

Book Reviews

"Other" Voices: Historical Essays on Saskatchewan Women, edited by David De Brou and Aileen Moffatt. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1995. Pp. 166.

Sometimes a map of Saskatchewan can appear dull and predictable: those straight-edged boundaries, all the space between towns, no mountain ranges to add colour. But maps become more intricate and interesting once cartographers add another level of description. The book *"Other" Voices: Historical Essays on Saskatchewan Women* re-maps the historical picture of Saskatchewan, adding women. Editors David De Brou and Aileen Moffatt have brought together a collection of essays on Saskatchewan women that draw upon interviews, oral histories, and autobiographical stories that were not taken into account in previous mapping of the province, and draft new views of Saskatchewan past and present.

The result is an engaging and readable account of some of the experiences of women from a variety of ethnic and economic backgrounds. The editors include essays on farm women, Jewish women, French and Swedish emigrants, well-off members of the IODE, women on relief during the 1930s, recent immigrant women working in domestic service, and Aboriginal women in transit from the bush to the city. The variety of perspectives they present is matched by the variety of sources: the authors of the essays used local histories, reminiscences, clippings, letters, anecdotes, and autobiographical fiction to discover the voices of women not usually heard in historical discussions.

The various approaches of the essayists are set in their context in both the introduction by the editors and in an essay in the issues in historiography by Aileen Moffatt. Moffatt and De Brou justify their work by pointing out the lamentable absence of many women from traditional Saskatchewan histories. Moffatt explains what steps the integration of women into the discussion of Saskatchewan history has taken, and cautions historians not to assume that mentioning the accomplishments of some women accounts for the lives of all women, saying "it is impossible to write a single history for all women because women's experiences, situations and interpretations are various and complex" (p. 25). Each of the writers has taken the task of mapping a little corner of women's experiences, and the result is a more complex analysis of how women's experiences were determined by their gender, but also by their community, ethnicity, class, and religion.

Some insights surprised me. I knew that homesteading women were often lonely, especially if neighbours were far away, but I had not considered the added isolation the French immigrant women would have felt because the people in the neighbouring communities spoke English. Lesley Erickson explains: "Not learning English deprived them of possible contacts with other women and their social circle was limited to the small, isolated French communities, scattered over the province" (p. 45). I was also

surprised to read of the difficulties Jewish women had in always providing food for their families. Anna Feldman notes that because of rules regarding ritual slaughter of animals for food, "[i]n the early days of settlement, the orthodox Jewish family's diet frequently consisted of salted herring and potatoes" (p. 67). These observations fill out for me the picture of daily life for women whose experiences are far removed from mine.

I also appreciated the essays on Aboriginal and recent immigrant women. Miriam McNab discusses the move of Aboriginal women from the bush to the village to the city as being one of increasing opportunity for women. She points out that the women's "optimism and active participation in the process of cultural change contrasts with the reflective remorse felt by many southern Aboriginal people who feel the need to return to their roots and sometimes blame their ancestors for their perceived losses" (p. 143). Jo-Anne Lee writes about the transition to the city of Saskatoon by recent immigrant women, who found the move more difficult than the Aboriginal women McNab interviewed. The women Lee writes about tell their own stories, which "are not stories about forging a new and glorious life in Canada, nor are they about being victims of 'isms': racism, sexism, or classism. ... As personal narratives, these are stories simply told of making a life in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada" (pp. 146-47). The immigrant women's stories are told in their entirety, and are touching in their emotional content.

All sorts of readers will find something to touch them in these accounts. Many people will hear echoes of their mothers' or grandmothers' stories in the life histories of farmers' wives recorded in interviews with Julie Dorsch. *They may see reflections of familiar faces in the photographs at the heart of* the book. Ideally, they will become inspired as historians, amateur or professional, to discover further voices in Saskatchewan history. The map of Saskatchewan history will become ever more diverse and interesting as we listen to the stories told by these "other" voices.

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Alberta's Petroleum Industry and the Conservation Board, by David H. Breen. Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1993. Pp. 800.

Probably the single greatest difference between the province of Alberta and the rest of Canada's prairie provinces is the importance of the petroleum industry to Alberta's economy. David Breen's book, *Alberta's Petroleum Industry and the Conservation Board*, examines the evolution of Alberta's energy policy during the formative years of the industry in that province. It provides a detailed account of the legislative and administrative attempts to bring order to an industry which, left to itself, would certainly have developed in a much different way than it has.