

### 3

## Garden of the Lord

*Fear and reverence Nature no longer; she is no mystery, for she 'worketh by motion,' and Geometry . . . Geometry can chart these motions. Feel, then, as if you lived in a world which can be measured, weighed, and mastered; and confront it with due audacity.*

—Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*

*The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing . . .*

—Isaiah 35:1–2a

Sometime in the 1890s, Hilda Blake, not yet an adult but now alone, arrived in Manitoba's second largest city, Brandon. The city, in which Robert and Mary Lane already lived, was younger than Blake. As recently as 1880, Brandon's resolutely (and beautifully) Victorian cityscape had been open, though not unoccupied, prairie. For millennia, southwestern Manitoba had been traversed by nomadic Aboriginal peoples. Beginning in the 1730s, fur traders and explorers had travelled the Assiniboine River, and the Hudson's Bay Company had established the trading post Brandon House in the 1790s at the junction of the Souris and Assiniboine (25 miles southeast of Brandon's present location) to compete against the North West Company for the prairie provisions required to carry traders to the Northwest. By the 1830s, buffalo hides and pemmican were the principal commodities