Festival every two years, as well as periodic arts and innovative cultural events and festivals at the St. Norbert Arts and Cultural Centre—a Winnipeg historical site of considerable beauty and interest. New to Winnipeg in 2000 is a year-long

Festival of Music and Arts co-presented by CBC and University of Winnipeg.

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet has a strong international reputation, and there are two other well-established dance companies—Winnipeg Contemporary Dancers and Ruth Cansfield Dance.

There are now three major orchestras on the Winnipeg scene. The Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra is the province's largest arts organization by far and features classical or pops concerts on virtually every weekend of the regular season. It also generates extraordinary national and international excitement during its yearly New Music Festival held in mid-winter. In addition, the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra and MusikBarock have long been central features of the chamber music scene. These latter two orchestral ensembles also anchor a thriving collective (called NusicNet) of chamber music organizations such as Virtuosi Concerts, the Winnipeg Chamber Music Society, Winnipeg Singers, Women's Musical Club, GroundSwell (specializing in new music) and even a new large jazz band, the Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra. Other musical attractions include a number of strong choral groups, a youth orchestra, and the unique Winnipeg Mandolin Orchestra.

The Manitoba Opera produces several major operas each year. A Gilbert & Sullivan Society produces one major show yearly. Multi-faceted perform-

ances of jazz, blues, and folk music are also featured regularly at the West End Cultural Centre and the Franco-Manitoban Centre.

Three major venues deliver dramatic productions throughout the regular season—Manitoba Theatre Centre, The Warehouse and Prairie Theatre Exchange.

One cultural attraction which is growing in prominence is the International Writers Festival. Art galleries and smaller studios abound, as well as several pottery and crafts shops.

A lively club scene provides a wide variety of popular music. The avant garde film community makes its presence felt at Cinematheque. The arts attractions are supported by an exceptionally good and varied selection of restaurants.

Red River History and Aboriginal Life

The history of the Red River Valley is uniquely fascinating, especially if it is presented as "history" rather than "heritage." "Heritage" is used to characterize things for the purposes of image-making, while "history" is a constantly evolving reality which people experi-

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ence every day. “Heritage” moves the tourist from one location to another and offers static, generic experiences at each location. It is commonly felt that one can find “heritage” experiences anywhere in the world. Tourists often feel that, when visiting a new location, they “should” visit heritage attractions in order to learn something.

“Historical” tourism, however, is quite different. The people involved with historical attractions bring life to those facilities. When visitors enter these locations, the fact that the attractions are “alive” in the present will enhance their learning experience. It is these experiences that will motivate tourists to visit Winnipeg as opposed to surrounding areas. Examples of attractions that adhere to the historical model include Winnipeg’s Ukrainian Labour Temple and Chicago’s Pullman district.

Winnipeg could advertise itself as a “gateway” and meeting place which has historically offered many opportunities to settlers and visitors. The advertising of Winnipeg’s history should not be premised on attempts to conceal the fact that, in the past, Winnipeg has been the centre of significant racial, ethnic and class conflicts which still colour our politics today. Cities such as Berlin and Vienna discuss their former status as conflict centres openly and factually, in order to give tourists an opportunity to learn from their experiences and to dem-

onstrate their own ability to move beyond their past difficulties.

Elements of Manitoba’s history that could be presented as history that is alive and continuing to evolve include:

- The role of Aboriginal people;
- The fur trade and settlement;
- The period of commercial development and the development of the Exchange District;
- Migration to Winnipeg in search of opportunity;
- The Winnipeg General Strike and labour history.

Since it has connections to each of these themes, the Forks could serve as a promotional centre that ties all of them together. For example, before the arrival of white settlers, there was a strong Aboriginal presence at The Forks. The area also served as an immigrant reception centre, and it can be tied to the railroads as well. The current Visitor Centre at the Forks could define experiences that would connect the five themes to the Forks, and direct visitors to other relevant sites. At the moment, however, it is little more than a place to pick up promotional brochures.

Also suffering from ineffective use at present is the Exchange District. Current

tourism policy has 'frozen' this area between the 1890s and 1920s, when it served as Winnipeg's warehouse district. However, this area has also had many other uses, uses that illustrate the way in which economic opportunities change with changing conditions. For example, the area became the city's garment district in the 1920s. Now, it is showing potential as an artistic centre. This area should therefore be treated as a dynamic location which presents people with different opportunities at different times.

Perhaps most neglected of all, however, is the Aboriginal contribution to Winnipeg's history. The recent development of Neeginan on Main Street has lately opened new opportunities for overcoming this neglect, but it is not widely known that the Neeginan project was preceded by Spirit Island, a proposed Aboriginal tourism site at the Forks. Unfortunately, the Spirit Island development project ran out of money before construction began.

In addition to its planned status as a tourism centre, the Spirit Island facility was intended to serve as a learning centre for Aboriginal youth. In order to accomplish these objectives, the site would feature a medicinal garden, restaurant, amphitheatre, classrooms and an elder facility. In addition to the proposed Spirit Island facility, a number of Aboriginal enterprises present opportunities for promotion.

Tour packages could be developed in co-operation with Aboriginal tourism operators across Manitoba. For example, the Brokenhead historic village (an Ojibway nation which features tipis, outdoor cooking, cultural interpretation and arts and crafts) could be promoted extensively in local schools. The Anishinabe facility in Riding Mountain National Park is a larger Ojibway village, with 150 campsites and an interpretive village showcasing Plains Indian building techniques. The Moose Island Eco-Tourism Network is located on Lake Winnipeg, and aims to recapture Cree childrens' mastery of traditional languages and stories. Another Cree-operated camp is in development in York Factory, and it is hoped that hunting and outfitting services can be provided there in future.

The promotion of Winnipeg as a centre of Aboriginal life could encompass all of Manitoba's Aboriginal cultures, and it could bring Nunavut and Manitoba closer together by directing visitor traffic toward Nunavut's assets. Therefore, Winnipeg's image as a 'gateway' city could be brought into play.

It has been widely observed that there is an active international interest in Aboriginal tourism. The range of Aboriginal cultures in Manitoba enables the province to provide international tourists with an unusually comprehensive experience. Rather than competing

fiercely for scarce resources, Manitoba's Aboriginal tourism organizations should band together to improve the quality of their facilities and produce joint advertising campaigns for international markets.

Adventure

The concept of 'adventure travel' can be divided into two subcategories: 'hard' adventure tourism, which demands higher levels of risk-taking and skill (for example sky-diving and whitewater rafting), and 'soft' adventure travel, which demands far less of travellers. There is a huge market for soft adventure travel, especially in the North.

The promotion of adventure travel begins, as other promotions do, with the identification of client bases through geographic segmentation, demographic studies, socio-economic analysis (level of disposable income) and consumer behaviour (identifying the best methods to reach those who wish to test themselves as well as those who are less venture-some). In order to market adventure travel successfully, the personalities of various types of travellers must be taken into account.

Unlike overpopulated international attractions, such as Yosemite National Park, Manitoba's outdoor assets remain basically untouched. Manitoba has world-class kayaking, rock climbing, camping and canoeing opportunities.

The diversity of Manitoba's wildlife is impressive. Large carnivores have not been eliminated, and ecosystems remain whole. Manitoba features many unique wildlife attractions, such as Churchill's polar bears and the snake population at Narcisse.

Significant outdoor opportunities are available within Winnipeg itself. Our rivers and bicycle paths provide residents and visitors with convenient forms of outdoor recreation. Yet, no efforts are currently being made to turn these assets to Winnipeg's advantage. Various simple and inexpensive steps could be taken to enhance the attractiveness of our urban environment, including common docking areas for boating on rivers, ice clearing and cross-country ski grooming along the rivers in winter.

Winnipeg's 'gateway' role is also relevant here, since the city could serve as a jumping-off point for rural and northern attractions. At the moment, however, no significant promotional connection has been established between these assets and the city of Winnipeg.

Our immediate attention, however, must be devoted to demand creation within Manitoba. Most local residents are unaware of the diversity and quality of Manitoba's outdoor attractions, many of which are literally 'on their doorstep'.

Marketing Winnipeg

Overcoming our chronic self-deprecation and developing an appreciation of Winnipeg's strengths is one thing. Getting people to put time and money into seeing for themselves is quite another. We conclude this study with a search for practical suggestions, drawing in part on the tourism marketing literature (Economic Planning Group of Canada and Fridgen 1991, Middleton 1988, Murphy 1985) and in part on experience.⁷ What we find there are insights that are familiar to professionals in the field of tourism marketing, but that are less frequently applied in slowly-growing cities than in growth magnets. We will ignore those precedents and proceed with some suggestions for advertising Winnipeg in a spirit of high self-esteem.

In fact, this type of promotion is likely to be more important for Winnipeg than it is for a rapidly-growing city. If a city is large, an international centre of business and finance, has a long, well-known history, is located in large population centres, or is near to spectacular scenery, it will automatically get visitors. This can apply to smaller cities as well. For example, Victoria has spectacular scenery nearby, a well-defined and well known native heritage, is located on the coast, near Vancouver and Seattle, and is well-placed to draw on the large Canadian and American west coast population pool.

Despite having these benefits, Victoria works hard at tourism. It offers an instructive example of how this is done. Victoria, like Winnipeg, has "something for everyone" and its web site calls attention to a wide variety of attractions, events and tours. But it does not promote itself, as Winnipeg in effect does, as "a place with something for everyone." Rather, it focusses its promotions on two central images: gardens and British heritage. Following is a passage from the welcome page on its web site:⁸

Welcome to Victoria - the "City of Gardens." This intimate, sophisticated seaside City is the vacation capital of Canada and the premiere tourist spot in the Pacific Northwest. Victoria is... the sunniest spot in the province and the gentlest in the country in terms of climate, environment, and lifestyle. Victoria's unique character is deeply rooted in its 150-year history — a history full of colourful people and fascinating tales. The city's British colonial heritage is still very much in evidence, but contemporary Victoria has a distinctly Pacific northwest flavour. Today, Victoria is best known as the capital city of British Columbia, and as a world-renowned tourism destination.

The British connection is emphasized by adding "Royal" to a number of names, such as the Royal London Wax Museum and the Royal British Columbia Museum. High tea at the Empress Hotel is a major attraction for Americans, who are often more fascinated by royalty than many Canadians. The British image is

further reinforced by the name British Columbia and by the strong British influences in the province's Euro-Canadian history. The fact that Britain is known for its formal gardens and that Victoria—named for a British queen—carries on the British gardening tradition lends unity to the twin themes of gardens and the British connection.

All of this is based in part on Victoria's possession of particularly favourable natural assets, but these are reinforced by exceptionally well-calculated promotions. Winnipeg does not possess Victoria's wealth of tourism assets, and our nevertheless considerable assets are little-known. There is no reason, however, why we cannot promote our assets with equal skill.

How can we go about promoting ourselves skilfully? It helps to begin by considering what it is that we are trying to "sell." A tourist attraction is a product but it is not a commodity, like bananas or lawnmowers. Rather, it is an experience, and if we wish to advertise Winnipeg as a tourism product, we have to think, as promoters of Victoria obviously have, about how the visitor will experience our city and, once having decided what kind of an experience to promise, we have to deliver.

Many things, commodities included, can be sold as an experience. Noxema skin cream markets cleanliness. Diamonds

are marketed with the highly successful slogan "A diamond is forever." Both themes are blindingly obvious at best and misleading at worst: no one markets dirty skin cleansers and everyone knows that diamonds are extraordinarily durable. We do not recommend that Winnipeg advertise itself with either obvious or misleading slogans, but it is worth reflecting on why Noxema and diamonds have been successfully marketed by association with cleanliness and eternity.

An important part of the appeal of the themes is that they can be taken in different ways. "Clean makeup" can be taken literally, but it can also imply purity, good morals and elevation above the figurative grit and grime of ordinary existence. The statement that a diamond is forever implies high quality, commitment, and its association with marriage brings with it the many resonances of love, romance, youth and beauty. English gardens can be seen as refuges from the hustle and bustle of daily life, as signifying formality and grace, or as natural.

In short, these themes are ambiguous. They mean what each person wants them to mean and are capable of capturing the imagination. Each individual can integrate them into his or her own experience or fantasy life, and, in the hands of each individual, they can mean something different. At the same time,

they can serve as an umbrella for many kinds of promotions, can be used to connect a variety of different specific experiences to a single, evocative phrase.

Again, we do not recommend that Winnipeg adopt the models of skin cleanser and diamonds in promoting itself—and certainly English gardens are a non-starter—but we do argue for a theme that can capture the imagination, signify different experiences to different people and connect with a variety of different specific attractions. We have argued that Winnipeg offers a wide variety of attractions including a colourful history, a richly varied cultural and entertainment scene and the many possibilities associated with its proximity to natural areas.

As we have suggested, “something for everyone” is neither uniquely characteristic of Winnipeg nor capable of capturing the imagination. We believe the choice of a theme should be part of a process that is open to the public, and are therefore not prepared to recommend a specific theme. We have already suggested the possibility that Winnipeg could characterize itself as a “gateway.” Now, in order to give concrete form to our discussion of the creation and implementation of a theme, we will suggest another possibility that we believe could work: Birthplace or Cradle of Western Canada.

Either “birthplace” or “cradle” seems workable, but, for the sake of the discussion, let us pick cradle. “Cradle of West-

ern Canada” has the necessary degree of ambiguity to allow for a variety of applications, to mean different things to different people and to invite each person to imagine his or her own meanings. It can conjure up images of Winnipeg as a comfortable place, a nurturing place, a place of seminal significance, a creative place, and more.

Moreover, it has the inestimable advantage of being neither obvious nor a distortion of the truth, while conveying genuine information about Winnipeg. Much of importance to Western Canada, indeed to all of Canada, began in Winnipeg and much has been created here. The 1919 General Strike was important, not only in its own right, but because it encouraged a commitment to democratic socialist politics that ultimately resulted in the formation of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation—predecessor of the NDP, and the longest-lived and most successful party of the left in North America. Thus it planted the seeds of such distinctly Canadian institutions as medicare, as well as being implicated in the widely-held Canadian belief that we are a caring society.

The Red River Colony was the only place in North America that was settled from the north, and residents of the colony were enjoying performances of Shakespeare when there was wilderness for 1000 kilometres in every direction. In the 1950s, Winnipeg became the home of one of North America’s first regional thea-

tres and today, as we have noted, Winnipeg continues to achieve excellence in many areas of the arts and entertainment.

The Riel rebellion, led by Louis Riel of St Boniface, brought Manitoba into confederation and was also the beginning of a quest on the part of Western Canada, first to free itself from the dominance of Ontario and more recently to achieve increasing control over its own economy while asserting its identity within confederation.

However, although that—and much more that could be said along similar lines—is fascinating to a history buff, it is not self-evident that it has the makings of effective tourism marketing. And in fact the destination marketing literature instructs us that the development of a theme is only the beginning. Once developed, the theme must be supported over and over again. It should manifest itself in souvenirs; packaging; books and videos; decor in hotels, stores and restaurants; wall murals and street decorations. This should be done, not by incessant repetition of the original theme, but by searching imaginatively for ways in which the theme can take on different meanings in the context of the arts, entertainment, architecture, streetscapes, historical landmarks, and the life of Aboriginal, ethnic and language communities.

The various routes likely to be followed by tourists could be named in a way that reflects our theme. Foods could reinforce it, as could greetings at the airport. Promotional literature and brochures should show how each community element connects to the main theme. The imaging should be authentic and accurate, but it should also be enjoyable.

The only limit to the possibilities for such tie-ins is that of the imagination. Yellowknife city buses are decorated with pictures of dog teams driving down each side, as if the bus were a motorized dog team, an appropriate articulation of a theme relevant to the city's image as remote and yet urbane. At the Honolulu Airport⁹ in March 1999, the entrance to the passport control area was decorated with numerous posters entitled "sharing Aloha with the world" with each one a different child's depiction of what that meant.

The more different imaginations and sensibilities are put to work on a common theme the more likely it is that the result will look like a genuine expression of community identity, rather than the usual tacky tourist promotion. For a theme to work, therefore, local residents have to understand it and business people have to support it, and be well-informed about it.

Among Iceland's thematic emphases are its history, especially Viking history, and

its dynamic environment - earthquakes, volcanoes and the sea. On a recent tour, one of the authors¹⁰ found that the five tour guides she encountered were all extremely well versed in their own history. They were also able to tie in, through stories, legends and documented history, the connection between their history and the environment so that often these constituted a single topic, for example the impact of the environment on settlement and on changing modes of travel.

Such effective promotion is possible only if the development and articulation of a theme is a community effort. Local people can be brought into the effort in a variety of ways. Among the methods that could be used are the following:

- Awards for outstandingly appropriate products;
- Close co-ordination between the travel trade and the Winnipeg (or Manitoba) tourism industry;
- Features in the local media;
- Signs on buses, and murals;
- School programs at all levels;
- Training programs in historical interpretation, aimed at people involved in the industry, in both the private and public sectors;

- Courses for seniors;
- Contests for students, and the sponsorship of scholarships for related education programs;
- A special day celebrating some aspect of the theme, with cultural activities relating to the theme;
- Gifts to visitors as part of the package.

These activities would have a twofold objective. In the first place, the more we as a community become educated about and involved in the theme, the more likely we are to persuade others that it is important and interesting. Secondly, widespread understanding of the theme, and of the community lore that is connected with it, can unleash more and more imaginations in developing it further and finding new applications for it.

The ideal outcome would be for the theme to become a natural, unselfconscious element in a wide variety of activities. For example, riverboat tours that focus on historic themes and stop at significant locations; storytellers adapting and elaborating the theme; entertainment events with related themes; interpretative literature; books on the history of the rivers, the fur trade, Aboriginal life, labour, or the transportation industry; whitewater rafting connected with

voyageur history; a fishing or hunting trip with a stay in a tipi included, and so forth.

Winnipeg has a great deal to offer, but it will go unappreciated until we convince ourselves of its excellence and find a way to communicate our conviction. We do not now have that conviction, because we have allowed thoughtless growth boosterism to persuade us of our own inferiority. One way to begin to overcome that sense of inferiority is to take a good look at ourselves, and see for ourselves how much has been accomplished

in Winnipeg and how much of value the accomplishments have produced.

Initiatives such as the ones we suggest will involve just such a look at ourselves. They will also cost money and require that many of us exert a major effort. The payoff would come, not only in business opportunities, but also in a form that is both intangible and far more important: enhanced community self-esteem. It is the hope of the authors that our joint effort will play some small role in helping us to overcome one part of the unhappy legacy of growth boosterism.

APPENDIX A

EVALUATION OF WINNIPEG AND MANITOBA TOURISM PROMOTIONS, SUMMER 1999.

Provincial promotions

Brochures. Information on a variety of attractions (adventure tourism, heritage sites, cultural events) was available in the summer of 1999 at Manitoba's visitor centres, such as the Manitoba Travel Ideas Centre. Taken together, these materials were suggestive of a lot of diligent activity, but little focus. A great deal of information was provided to help anyone who had already decided on Manitoba organize her or his trip. But we found little that seemed likely to provide someone who had not considered Manitoba before with fresh reasons for visiting the city or the province; to offer a hunter, a fisher or a conference-goer a reason for staying a few extra days, or to strike the fancy of a spouse stranded in a conference hotel without anything interesting to do. Following is a brief catalogue of what we found in brochures.

The *Manitoba Adventure Travel Directory* (published by Manitoba Industry, Trade and Tourism) offered indexes of avail-

able adventure travel packages, tours and receptive services in Manitoba. The overriding theme of this publication was the promotion of conventional outdoor activities, of the kind that are available in many parts of North America and the rest of the world, despite a scattering of listings that might be seen as unique to Manitoba, including the Anishinabe Camp and Cultural Tours, Otours and the Brokenhead Historic Ojibway Village.

Since Manitoba's parks are among the province's most important attractions, a great deal of attention had been devoted to their promotion. The *Manitoba Magic Provincial Parks Guide*

(published by Manitoba Natural Resources) described the activities, accommodations, attractions and locations of 17 provincial parks. Additionally, the Guide offered an index of parks with interpretation services, recreation opportunities and general tips for park and campground users. Using a series of activity icons, the Guide alerted travellers to heritage and archaeological sites and museums within the parks listed.

The Parks Reservation Service is an important service for travellers, and Manitoba Natural Resources had published a brief brochure in order to promote it. A toll-free number connected travellers to reservation agents, who could secure spaces in campgrounds, vacation cabins

and group camping areas (Manitoba Natural Resources 1999).

Manitoba Industry, Trade and Tourism had published a more comprehensive guide to accommodations and campgrounds within the province. The *Manitoba Accommodation and Campground Guide* served as a directory to hotels, motels, campgrounds, resorts, farm accommodations and bed and breakfast locations (Manitoba Industry, Trade and Tourism 1999).

The guide contained comprehensive listings of hotels and motels within Winnipeg, as well as those in communities throughout rural Manitoba.

Additional sections of the guide were devoted to drive-to and fly-in resorts and lodges within the province. The amenities, rates, services and facilities available at Manitoba's many campgrounds and waysides were listed. A full index of country vacation farms was provided, with ratings by the Manitoba Country Vacation Association. Comprehensive listings of bed and breakfast establishments acknowledged the growing popularity of this type of accommodation.

In addition to its promotion of the sight-seeing aspects of outdoor tourism, Manitoba

Natural Resources published an annual *Hunting Guide*. This publication offered an overview of general regulatory and

licensing information for hunters, as well as details about vehicular regulations and the possession and transportation of game (Manitoba Natural Resources 1999). Maps of hunting zones and information about seasons for different animals were also provided.

Various organizations and agencies besides the provincial government had also published promotional materials relevant to outdoor tourism, and many of these products were available at Manitoba's visitor centres. Examples were the Trans-Canada Trail Foundation, the Town of Leaf Rapids and The Pas and District Chamber of Commerce.

In addition to the outdoor tourism promotions discussed above, Manitoba's visitor centres also contained a considerable amount of information — some of it produced by the federal government — about the historic sites and museums throughout the province. In partnership with Alberta Lotteries, Canadian Heritage Parks Canada had produced a guide to the national parks and historic sites located along the Yellowhead route. The guide featured a map of the route, which displayed the locations of national parks and historic sites. In addition to descriptions of parks and sites in Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia, the guide offered a brief description of the programs, services and activities available in Manitoba's Riding Mountain National Park.

Similar information was contained in a promotional brochure entitled *Heritage Within Your Reach*, also published by Canadian Heritage Parks Canada. This publication contained many colour photographs from national parks and historic sites around the country, including several Manitoba attractions. However, there was very little printed information included in this brochure.

Canadian Heritage Parks Canada had also published a more comprehensive guide to national parks and historic sites in Manitoba. The *National Parks and Historic Sites Manitoba Vacation Planner* described the services and activities available at seven parks and historic locations. Further, the Planner informed travellers of optimum visiting times, park and site locations, special events and contact information for each attraction.

The Association of Manitoba Museums and Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Citizenship had jointly published an annual guide entitled *Museums in Manitoba*, which divided the province into seven regions and offered descriptions of museums and visitor centres within each area. Importantly, various multicultural attractions, such as Steinbach's Mennonite Heritage Village, Gimli's New Iceland Heritage Museum, and Winnipeg's Ogniwo Polish Museum Society were included in this publication.

Other historical and heritage materials produced by organizations or agencies outside the provincial government and available in tourism information centres in Manitoba dealt with CFB Shilo's Royal Canadian Artillery Museum, Winnipeg's Western Aviation Museum and the historic Dawson Trail region.

A number of other publications worth mentioning were subject to the comments we have made already: They were suggestive of a lot of energetic activity, but they tended to promote the obvious and the generic, rather than those things that are unique to Manitoba. Included are the following:

- *Manitoba Meetings: Convention & Incentive Travel Guide*, published by Manitoba Industry, Trade and Tourism. This publication described Winnipeg's convention facilities and meeting places, accommodations and cultural attractions in order to attract executive travellers. The Guide also outlined executive conveniences in rural settings, such as Brandon, Flin Flon and Portage La Prairie (Manitoba Industry, Trade and Tourism 1999). Various convention resorts (Hecla Provincial Park, the Elkhorn Resort and Conference Centre) and fly-in and drive-to lodges (including Island Lake Lodge, Kississing Lake Lodge and the Falcon Lake Resort Hotel) were mentioned as well. Finally, a selection of incentive travel itineraries was outlined.

- *Refresh Your Spirit*, produced by the Tourism Marketing and Promotions Branch was available in a range of languages, a useful step in the direction of tapping a wider market. However, the content was more of the same: brief descriptions of the attractions in Manitoba's outdoors, agricultural roots and cultural events. The province's fishing facilities and northern attractions were also featured. Additionally, *Refresh Your Spirit* included outlines of seasonal activities, both summer and winter.

- The *Manitoba Explorer's Guide*, produced by Manitoba Industry, Trade and Tourism, divided the province into six tourism regions and devoted a section to each one. Each section contained a map of the region in question and listings of the parks and outdoor attractions, historical sites, cultural attractions and sporting events in the area. Interpretive tours and gambling facilities were also mentioned in each section. Further, the Guide provided travellers with an index of Manitoba's golf courses.

- *Manitoba Spring/Summer/Fall Events Guide* was an annual publication that used a calendar format to index cultural celebrations, music festivals, sporting events and agricultural fairs occurring throughout the province from May to October. Although this Guide did not offer detailed descriptions of listed events, it encompassed a broad spectrum of activities.

The promotions found in Manitoba brochures were all useful, and undoubtedly they were helpful in organizing the tours of people who have already decided to come to Manitoba. But they were also miscellaneous, unconnected to each other, and it seems unlikely that any of them would be sufficient to attract many prospective tourists to decide on Manitoba in preference to other locations. It is our argument that they should be more clearly integrated into wider themes unique to Manitoba.

It is clear that the Manitoba government has made significant efforts in the promotion of the province's many attractions. The intention, clearly, is to make comprehensive information available, and this is a useful part of an overall strategy, but it is no substitute for the development of themes, representing Manitoba's primary sources of attractiveness, and the production of materials designed to emphasize them.

In addition to these travel brochures, tourist promotion for Manitoba has properly been brought to the internet.

Provincial on-line promotions. On-line promotions are an important element in any serious attempt to tap a wider international market, and Travel Manitoba has established an on-line presence. However, when we surveyed the web site in the summer of 1999, most of the promotions offered there resembled

those already discussed: a heavy emphasis on outdoor activities, together with some miscellaneous historical and cultural attractions unconnected to overarching themes: an extensive grab-bag of attractions, without clear identification of the main themes, the principle sources of Manitoba's attractiveness as a tourist destination. However, the on-line promotions do provide information about arts and dining in Winnipeg, an emphasis that is not evident in the brochures. This would fit in well with the arts and entertainment emphasis that we recommend. A summary of the Travel Manitoba site follows.

The table of contents of the web site provided an overview of site highlights, links to information on the Manitoba Tourism Awards, current weather conditions in the province, and a brief listing of Manitoba events. It also included an on-line version of the *Manitoba Explorer's Guide*, which contained a map of Manitoba, information on accommodations, an index of provincial parks, a detailed monthly guide to special events around the province and visitor information.

The "Guide" included a "Hiking & Camping" page, which offered visitors a listing of hiking and camping facilities and activities within the province, access to free copies of the *Manitoba Accommodation and Campground Guide* and links to related web sites. The "Outdoor Adventure" section provided a link to a

comprehensive index of wilderness tours and links to listings of various types of adventure travel packages.

There was also a "Hunting & Fishing" page, which listed links to information on fishing lodges, air charter services, outfitters, the Manitoba Fly Fishers Association, catch and release techniques and the "Manitoba Hunting Guide." The 1999 "Manitoba Golf Guide" enables users to conduct on-line searches for specific courses meeting their personal preferences. An "Urban Parks" page offers links to related sites.

An "Entertainment" page includes links to information on Manitoba's entertainment options, and access to free copies of the printed *Explorer's Guide*. The "Professional Sports" page includes links to various team web sites, listings of sporting events in the province and access to free copies of the *Manitoba Events Guide*. The "Historical Sites" page includes a detailed list of Manitoba's historical sites, while the "Museums and Galleries" page provides visitors with access to museum and gallery links.

A "Performing Arts" page includes access to relevant links, and a brief overview of Manitoba's many performing arts groups (including the Manitoba Chamber Orchestra and Le Cercle Moliere). Access to free copies of the *Manitoba Events Guide* is also provided. The "Fairs and Festivals" page offers an

extensive listing of Manitoba's fairs and festivals, an opportunity to order a free Vacation Kit and links to related sites, including Folklorama and Festival du Voyageur. Another feature is an on-line guide to dining and shopping, which contains information on shopping districts and links to restaurant listings and specialty shops.

All in all, the web site offers some improvement over the brochures. Although not as clearly themed as we recommend, the web site does refer to performing arts and dining in Winnipeg. This could become part of a more thoroughgoing emphasis on Winnipeg arts and entertainment as a major tourism promotion theme, an emphasis that we recommend.

Winnipeg Promotions

Brochures available from Tourism Winnipeg. Tourism Winnipeg drew prospective visitors' attention to an array of attractions, illustrating how much Winnipeg has to offer, but lacking well-articulated themes. Cultural attractions in Winnipeg received more attention from Tourism Winnipeg than they did from Manitoba promotions. The *1999 Winnipeg Visitor's Guide* described the range of cultural events and attractions within the city, revealing the city's appealing diversity.

The Manitoba Theatre Centre, Prairie Theatre Exchange, the Manitoba Opera, the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, the Winnipeg Art Gallery and the Royal

Winnipeg Ballet were briefly described. Also described were Artspace, the Plug In Gallery and the St. Norbert Arts and Cultural Centre.

The *Visitor's Guide* paid attention to Winnipeg's multicultural milieu. The *Guide* divided the city into a series of districts, and described the features of each district. Chinatown's China Gate, the Forks Market and historic site, the St. Boniface Cathedral and the Franco-Manitoban Cultural Centre were among the attractions mentioned. In addition to its descriptions of cultural attractions within Winnipeg, the *Guide* also mentioned those located outside of the city, including Lower Fort Garry and Steinbach's Mennonite Heritage Village.

A brief discussion of the multicultural cuisine available at Winnipeg's many restaurants was another of the *Guide's* important features, and a separate publication, *Tourism Winnipeg's 1999 Taste Restaurant Guide* offered more comprehensive information about the wide variety of restaurants in the city. In addition to its promotion of the city's multicultural dining facilities, this publication called attention to the growing popularity of local produce in Winnipeg's cuisine. The *Guide* listed Winnipeg's restaurants according to their culinary specialties, and also covered comedy clubs and dinner theatres.

Winnipeg's multicultural milieu finds expression, not only in individual differences, but also in the fact that many neighbourhoods have an ethnic identity. In a publication entitled *Welcome to the Neighbourhoods of Winnipeg*, however, it was not Chinatown or St Boniface that were featured. Instead the publication detailed historic, cultural, and culinary attractions, shopping facilities and parks in areas such as the Exchange District, Norwood Grove, Osborne Village, the downtown district and Transcona.

The *Winnipeg Visitor's Guide* described a few of Winnipeg's most prominent festivals, including *Festival du voyageur*, the International Children's Festival, the Folk Festival and the Fringe Festival. A more comprehensive listing of events for part of the year was in *Tourism Winnipeg's Passport Spring and Summer Events Guide*, which used a calendar format to outline Winnipeg's festivals from April to September. This publication divided the city into districts in order to describe the attractions within each one. In addition to the above information, the *Events Guide* offered a toll-free number to facilitate bookings.

Winnipeg attractions were also promoted by a range of organizations and agencies other than Tourism Winnipeg. Many of these were available at visitor centres. A visitor's guide to St. Boniface and the Forks, published by the *Chambre de commerce francophone de Saint-Boniface*,

provided indexes of events, attractions and facilities. Visitor centres also offered other valuable tourism publications, such as *Where Winnipeg* magazine, published by Fanfare Communications Group, the Exchange District Business Improvement Zone's *Shopping, Dining, Entertainment & Accommodation Guide to the Exchange District*, and the Winnipeg Art Gallery's guide to Artwalk '98.

Printed promotional materials for the Winnipeg Art Gallery, the shops of Selkirk Avenue and the Native and Inuit Art Gallery were also available. CraftLink Tours, an organization which offers guided shopping tours of various art and craft galleries around the city, also had printed materials available at Tourism Winnipeg's visitor centre.

In addition to these promotions, attention was devoted to the city's outdoor features. However, this aspect of the city was not promoted as extensively. As in its overview of cultural attractions, the *Tourist Guide* divided Winnipeg into districts in order to describe the city's many outdoor features, such as the Voyageur Canoe Tour at the Forks, the Rotary Prairie Nature Park in Transcona and the Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre. Another publication that described outdoor tourism opportunities within the city was the CityCats Guiding Service, which offered guided fishing expeditions around the city.

Tourism Winnipeg's family activity guide entitled *Kids Play in Winnipeg* sought to enhance Winnipeg's reputation as a centre for family recreation. This publication described the many family-oriented attractions available in the city, including the Forks Market and historic

that was largely absent was the province's Aboriginal roots. Another item conspicuously absent was Winnipeg's rich labour history.

It seems odd that the generic aspect of The Forks is given a great deal of publicity, while the Aboriginal history is acknowledged in a few plaques and otherwise ignored.

site, the Manitoba Children's Museum, the Western Canadian Aviation Museum and the Assiniboine Park Zoo. Recreational facilities, such as Grand Beach,

the Victory Lanes Speedway, Fun Mountain Waterslide Park and the Winnipeg Stadium were also mentioned. Folklorama, the Dragon Boat Festival, Festival du Voyageur and the Winnipeg Folk Festival were among the family-oriented events described in this publication.

These promotions were livelier and more imaginative than the provincial ones, and the attention paid to both the arts and various aspects of Winnipeg's multicultural character did strike some themes that are unique to Winnipeg. It is less encouraging, however, to note that amidst the celebration of our multicultural heritage, the one element

The Forks is at least two things: a site that celebrates the unique history of the Red River Valley and Manitoba — a history that is first and foremost Aboriginal — and a waterfront park that has been developed as a place for shopping and eating. The first of these aspects is unique, the second generic, indeed derivative. Waterfront markets and upscale shopping places that look very much like The Forks can be found in scores of other cities. It seems odd that the generic aspect of The Forks is given a great deal of publicity, while the Aboriginal history is acknowledged in a few plaques and otherwise ignored. Generic attractions are important, because tourists expect them, and The Forks is a good one, but it is the unique ones that give prospective visitors a reason to choose Winnipeg and Manitoba in preference to other locations.

If The Forks is ever properly recognized as a celebration of Aboriginal history — for example through the development of the long-awaited Spirit Island, which is dealt with in the body of the study — another facility could reinforce the recognition of Winnipeg's Aboriginal history. The Neeginan Roundhouse, recently completed, is located in Winnipeg's historic North Main district. The

Roundhouse can become a source of cultural, spiritual and social support for Aboriginal people. The building will be surrounded by Neeginan Park, a space intended to "...reflect the character of Neeginan and the links of the Aboriginal community to nature" (Neeginan Development Corporation). The park will include a ceremonial sweat lodge, a children's playground and a unity monument (Neeginan Development Corporation).

The construction of the Roundhouse and park constitutes the first phase of a long-term project. In future, the Neeginan Development Corporation aims to establish an Aboriginal art gallery, an incubator for economic development, and commercial and youth support complexes (Neeginan Development Corporation). As of summer 1999, no governmentally produced printed information on the topic was available at visitor centres. We hope and expect that this shortcoming will be remedied, or perhaps has been already, but we are not encouraged by the low priority accorded to other potential Aboriginal themes.

A similar silence blankets Winnipeg's rich labour history. The fact that Winnipeg is the site of one of only two major general strikes in the history of North America is bound to interest anyone interested in social history, regardless of whether they are sympathetic to unions. This history has been well-documented, in a form suitable for tourist promotions,

but the opportunity to showcase one of the most unique aspects of Winnipeg's history has been ignored by Tourism Winnipeg.

A brochure entitled *The 1919 Winnipeg General Strike: A Driving and Walking Tour* published by the Manitoba Labour Education Centre, with support from Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, divides Winnipeg's inner city into three areas: "Working-Class Winnipeg," "Crescentwood: Home of the Committee of 1000" and "Central Winnipeg: Scene of Conflict." Within each district, the brochure identifies historical landmarks relevant to the events of the General Strike, including the Ukrainian Labour Temple, the C.P.R. Weston Shops, the Board of Trade Building and the Orange Hall. A background to the Strike and chronology of events are also provided. This publication was not available at visitor centres when the research for this paper was being conducted.

In addition to the Labour Education Centre's efforts to promote the General Strike as a viable tourist attraction, the Victoria Park Committee (a subcommittee of the North Main Task Force) aims to "...re-establish Victoria Park, the site of a number of the key events of the 1919 General Strike." (Victoria Park Committee 1998: 1).

In its *Interim Report*, the committee calls for a new park and plaza, which will showcase a range of displays, objects and performances related to the historic

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location, with an emphasis on labour history (Victoria Park Committee 1998). The “dynamic representation” of the park’s history is to be set off by an “entry portal to the river” and the park is intended to accommodate commercial development in its vicinity. (Victoria Park Committee 1998: 12).

It is elements such as these — that reveal something about what kind of city Winnipeg is, and what sorts of people live here — that are characteristic of this city and unique to it. These are the kinds of things we would be celebrating in our tourist promotions if we were not blinded by the North American growth fixation into seeing ourselves as inferior, if we believed enough in ourselves to appear as we are, instead of trying to legitimize ourselves by imitating others. Appropriate representations of

Manitoba’s Aboriginal history and Winnipeg’s labour history could serve as key elements in the development of tourism themes designed to highlight the community’s uniqueness. They could serve as effective replacements for some of the current promotions that seem to be premised on attempts to imitate attractions available elsewhere.

Winnipeg’s on-line promotions. Like the Tourism Winnipeg brochures, the agency’s web site was lively and busy when we viewed it in 1999, but did less than it could in the development of overarching themes unique to Winnipeg, and failed to promote either Winnipeg’s Aboriginal presence and history, or the city’s labour history. The home page offered a brief description of Winnipeg’s attractions, and links to an “Events” guide, a “Meetings and Conventions” web site, a comprehensive links index and an “Updates” page.

A click at Events took the browser to an “Events and Activities” guide, which connects visitors to indexes of sightseeing, entertainment, outdoor, historical, recreational, family and cultural attractions and activities. The “Great Outdoors” page of the “Events and Activities” guide offered a comprehensive list of outdoor facilities and activities, including the Assiniboine Park, Zoo and pavilion, Fun Mountain Waterslide Park, the Living Prairie Museum and the Winnipeg Goldeyes baseball team.

The “Events and Activities” guide also included a “History/Herstory” page, which listed historic sites and activities available in Winnipeg and the surrounding area, including Upper Fort Garry, the Western Canadian Aviation Museum and the Captain Kennedy Tea House and Museum. A “Culture Vultures” page offered information on many of Winnipeg’s cultural highlights, including the Manitoba Opera, Artspace, the Gas Station Theatre and the Leo Mol Sculpture Garden. A regularly updated “City of Festivals” page provided a month-by-month directory of sporting events, concerts, festivals and exhibitions occurring in Winnipeg.

In order to promote the multicultural range of restaurants in the city, a “Food for the Soul” page enabled users to order free copies of the “Taste Restaurant” guide. A “City Slickers” page offered a detailed list of Winnipeg’s most popular attractions. Historic sites (The Forks), recreational facilities (the McPhillips Street Station), museums (Dalnavert House), cinemas (the Imax Theatre) and outdoor attractions (Assiniboine Park) were included.

Recreational attractions were promoted on the “Winners’ Circle” page, which mentioned a wide range of sports teams and events, including Assiniboia Downs, the Winnipeg Blue Bombers and the University of Winnipeg Wesmen and Lady Wesmen.

The “Kids Play” page provided an overview of family-oriented attractions and events, including the Touch the Universe Science Gallery, the Manitoba Children’s Museum, Fantasy Theatre for Children and the Winnipeg International Children’s Festival.

The link to Tourism Winnipeg’s “Meetings and Conventions” web site, referred to above, publicized Winnipeg’s status as a meeting and convention centre, with listings of available accommodations, services, entertainment, transportation and group activities. The links directory organized the site’s listings into five categories: “Festivals and Attractions,” “Hotels,” “Meetings and Conventions,” “Retail and Restaurants” and “More Information.”

The site is lively, interesting and attractive, but the criticisms offered for Tourism Winnipeg’s printed promotions remain valid here. None of the listings in the *Events and Activities Guide* mentioned the Neeginan project or the history of the labour movement in the Exchange District. Further, none of the pages listed links to information about these attractions. As we will argue, a little less self-deprecation might open the way to a tourism policy that is more attractive yet, and more truly representative of Winnipeg.

More Energy Than Self-esteem

Both the provincial government and Tourism Winnipeg are active and energetic in the promotion of tourism, but marked differences in tone and style were evident. In general, Manitoba promotions had a generic feel and were lacking in originality. Promotion concentrated on obvious items and on attractions that are invariably promoted every-

Tourists will be interested in us to the extent that we show off those things that are unique about us

where: hunting, fishing, camping, parks, golf, conventions, museums, historic sites. Manitoba's tourist promotions, far from focussing on things that are particular to Manitoba communi-

ties, tend to be imitative of the least imaginative tourist promotions for other parts of North America.

Winnipeg promotions were more imaginative, and they reflected a variety of

things that are unique to Winnipeg, including its lively and varied cultural scene, the wide variety of restaurants and its distinctive neighbourhoods. The variety and liveliness of these promotions was encouraging, but they fell short of presenting an unmistakable profile, because they lacked emphasis. They made it clear that Winnipeg can truly claim to have something for everyone, but left the city undefined. In addition, two of the most unique and interesting aspects of Winnipeg were overlooked: its status as a centre of Aboriginal life and history and its labour history.

For both Winnipeg and Manitoba, there is much to be gained by the establishment of an overarching theme or themes, designed to bring out those things that are particular to our communities. Tourists will be interested in us to the extent that we show off those things that are unique about us. They are much less likely to be interested in visiting a place that tries hard to be like every other place.

APPENDIX B

BIOGRAPHIC SKETCHES OF CONTRIBUTORS

Maureen Bundgaard, Supervisor, Tourism and Parks, North Slave Region, Department of Resources, Wildlife and Economic Development, Northwest Territories. A Winnipeg native with wide-ranging knowledge of Winnipeg and Manitoba history and society, Ms Bundgaard has an honours degree from the University of Winnipeg, as well as professional certification in Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Management, Marketing and Sales Management and Cultural Resource Management.

David Burley, Professor and Chair of the Department of History, University of Winnipeg, is a social historian specializing in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Canada, and author of *A Particular Condition in Life*, a social history of the middle class in Brantford, Ontario. His current research, parts of which have been published in *Urban History Review* and *Social History*, is a study of the consequences of inequalities in the built environment for class formation in Winnipeg before the First World War.

Jennifer Fultz is a candidate for the Master of Public Administration at the Universities of Winnipeg and Manitoba. During her undergraduate studies, she

was the recipient of the Gold Medal in Political Science at the University of Winnipeg. Her studies have focussed on urban politics. She intends to complete her studies in 2002, and hopes to be employed in municipal administration.

Willi Kurtz has run for Winnipeg City Council on a Green platform, walked across the USA on a nuclear disarmament march and with his partner Kris started Humboldt's Legacy, North America's oldest ecological department store. Mr Kurtz has a strong understanding of issues of peace, justice, the environment and business.

Christopher Leo, Professor of Political Science, University of Winnipeg; Adjunct Professor of City Planning, University of Manitoba, and Research Associate, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives — Manitoba. Recent articles have been published by the CCPA and others have appeared in the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *Journal of Urban Affairs*, *Urban Affairs Review*, and *World Transport Policy and Practice*.

Grace Stein was Special Projects Coordinator of the West Region Economic Development Corporation and acting Manager of the Manitoba Aboriginal Tourism Association at the time of her collaboration on this project. She was involved in the overall development and organization of aboriginal tourism in Manitoba and had earlier taken part in

the management of Anishinabe Village, winner of the international Ecotourism ToDo! Award for 1997.

Harry Strub, Professor of Psychology, University of Winnipeg and Executive Director, of the Festival of Music and Arts, co-presented by the university and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Dr Strub's most relevant areas of expertise flow from his invaluable service as producer of a variety of public events associated with the University of Winnipeg and his extensive knowledge of the arts community, in Winnipeg and elsewhere.

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Notes

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²This argument is made in more detail in Leo and Brown 2000.

³This argument is made in more detail in Leo and Brown 2000.

⁴Darren Lezubski, Jim Silver and Errol Black. 1999. High and rising: the growth of poverty in Winnipeg. Winnipeg: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 16-17.

⁵John Loxley, "Aboriginal Economic Development in Winnipeg," in Jim Silver, ed, *Solutions*

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⁶Darren Lezubski, Jim Silver and Errol Black, "High and Rising: The Growth of Poverty in Winnipeg," in Jim Silver, ed, *Solutions that Work: Fighting Poverty in Winnipeg*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2000, p. 41.

⁷Our source of experience is co-author Maureen Bundgaard, veteran of numerous courses in tourism and marketing and more than 20 years experience in the field.

⁸<http://www.city.victoria.bc.ca/welcome.htm>, down-loaded 8 November 2000.

For another view of the matter, see Magnusson (1996), who points out that Victoria's "a bit of Olde England" image glosses over other aspects of the city's history, including Victoria's past as a major centre for the distribution of illegal opium. We do not recommend tourism promotions that are based on untrue accounts of history, but the question of which aspects of history to emphasize will be a matter of judgement pitched to each individual case.

⁹Visited by Maureen Bundgaard.

¹⁰Maureen Bundgaard, September 2000.

A CITY THAT DOESN'T APOLOGIZE FOR ITSELF

Rethinking Winnipeg's Tourism Strategies

by

**Christopher Leo
Maureen Bundgaard
David Burley
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