



FONDATION
CANADIENNE POUR LA
REVITALISATION RURALE

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CANADIAN
RURAL REVITALIZATION
FOUNDATION

CRRF/FCRR AGM President's Report November 2023

Dear CRRF Membership,

It started with a subscription to CRRF's newsletter on the recommendation of a colleague – Angela Pollak, a former CRRF board member. She encouraged me to attend the upcoming conference in Nelson, BC. I couldn't go, but continued to check out the newsletter and when I saw the next conference was in Saskatoon, I submitted a paper proposal (about a heritage project in Coronach, Saskatchewan, a town facing the closure of its coal mine and power plant). I showed up, did my presentation, went to presentations, and slowly, excitement grew. These folks were speaking my language and they were talking about things that mattered very much to me – both personally, as a farm girl from southern Sask, and professionally, as a practitioner working for a non-profit in cultural heritage sector. Someone, and I'm pretty sure it was Bill Reimer, or maybe it was Ray Bollman (can I be forgiven for mixing them up? It was my first CRRF conference) leaned over and whispered to me after I made a comment in a Q&A, "you should join the board." I thought about it, talked to a friend and colleague (Verona Thibault, ED of the Saskatchewan Economic Development Alliance) who said, "go for it." And so, nervously, I went to the AGM and put up my hand when they asked if anyone wanted to join the board from the floor. I made a 30 second pitch of some kind and I got in. And the rest is...

It is now five years later and I could never have imagined on that October evening in Saskatoon that I would end up carrying the torch as president of the CRRF board, but here we are! CRRF has become a much bigger part of my life than I could have anticipated when I first joined the board. My affiliation with CRRF even pre-dates knowing my husband, and that's a strange thought, but a true one. CRRF does come with its challenges, but it truly has been my privilege, and an honour, to serve this organization as its president this past year. I had large shoes to fill, and I knew it, so we started the new year off with an orientation that was just as much for me as it was for our new board members. Former CRRF presidents Ryan Gibson, Sarah Breen, Valencia Gaspard, and Sarah Minnes graciously joined us at our first board meeting to get us all up to speed on CRRF's storied origins, its bylaws, and the "absolute musts" of CRRF governance. This got us off to an excellent start and inspired us to tackle those bylaws and update them. At the AGM, members will vote on our proposed amendments to the most recent version of CRRF bylaws from 2016. We consulted the Alberta Companies Act (as CRRF is registered as a non-profit in Alberta) to ensure that we were up-to-date on all required elements, tightened up some language, and removed redundancies.

A major focus of our efforts this year was the conference hosted at the University of Lethbridge by the Prentice Institute was a return to western Canada – the first conference west of Ontario since 2018. We were very pleased to provide funding for four students and emerging professionals to attend. We had more than 80 delegates on site and several more attended virtual sessions. A field trip to Head Smashed In Buffalo Jump, a UNESCO World Heritage site, was a highlight. The food was excellent and as always, the research presented was thought-provoking and essential to understanding the issues facing rural Canada.

In late 2022, CRRF was asked to join the Economic Equity Alliance, a group created by the Canadian Women's Chamber of Commerce with funding from the Department of Women and Gender Equality to bring together organizations from across Canada representing the perspectives of underrepresented and marginalized entrepreneurs and the self-employed. Kathleen Kevaney, a former CRRF president, has continued her service to the organization by representing us in the Economic Equity Alliance. CRRF received a stipend of \$2500 – thank you, Kathleen, for your ongoing participation in this worthy endeavour on CRRF's behalf.

We also provided our support to various funding applications this year, providing letters to the proposed projects: *Moving Forward: Determining the Influence of Place on Public Transit in Rural Canada*; *Accelerating Canada's Pursuit of Sustainable Agriculture in a Net-Zero Economy: Addressing Barriers and Enhancing Opportunities*; *Building Regional Cannabis Trails*, and *Northern Dialogues: Remoteness and Sustainable Livelihoods in Rural and Northern Canada*.

I attended several meetings of the Canadian Rural Collaborative, an informal coalition started by the Rural Development Network which included several organizations across the country interested in rural issues, and joined the governance sub-committee, which has met twice this past year. The group will continue to meet and I encourage CRRF's ongoing participation, with the caveat that we ensure that CRRF's long history of providing a network for scholars *and* practitioners is well understood. There is no need for duplicated efforts in our small and scrappy field!

The fourth edition of the *State of Rural Canada* is well underway with Joelena Leader, a newly minted faculty member at the Edwards School of Business at the University of Saskatchewan at the helm. Kyle Rich, a former CRRF board member, led the charge on a SSHRC Connections grant (*Northern Dialogues: Sustainable Livelihoods and Remoteness and in Northern and Rural Canada*) to support both SORC and the upcoming CRRF conference in Whitehorse. I am pleased to share that the application was successful and, not only that, scored very highly in the competition.

This is CRRF's 10th year of honouring rural champions through Lifetime Memberships. This year we will welcome our newest lifetime member following the AGM and will also recognize all of our lifetime members from the past 10 years – thank you, Ryan Gibson, for doing that work.

As I relinquish my role as president and move on to the ex-officio position as past-president, I am committed to smoothing the transition for our incoming president and ensuring that ongoing and in-process projects continue. This included consolidating our online files to a more efficient and user-friendly system. I also would like to see the implementation of the Strategic Plan CRRF commissioned and developed in 2021. We are planning to return to Brandon in 2025 for a conference and to strengthen our ongoing ties with the Rural Development Institute. We need to increase membership and tie this in with inclusivity efforts. Other priorities identified in the Strategic Plan include fundraising. We can revisit membership fees and categories. I also would like to see strengthened CRRF committees. We are always looking to recruit new volunteers so please put your name forward if you're interested in contribution to CRRF's ongoing efforts to be the champion for rural issues in Canada.

One of the trends we have identified as an issue of concern going forward is, how can CRRF be more inclusive? We discussed this matter at length in Lethbridge and acknowledged that even the name of the



organization can be interpreted as exclusive. This was reiterated by one of the conference presentations, as I noted in this excerpt from my report on the conference:

Niitsitapiisinni and Rural Wellness, [was] a panel curated by four Blackfoot scholars who shared their perspectives on Blackfoot viewpoints and practices related to wellbeing. It was a powerful discussion and one important takeaway for me was the reality that for many Indigenous communities, the reality of “rural” is not always positive. CRRF must take these lessons to heart and consider how we can forge positive and sustainable relationships with First Nations and Indigenous communities.

Overall, this panel was excellent and made us think that in future, we could be uplifting Indigenous experiences in rural Canada by hosting plenary panels at CRRF conferences. I also would like to see CRRF connect better with municipal practitioners. I have witnessed through my own work and heard from many others about the disconnect between research and the municipal policy level. As we well know, municipalities are much more flexible and responsive than provincial and federal governments when it comes to enacting policy changes that really make a difference in the everyday lives of rural Canadians.

I am personally grateful for my time on the CRRF board these past five years. My involvement with CRRF has strengthened my own career through the networks I’ve built and the research I have exposure to through CRRF. It has enriched my life in countless ways; most notably, it has connected me with amazing people across Canada, some of whom I now consider dear friends as well as respected colleagues. I will continue to be a champion of this organization in my new role as past-president. I am eager to work with the new board members and executive. And finally, I look forward to seeing many of you in Whitehorse!

Special thanks to: Sarah Breen; Patrick Brouder; John Dale; Heather Exner-Pirot; Valencia Gaspard; Ryan Gibson; Lars Hallstrom; Stacey Haugen; Kathleen Kevany; Brennan Lowery; Samantha Mark; Sarah Minnes; Diogo Oliveira; Kyle Rich; and Bill Reimer.

Sincerely,



Kristin Catherwood Mantta
President, Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation/ Fondation canadienne pour la revitalisation rurale.
Director of Living Heritage, Heritage Saskatchewan
UNESCO Co-Chair in Living Heritage & Sustainable Livelihoods

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FCCR est une institution de bienfaisance qui s’engage à améliorer la vie des Canadiens des régions

