2010

Book Review of *Perspectives of Saskatchewan* edited by Jene M. Porter

J. William Brennan

*University of Regina*

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Intended to mark the centennial of Saskatchewan’s becoming a province in 1905, this collection of 18 essays has only just been published. Has it been worth the wait?

A few essays stand out, either because they explore previously ignored aspects of the province’history, or because they offer a fresh look at subjects we thought we already knew a great deal about. I would place Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond’s and Christine de Clercy’s contributions in the first category, and Brett Fairbairn’s in the second.

Turpel-Lafond discusses the challenges that Aboriginal people have faced in Saskatchewan over the past 100 years by focusing on the history of her own Muskeg Lake Cree Nation, located just north of Saskatoon. In undertaking a detailed scholarly study of a single First Nations community, Turpel-Lafond has provided a model for others to follow.

Christine de Clercy’s “Women’s Legislative and Political Participation in Saskatchewan, 1905 to 2005” deals
with another little-explored aspect of Saskatchewan’s past. Although it was the second province to give women the vote (in 1916), she concludes that Saskatchewan’s unique political culture (its fondness for social democratic parties) has not translated into unusually high numbers of women sitting in the legislature. Rather, “the political experience of Saskatchewan women in the last century has been very similar to that of women in the other provinces.”

Brett Fairbairn casts fresh light on the worst decade in Saskatchewan’s history: the 1930s. Although usually remembered as a time of very low wheat prices and withering drought, Fairbairn points out that it also proved to be a period of significant economic innovation. In 1934 a small group of southern Saskatchewan farmers established a cooperatively owned oil refinery, the forerunner of the heavy oil upgrader and refinery complex that Federated Co-operatives Limited now operates in Regina. And in 1937 Saskatchewan’s first credit unions were established. (Today, as Fairbairn indicates, half the residents of the province belong to one.)

Other topics discussed in this collection include the province’s changing demographics; the evolution of agriculture and the rural economy over the past century; the University of Saskatchewan’s contributions to the province; landscape painting and abstract art; and the legacy of Saskatchewan writers from Sinclair Ross, Eli Mandel, and W.O. Mitchell to Sharon Butala and Guy Vanderhaeghe.

I have only one minor quibble: one of the authors asserts that “under a charismatic leader, Tommy Douglas, the CCF [Co-operative Commonwealth Federation] came close to defeating the Patterson [Liberal] government in 1938. . . .” Charismatic Douglas certainly was, but in 1938 he was still a freshman Member of Parliament in Ottawa. He would not become the leader of the CCF until 1942, or lead it to victory until 1944. Someone should have caught this. **J. William Brennan, Department of History, University of Regina.**