

Book Reviews

permanent record of the pioneer generation's achievements. We may also be sure that the commercial advantages of including a great number of family names in the narrative was well understood by the publishers of the *Daily Republican* when they first issued the sketches.

Childs's essays, in addition, offer an exquisite example of the marriage between local history and boosterism, which Klein notes on occasion when he must point out inflated population figures and other errors born of local pride. In Childs's hands the annals of Dubuque are the story of determined pioneers overcoming the physical adversities of the frontier and of lawless social disorder giving way to "the character of a well-regulated community" (50). In Dubuque the triumph of moral order did not seem so foreordained in the 1830s when the lead mines attracted a contentious, rough population of young males. Claim disputes were settled with guns, and a string of murders required vigilante justice in the form of "Judge Lynch" to substitute for what Childs referred to with certitude as "the law and order that a better civilization has since produced" (23). But as the town grew, Childs confidently recorded, "the moral power of the better class of citizens began to exhibit itself" (50). This was apparent not only in formal mechanisms of law and order but also in the growing presence of religious institutions, schools, and the proliferation of voluntary associations dedicated to such moral reforms as temperance and regulation of the Sabbath. Childs, a local civic booster, rock-boned Republican, and superintendent of schools, revealed a confident nineteenth-century Whiggish cast of mind that saw history as the progress of reform over evil, a process within the power of right-minded people to control for the betterment of the whole society. It is a view of the world that appears naive to the jaundiced modern eye, but it is in this capacity that Childs's sketches transcend their original purpose as a chronicle of local history to serve as fascinating historical documents in their own right.

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The Canadian Prairies: A History, by Gerald Friesen. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984. xv, 524 pp. Notes, illustrations, maps, bibliographical essay, index. \$24.95 cloth.

The people of the Canadian prairies (which, for purposes of scholarship, consist of the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta) possess an unusually well-defined identity and self-consciousness that is based on a powerful sense of grievance. Prior to 1870 the prairies were part of the domain of the Hudson's Bay Com-

pany. In 1870 the newly formed Dominion of Canada annexed the region. Sir John A. Macdonald, the prime minister of the day, did not consult the Indians, Métis (mixed bloods), or white farmers scattered throughout the area. His intention was to govern the prairies as a territory and exploit prairie wealth for the benefit of central Canada. The result was an uprising led by the charismatic Métis leader, Louis Riel. A consequence of the uprising was the premature creation of Manitoba, which initially was only a fraction of its present size. It was a poor province and, unlike all other provinces, was denied control of its public lands and natural resources. The remainder of the area continued as a territory until 1905, when Alberta and Saskatchewan were formed. Like Manitoba, they were not given their public lands and natural resources. In short, the prairie provinces were not constitutionally equal to the other provinces until Ottawa capitulated on the resources issue in 1930.

Prairie leaders bitterly resented Ottawa's retention of their lands and resources, and that resentment became a permanent component of western Canadian political culture. And there was more; during the late 1870s Canada became a high-tariff country. Westerners were convinced that this victimized them because they were forced to sell their wheat in a competitive international market while purchasing their supplies in a protected domestic market. Railway freight rates were also a cause for passion. In the east, where railways were forced to compete with water-based transport, rates were reasonable. The trans-continental lines, however, could charge substantially higher rates in the west, where water transport was of negligible importance. This enraged the prairie farmer.

Developments like these helped mold the prairie mind, while other factors reinforced the west's sense of grievance. The Depression ruined the wheat economy and made the three prairie provinces virtual wards of a more affluent east. More recently the region has felt alienated from the rest of the country because of its routine and substantial political weakness in Ottawa, the federal governments' attempts to keep low the price of western oil used in central Canada, and federal policies relating to bilingualism and biculturalism.

Prairie uniqueness has led to a variety of fascinating developments. Because the region was tightly controlled from Ottawa during its formative period, the Canadian west never had an uncontrolled, moving frontier. The North-West Mounted Police and the Canadian Pacific Railway were in place before the major settlement period began. Ottawa managed, for the most part, to enforce order on the frontier. Political protest spawned a series of movements that were as innovative as they were interesting: the United Farmers of Manitoba

(UFM), the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA), the Progressive party, Social Credit, and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). These were no fly-by-night operations. The UFM came to power in 1922, and its successor governments survived until 1958. The UFA governed Alberta from 1921 to 1935. Alberta had a Social Credit government for thirty-six years, and both Manitoba and Saskatchewan have had extensive periods of government by the CCF (or its successor, the New Democratic party).

It is probably this highly developed sense of identify, self-consciousness, and grievance that has caused Canadian historians (both eastern and western) to devote a disproportionate share of their scholarly energy to the study of the prairies. The result is a vast regional literature, which is easily the richest of Canada's regional literatures. Louis Riel, the western protester with the highest profile, is the most written about of all Canadians. The Métis, freight rates, wheat economy, tariffs, railways, third-party governments, and farmers' organizations have been studied to death. More recently substantial scholarly attention has been devoted to native peoples, the wide variety of ethnic groups that are neither British nor French in origin, and urbanization.

Curiously enough, the one huge gap in prairie historiography has been the lack of a well-written, comprehensive, and scholarly survey of prairie history. Gerald Friesen set himself the task of filling this gap. The result is a brilliant success. Friesen was well qualified for the task. For years he had taught prairie history at the University of Manitoba. He had published a substantial amount on the region and was intimately familiar with the huge body of theses, articles, and books that relate to the prairies. As well, Friesen was familiar with his primary source material: archival collections, newspapers, parliamentary records, poetry, novels, pamphlets, and photographs. *The Canadian Prairies* is a panoramic view of the region's past that synthesizes much of the secondary literature. But it is more than that because much of it is informed by Friesen's own extensive research. As a consequence it is written with a sure confidence: it is also well written. Friesen has a special interest in native history; several fine chapters explain Indian and Métis culture and native peoples' association with the great fur trading firms that dominated the prairies before 1870. The imposition of Canadian control is dealt with sensitively and fairly. The origins, nature, and implications of western grievances and protest movements are given first-rate analyses. The Depression, the wheat economy, and the "new west since 1940" are chronicled in exemplary manner. Friesen has a particularly well-defined talent for vignette biographies, and his

book is studded with excellent descriptions of such key characters as J. S. Woodsworth, William Aberhart, and Peter Lougheed.

If any serious criticism should be leveled against Friesen's book, it relates to balance. The pre-1900 period receives detailed attention, while more recent periods are less well covered. Nonetheless, *The Canadian Prairies* is highly successful and is already widely used in all parts of Canada. The book should be of substantial interest to students of the western portions of the United States. The "medicine line," as nineteenth-century Indians described the Forty-ninth parallel, is a thoroughly arbitrary boundary that imposes different political and constitutional jurisdictions on adjacent territories that are similar in geography and population. Different societies evolved on the two sides of "the line," as the border is often called in the contemporary West. It is fascinating to study these societies in a comparative way. Gerald Friesen's book makes such study much easier and substantially more enjoyable than was hitherto the case.

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The Mythic West in Twentieth-Century America, by Robert G. Athearn. Foreword by Elliot West. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986. xii, 319 pp. Illustrations, map, essays on sources, index. \$25.00 cloth.

The Mythic West in Twentieth-Century America is a posthumous book. Robert G. Athearn died in 1983; Elliot West, in concert with some of Athearn's family and friends, as well as the staff of the University Press of Kansas, completed the manuscript and shepherded it through the publishing process. Withal, West claims in a maudlin foreword, it "is still Robert Athearn's book alone" (xi). That is not true: West wrote one chapter and amended others; somebody else selected the photographs; and so forth. Still, the circumstances are sufficient to mute criticism, amplify praise, and cause reviewers to fret over their verb tenses.

Although Athearn observed that his subject "has no state boundaries, because they are artificial anyway" (9), his widow and Professor West nevertheless succeeded in inflicting them upon the study by limning an "authentic West" (xii) that nowadays begins at Sioux City and ends at the western borders of Idaho, Nevada, and Arizona. The authenticity of the region—in contrast to the pretentiousness of the Midwest and the anomalousness of the Far West (the former tried hard to be part of the real thing, said Athearn, while the latter simply became eastern)—derives largely from the fact that it was the last-settled

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