

*Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy*, by Sarah Carter. Montreal, Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993. Pp. 323.

Sarah Carter's *Lost Harvests* raises and addresses a cruel paradox. The purchase of Rupert's Land by the Dominion Government in 1869, and the negotiation of a series of treaties with Plains Indians, beginning in 1871, make it abundantly clear that the Government and indeed the Parliament of the day had no confidence in the Native and Metis peoples holding an expansionist America at bay and securing the prairie territories for British North America.

That objective, they were satisfied, could be achieved only by supplanting the dwindling fur trade with agriculture and replacing the indigenous population with strangers to the region: settlers from eastern Canada, the United States and Europe.

The Plains Indians were dutifully cleared off the land, reassembled on reserves, to be assimilated into "white" society. How? By teaching them how to farm.

The plan failed and Carter carefully mines conventional histories for an explanation. She is not disappointed. Put simply, nomadic hunters and traders do not farmers make. A plausible explanation which, Carter discovered, does not stand up against careful investigation.

Carter does not dispute that the customs and habits of hunting and trading, indeed the religious attitudes of Plains Indians towards the land, did not dispose the aboriginal peoples to converting to agriculture. What she discovered were numerous instances where Plains Indians converted nonetheless, during drought years, in the face of questionable assistance from farm instructors with no dryland farming experience.

And what became of this remarkable breakthrough? It is Carter's contention that the Department of Indian Affairs effectively sabotaged its own policy. The evidence she adduces is persuasive and bound to shatter the self-serving and popular view that Canadians, unlike Americans, were benevolent towards and tolerant of aboriginal peoples.

The success of reserve agriculture was viewed as threatening in two respects. First, it placed Indians in competition with "white" settlers; that is, individuals who were assumed to be politically reliable for national purposes. Second, reserve agriculture tended to be a collective enterprise, offending the proposition that private property alone was the basis for productivity and prosperity.

Indian Affairs set about to ensure that the prophecy was fulfilled. A policy of "severalty" — of breaking up reserve land into individual allotments — was vigorously pursued.

There was more. The senior officers in Indian Affairs were convinced that people of Indian ancestry had to evolve into the occupation of farming;

that the transition from nomadic hunter and trader to modern farmer required passage through a stage known as peasant farming, that is, small operations with rudimentary, hand technology. This in the face of successful, collective farming; this in the face of Indian demands for modern technology. The result? A promising initiative is snuffed out. The Department of Indian Affairs succeeds in creating a dependent clientele. A generation of historians will conceal the treachery.

A first read of the evidence that Carter has meticulously gathered defies belief. One finds oneself racing to the endnotes to check and consider sources. And then it sinks in. The methodical madness of it all. The systematic destruction of an aboriginal attempt to adjust and adapt to new and trying circumstances in their own way, through their own ingenuity.

*Lost Harvests* is more than essential reading for students interested in and concerned about the Canadian Prairies. It is, in addition, a major contribution to a modest literature concerning the usurpation of the commons by private property: in America, in Europe, in Africa. It cuts a wide swath.

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*Co-operatives and Community Development: Economics in Social Perspective*, by Brett Fairbairn, June Bold, Murray Fulton, Lou Hammond Ketilson and Daniel Ish. Saskatoon: Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, University of Saskatchewan, 1991. Pp. 120.

At the simplest level, this book is a plea for co-operatives to play a more committed role in small community development. It is a kind of moral injunction to administrators, board members and ordinary co-op members to revitalize their organizations and thereby save their communities from extinction. As such it should be adopted in western Canadian university faculties of administration as a textbook on better co-op management. It is geocentric and ethnocentric in its appeal.

The argument is couched in the language and thought of economic modelling, contemporary scientific management and even pop ecology (finding a productive "niche"). Charts are used to illustrate such propositions as the superiority of co-operatives over "outside firms" in creating and retaining earnings within communities, ownership and control characteristics of outside firms versus co-operatives, market linkages in local communities comparing export-oriented firms with locally oriented firms, and the "rusty bucket" model of community economic development.

The audience addressed is presumably comfortable with the assumptions and terminology of mainstream academic economics, yet the message of co-operative superiority over competitive and acquisitive individualism promises a different kind of social organization. The explicit assumption of