



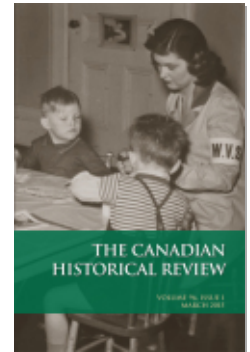
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Saskatchewan: A New History (review)

John Herd Thompson

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priation of landscape, the author misses the opportunity to connect the British hunter to the increasing sophistication and spread of an over-arching environmental imperialism. Indeed, elite American hunters in Eastern Canada during the same period employed much of the same rhetoric. They, too, wrote detailed monographs and mapped out the results of their own explorations and sublime experiences, all illustrated by similar picturesque imagery. By the mid-nineteenth century there was an emerging struggle between British, American, and Canadian sportsmen over the control of hunting territory throughout Canada, and much of it played out in British and provincial courts. Was the British appropriation of Rupert's Land part of that process? What was unique about British activities there? Perhaps a more thorough understanding of the character of British activities might be better revealed with a more detailed account of the relationship between their 'British' values and the animals they chose to hunt, to import, and ultimately to acclimatize in Western Canada.

Although a slim volume, this is a well-argued text that adds novel interpretations of little-used sources and provides a model approach for interdisciplinary research and writing that seamlessly integrates concepts in both cultural and environmental history. As such, this work will interest scholars in a range of fields, including nineteenth-century literature, colonial/imperial studies, and cultural geography, to name only a few. Those working in the nascent field of Canadian environmental history, especially, will find this a rewarding study in the interconnectedness of nature, class, and culture.

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Saskatchewan: A New History. BILL WAISER. Calgary: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2006. Pp. 608, \$49.95

When the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) won power in Saskatchewan in 1944, among its priorities was to make the province's history accessible to popular and scholarly audiences. In 1945 it established the Saskatchewan Archives Board, with offices astutely located both in Regina and on the campus of the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon. In 1948 the Board published the first issue of *Saskatchewan History*. Historical scholarship built on this intellectual infrastructure and continued to receive taxpayer support. In 1955 the provincial Golden Jubilee Committee sponsored *Saskatchewan: The History of a Province*, written by Jim F.C. Wright with the assistance of a team of researchers. For the province's Diamond Jubilee in 1980 the Archives

Board commissioned John H. Archer to create *Saskatchewan: A History*, aided as Wright had been with a research team. Both Wright and Archer worked with complete interpretive independence. Each book in its context was a commendable achievement.

But each volume tells us as much about the Saskatchewan in which it was written as it does about Saskatchewan's past. Wright's heroes were homesteaders. The province's greatest achievement was 'becoming homogenous without . . . compulsion,' despite 'a variegated populace' that was less than half 'Anglo-Saxon.' To Wright in 1955, *variegated* meant Europeans from outside the British Isles; Metis and Indians literally disappeared after page ninety-seven of the 281-page narrative. In 1980 Archer accepted as given a much broader 'concept of multiculturalism' that with 'maturing idealism' could encompass all provincial citizens. But because he wrote while Saskatchewan fought with Ottawa over the division of the spoils of potash and petroleum development, Archer foregrounded contemporary regional conflict and sometimes projected it backwards into history.

Bill Waiser's *Saskatchewan: A New History* shares much with its two predecessors in the blueprint of its creation. Commissioned to mark the province's 2005 centenary, the project had support from the University of Saskatchewan and the provincial government. In a marked departure from Wright and Archer, Waiser also had support from three federal government agencies. Like Wright and Archer, Waiser led a team of researchers, and like them he had complete control of 'how the history of the province was handled.' But Waiser has handled that history much more successfully than Wright or Archer could have imagined. He has crafted a flowing narrative that can enthrall an elusive popular reader and yet synthesizes and cites enough academic scholarship to satisfy a cranky pedant like this reviewer.

Waiser builds his opening chapter, 'The Banner Province,' around 4 September 1905, Inauguration Day for the new province, and uses the ceremony to set Saskatchewan into its Canadian and British Empire contexts. Waiser uses other ceremonies – the 1912 opening of the Legislative Building, the 1927 Diamond Jubilee, the 1939 Royal Tour – equally dexterously to launch or conclude several of his twenty-one chapters. Each chapter title quotes a primary source. Although the subjects of individual chapters aren't at first obvious, Waiser introduces each chapter succinctly and locates the quotation; once a reader figures out his system, it adds further to the pleasure of the book. Because Waiser combines chronological and thematic organization, a half-dozen of his chapters could stand alone as readings for university history classes. As but three examples, 'Dead Cows Hanging,' 'Land

I Can Own,' and 'A Very Nice Fairy Tale' would introduce cattle ranching, homesteading, and the wheat economy more effectively and better than any book chapter or journal article I've yet discovered.

Two of many commendable characteristics of *Saskatchewan: A New History* deserve particular praise. After opening with the creation of the provincial state in 1905, Waiser flashes back to 'Another Country Altogether,' an outstanding chapter on Native peoples in northern Saskatchewan. But Indians and Metis are not confined within individual chapters but instead are integrated into every chapter of the book as full-fledged historical actors. Although their resistance to Euro-Canadian encroachments was too often unsuccessful, Native peoples nonetheless always have agency in Waiser's prose. 'Much like western farmers,' he writes in his chapter on the 1920s, Indians 'turned to political organization to try to reverse decades of mistreatment.' The sentence just quoted notwithstanding, however, Waiser offers little historical comfort to those who probe past Central Canadian injustices to buttress contemporary Western regional grievances. To offer two examples, Frederick Haultain is just an unsuccessful politician, not a tragic prophet of a more powerful West. And although Waiser writes that 'the so-called siege of Ottawa started a protest tradition that is still part of the Canadian way of life,' he adds that 'whether it helped farmers at the time is questionable.'

When Saskatchewan celebrates its 125th anniversary, Bill Waiser's *Saskatchewan: A New History* will be a very difficult act to follow.

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Method and Meaning in Canadian Environmental History. Edited by ALAN MACEACHERN and WILLIAM J. TURKEL. Toronto: Nelson Education, 2009. Pp. 352.

The Archive of Place. WILLIAM J. TURKEL. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007. Pp. 352, \$85.00 cloth, \$32.95 paper

Canadian environmental history, limited in the period between 1970 and 1990 to what Alan MacEachern has called a few 'voices crying out in the wilderness,' has received significant exposure in recent years in a series of compelling monographs, dissertations, and articles in both specialized journals such as *Environmental History* and more broadly focused publications such as this journal. Two recent publications, Alan MacEachern and William J. Turkel's edited collection,