

conducted for his 1976 book, *Imperial Russia in Frontier America*, Gibson was familiar with the Company's relations with Russian America. His familiarity with the relevant sources makes his evaluation of the Company's success particularly convincing.

The importance to this volume of the correspondence, reports, and journals of the Hudson's Bay Company is readily apparent. The quotations liberally sprinkled through the text are well-chosen and apt. Whether eloquent or earthy, as in the discussion of the effects of a steady diet of salmon (pp. 25-26), they invariably advance Gibson's argument in a vivid way. Occasionally the transcriptions are confusing when abbreviations are rendered as unfamiliar words, such as "condons" instead of either "cond<sup>ons</sup>" or "cond[iti]ons" (p. 10), but this is a minor quibble.

The most effective of the thirty tables are also the twenty-three based predominantly on Hudson's Bay Company Archives documentation. Yearly fluctuations in the number of Hudson's Bay Company servants, cultivated acreage, number of livestock, or output of grains can be seen at a glance. It is only in the last two chapters where scattered sources are used, that the tables prove less helpful. In Table 23, data on the American migration via the Oregon Trail for seven years is based on the gleanings from some fifty different sources. There are almost equal numbers of question marks and figures, and five qualifying remarks are necessary. Perhaps a footnoted narrative would have been more effective in such cases.

The major disappointment in the book is the quality of the map reproductions. Poorly focussed and murky, printed on the same paper as the text, they serve little more purpose than to break up the prose. Names and features are very difficult to distinguish. In two cases the maps are spread across two facing pages, with detail disappearing into the gutter. It is embarrassing to see the maps from the Hudson's Bay Company Archives, especially those by Mervyn Vavasour, so poorly represented. Another minor point is Gibson's idiosyncratic citation style. Admittedly, the system used in the Archives and developed in Britain can be confused by the term "dorse," abbreviated to "d," to designate the reverse side of a folio. But there is little advantage in introducing a new system using "v" (presumably for "verso"). The notation "D4/90:195v" would appear to have few benefits over the Archives' version, "D4/90 fo. 195d."

In his "Prologue," Gibson modestly criticizes his own 1968 article on farming in the Pacific Northwest as "too compendious and marred by typographical errors." (p. 227) His latest product can be described as "compendious" in the positive meaning of brief but comprehensive. It is also remarkably free of typographical errors. And beyond its technical merits, the book is well-organized, and well-researched. Aids to the reader include a helpful index, and the excellent bibliography and footnotes.

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**Building Beyond the Homestead: Rural History on the Prairies.** DAVID C. JONES and IAN MACPHERSON, eds. Calgary: The University of Calgary Press, 1985. 235 p. illus. ISBN 0-919813-07-0.

The articles in this volume consist of papers presented at a conference on rural prairie history held at the University of Victoria in February 1984. The theme of the conference,

"The Forgotten Majority," was chosen as a forum for academics who have shifted the focus of agricultural settlement historiography from the broad economic and political context to the nature of rural life itself. Each study in this collection looks at some aspect of that basic prairie institution, the family farm.

Editors David C. Jones and Ian MacPherson have assembled what is, by and large, a very readable and cohesive work. Following a wide and thoughtful overview of prairie historiography by MacPherson, ten articles offer a welcome and at times very personal look at the life and lot of the western Canadian settler/farmer of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and point to the diversity of sources which document that broad subject.

Historical geographers James M. Richtik and John C. Lehr open the volume with complementary pieces which examine the factors involved in site selection for settlers in Manitoba. Richtik takes as his case study settlement of the Pembina Mountains region in the 1870s. From a detailed study of township registers, local histories, and newspapers, he concludes that in the early period the presence of family and friends in new and strange surroundings was of more importance in the location of a homestead than the physical characteristics of the land. Looking at Ukrainian settlement in south-eastern Manitoba between 1896 and 1912, Lehr comes to a similar conclusion. Curiously, however, the Ukrainians enthusiastically chose an area which many contemporaries considered among the worst agricultural land available. In a succinct analysis drawing on Immigration Branch and Department of the Interior papers, he demonstrates that their choice was, in fact, pragmatic. For the new settler with a small amount of capital, land with some trees, bushes, and above all water, provided an excellent source of life's basic requirements in addition to an albeit limited opportunity for planting.

Rudolph Marchildon and Eliane Silverman look at two aspects of women's role in prairie society, namely the formal attempts to improve their quality of life and marriage. Marchildon directs his attention at the efforts of the women's section of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association. He provides a revealing glimpse of the often arduous burden placed on the farm woman, a plight compounded by the serious shortage of labour during the First World War. Though the Association was unsuccessful in its campaign to increase the supply of domestic help, Marchildon concludes that in other important ways, such as improved medical care and the establishment of libraries and community halls, a very positive contribution was made.

Silverman takes the quality of life issue one step further. Focussing on the women who came to Alberta between 1900 and 1930, she explores their own perceptions of marriage at that time. In the process, she tests an assumption found in some settlement studies that popularized notions about the "ideal" marriage, in particular, the ideology of the weak and leisured "true" woman, were transported from civilization to the frontier. Based on material from 130 interviews, she suggests that the typical farm marriage, at least from the woman's point of view, was quite simply "a working partnership, designed for survival, productivity and reproduction," with an emphasis on the economic nature of the relationship. Many of the couples who came to Alberta were foreign born, poor, and not well educated and it is therefore perhaps not surprising that the "ideal" marriage of literature would have been a strange concept to them indeed. Well practised in interviewing pioneers, Silverman is fully aware of the limitations involved and addresses the problems of interpretation, memory, and ambiguity of meaning. Accordingly, she presents her

findings as “speculative” and “tentative.” Given that the portrait drawn here is based as much on what people did not speak about as what they did and also the way in which they discussed some very personal memories, such qualifications are perhaps necessary. Still, in an exercise which of necessity involves “teasing out meanings” from the data, the author seems to have discovered a certain consistency of experience. The view of prairie marriages to emerge, if somewhat unromantic, has a distinct ring of truth to it.

In an excellent article on the Junior Red Cross movement in Saskatchewan, Nancy Sheehan traces the remarkable efforts of that organization following the First World War in improving the quality of life for young people. Through an examination of Department of Education records with the Saskatchewan Archives Board and Red Cross papers at the Canadian Red Cross Library in Toronto, Sheehan ably documents the work which the organization accomplished, notably through specialized clinics designed to serve remote areas of the province. She suggests that by the mid-1920s, Saskatchewan’s rural health care and education were far ahead of any other province.

Three articles explore different aspects of farm labour. Joseph Cherwinski offers a thought-provoking piece on the often unsatisfactory relationship between the farm hand and the farm family. Ernest B. Ingles presents a delightfully descriptive account of the sometimes profitable but always potentially hazardous life of the itinerant custom thresherman. Cecelia Danysk analyses the variety of reasons why formal organization of farm workers was either impractical or unwanted.

In what is perhaps the best documented article in the collection, Paul Voisey investigates the riddle posed by farmers in the Vulcan area who chose wheat farming over mixed farming in spite of a large and vociferous lobby proclaiming the advantages of diversification. Research in agricultural society papers, local newspapers, and privately held memoirs, suggests the answer lies in what Voisey calls the “stark contrast between belief and behavior.” Although many farmers, especially those from Europe, were used to having livestock and a variety of crops, the special conditions of the Vulcan area, from the amount of rainfall to the system of marketing, simply did not lend themselves to accepting the conventional wisdom.

Not least among the many vicissitudes with which farmers had to contend, was a not always happy relationship with banks and mortgage companies. In the concluding article by co-editor David C. Jones, that relationship is viewed against the backdrop of the little studied agricultural disaster which visited the drybelt of Alberta and Saskatchewan between 1917 and 1926. Through an analysis of bank account records, commission findings, and newspaper accounts, Jones offers an alternative perspective to the widespread contemporary belief that financial institutions had ruthlessly and unfairly ended credit when calamity hit the farmers. In reality, their own position was often every bit as shaky as the farmers’. Many, as products of an earlier boom time mentality, had simply accumulated too great a volume of what turned out to be unrecoverable loans and when the crisis came, went under almost as quickly as those they had once generously financed.

Overall, *Building Beyond the Homestead* is a very satisfying and even stimulating volume. The variety of approaches and diversity of sources suggest that there is no reluctance, at least among these academics, to be bold in their exploration of the “new” prairie perspective. It is hoped that such enthusiasm will be contagious, and that other historians

will eagerly develop and refine our understanding of life in and around the fields and farmhouses of the settlement period.

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**Back the Attack! Canadian Women During the Second World War — At Home and Abroad.** JEAN BRUCE. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1985. 182 p. illus. ISBN 007715-9682-0 \$29.95.

War today carries such connotations of terrible destruction and appalling lingering aftermath that it is salutary to be reminded that this was not always so. In *Back the Attack!*, Jean Bruce reviews Canadian women's experience during the Second World War and the chief themes to emerge are the welcome and unexpected opportunities for work after the Depression, the widening of social boundaries caused by wartime mobility, and the triumphant discovery of previously unsuspected personal resources in women who responded enthusiastically to the challenges of the war. By means of photographs, oral interviews, and contemporary documents, the author conveys the flavour of the period. The anecdotes her subjects relate cover women's lives on the home front, in the factories, in the service industries, in nursing, in the first para-military organizations, and of course in the Services themselves. They remind the reader of how much women had to cope with and how far they were moving from the traditional concept of their role: "Areas which had been completely male, like the furnace room, like the hot water tank, like the garage, all became my domain, my responsibility." (Winnipeg p. 17)

In the factory: "I was paid less than the men. In fact I was supervising young men who earned more than I did. I wrote the Board (of a munitions plant) to complain and when the reply came back, it said this was a woman's burden!" (Toronto p. 59) In the Services: "I belonged to the Alberta Women's Service Corps for nearly a year, drilling and training. There were many smiles and snide laughter." (Calgary p. 28) These verbatim extracts from interviews serve in a way as a corrective to the photographs, many of which because of their original propaganda purposes emphasize the jollity rather than the struggle of the war effort. This is not to denigrate the excellent selection culled from a wide range of archives which illuminates women's activities in general, but as Jean Bruce herself explains, there are important caveats to bear in mind. Many of the photographs clearly demonstrate their propaganda content in, for example, the carefully posed smiles of the potential recruit and her interviewers in the Canadian Women's Army Corps recruiting booth (p. 36) or the intensity of concentration assumed by two aerial photographers studying a map before a training flight at Rockcliffe Air Station, Ottawa (p. 83), or the sheer glamour of the frilly costumes of the "W Debs," entertainers of the Royal Canadian Air Force, Women's Division. (p. 91)

Overall however, the photographs evoke a mass of historical detail in a succinct form and it is this which makes them such a valuable and attractive record. It would have been worthwhile perhaps to explore something of the organization behind the taking of photographs in wartime and to know whether photographers were professionals carrying on for the duration with official blessing or, as was the case in Britain, a mixture of official and non-official photographers. In Britain's record of the home front, the former produced consistently better work and, as there are qualitative differences apparent in Jean Bruce's selection, it would be interesting to know if similar organization prevailed.