

expanding body of scholarly literature on Indian issues because of its lack of depth and a developed methodology, it is an extremely valuable book for those individuals new to this area. Krotz captures the essence of reserve life and allows the reader to identify with the distinctiveness of Indian cultures and the frustration of Indian peoples as they seek to preserve those cultures. *Indian Country* would be excellent supplementary reading in introductory Native Studies courses.

J. Anthony Long

Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1990.

Sarah Carter's *Lost Harvests* is a timely book on a neglected subject: the history of Indian reserve farming. To date, Canadian Native history has tended to focus on a number of stock questions, including the treaties, the contact process, the fur trade and the Riel Rebellions. Carter, on the other hand, has boldly moved away from these standard subjects to open up a new realm for discussion—one with potential to yield new material, questions and points of view for those interested in Canadian Native history.

Despite its non-traditional subject, *Lost Harvests* is a history researched and written in a traditional historical manner: it is descriptive, chronological and based on standard archival and secondary sources. The book deals, specifically, with the attempts made by the Plains Indians of Treaty 4 to break the prairie soil and begin farming under the Indian agricultural program officially adopted by the federal government in 1878. With the rapid disappearance of prairie game, the Plains people were feeling the acute pressure of hunger and recognized farming as a new potential food base. The idea of a government-managed agricultural program had grown out of the Plains treaties signed a few years earlier. Treaties 4 and 6 contained promises on the part of the Crown to provide the signing Indians with farm implements, livestock and seed. As a result of these promises, the government was technically obligated to provide the Indians with the means to succeed.

Tracing the struggle of the Indian farmers from the 1870s through the 1910s, *Lost Harvests* attacks the established myth that Indian indifference and apathy were the root cause of the failure of their attempts at farming. This book ably demonstrates the contrary. It shows how Indians were willing and enthusiastic, and how it was the government's lack of concern

for Indian welfare, its characterization of Indians as lazy and indolent, and its short-sighted planning that undermined and ultimately caused the failure of all attempts to make Indians successful agriculturalists.

Carter's descriptions of government dealings with Indian agriculture are detailed: *Lost Harvests* discusses the "home farms," the nature of supplying reserves with implements and stock, the effects of the 1885 Rebellion on government attitudes toward Indian agriculture, and comments on many of the personalities involved in the administration of the policy. Valuable also is a (lamentably short) comparison between Indian and Euro-Canadian pioneer farmers, and the contribution of Indian women to farming. In the last chapters of the book Carter outlines how modern mechanized farming bypassed reserve farmers and doomed their attempts to compete with their settler counterparts.

Carter has produced a well researched, illustrated, and extensively documented book. With this work, students of Native history finally have access to a detailed outline of the development of government policy dealing with Indian farmers living on the reserves in the Canadian west. *Lost Harvests* has set a scene where there previously was none. In addition, by focusing on the early years of reserve agriculture, Carter has also created a base for research into twentieth century reserve life. In these ways the book makes an invaluable contribution to Canadian and Native history.

And yet, in the opinion of this reviewer, the book has characteristics that undermine its research conclusions. Firstly, *Lost Harvests* appears to have an unstated agenda of putting the turn-of-the-century federal government on trial for the faltering of prairie Indian reserve agriculture. The charge is negligence. Since the book aims to dispel the myth of Indian responsibility for the farming failure, to reverse the charges and blame the enormous bureaucracy in Ottawa seems initially logical. The arguments in defence of the Indian position are sound and solid, and Carter illustrates in great detail how and why they were unable to succeed.

At the same time, however, there is minimal explanation or investigation into why the federal government failed. Carter provides little historical context for the events she describes, and does not investigate Victorian Canadian attitudes towards concepts of "social welfare," "progress," "economy" or "success." If this had been done, the actions of the Ottawa politicians would have seemed more logical. Excusable is another issue. It could easily have been pointed out, for example, how during the crucial first years of the Indian agricultural program, between 1878 and 1880, the Macdonald government was in an economic straight-jacket, unwilling to spend on ventures not obviously contributing to the nation's "progress," and how that same government looked jealously south,

to America, for definitions of that "progress."¹

Secondly, *Lost Harvests* too easily foists late twentieth-century morality and value judgements onto nineteenth-century events. As a result, instead of gaining insight into the complexity and political nature of the Ottawa-Indian relationship, the reader is simply left with a burning but perhaps shallow indictment of government actions. In this sense, *Lost Harvests* has missed out on one of the challenges of writing history: not to accuse or absolve, but rather to understand the actions of the various parties involved; to create a more meaningful sequence out of old historical details; and to reveal the essential humanity inherent in historic events.

Despite these difficulties, which should not be ignored or catered to, the book is mandatory material for any Native history library. *Lost Harvests* can be commended for bringing together a large amount of important information.

Laurie Meijer-Drees

Notes

- 1 Peter B. Waite, *Canada, 1874-1896* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Ltd., 1971), pp. 55-125.
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