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## Review of Farmers "Making Good": The Development of Abernethy District, Saskatchewan, 1880-1920

Thomas K. Baldwin D. Isern  
*Emporia State University*

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by Lyle Dick, a historian at its Winnipeg offices. *Farmers "Making Good"* is local history of a high order, incorporating the best scholarship, rising to broadly regional significance.

Dick questions whether in the grain-growing reaches of Saskatchewan individual initiative was the only, or even the main, factor in agricultural success or failure. He discovers that the Ontarian settlers of Abernethy gained significant advantage over later comers, such as the Germans of Neudorf, by arriving early and seizing the better lands near the railroad. Disparities only increased during the early twentieth century, as those with the best lands enjoyed their capital gains and profited most from good prices for wheat. Dick populates the Canadian prairies of this study with a class-riven, stratified society. Its ethos enshrined individual enterprise, Calvinist protestantism, and Anglo-Saxon dominance.

Dick's method is to approach any particular topic (say, farm-making costs for homesteaders) by drawing on extant scholarly literature (Robert E. Ankli's work on such costs, in this case), comparing previous findings to his for Abernethy, and applying, modifying, or rejecting the standard wisdom (which means scaling down Ankli's estimates considerably). This does not make exciting reading, but it is surely craftsmanlike.

Later portions of the work interpret the role of Motherwell and like agrarian activists in the early twentieth century. Dick avoids branding them as either radical or reactionary, but rather explains their actions according to their ambivalent place in the economic order—neither capitalist nor laborer—producing recurrent agitation.

This essentially economic interpretation is indicative of the mainstream Canadian line of thought the book represents. Unlike American historians of the Plains, who emphasize cultural and environmental interpretations of the region; and unlike Paul Voisey (author of a recent community study entitled *Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community*), who breaks new ground with an inductive approach; Dick, however revisionist his answers may seem, defines the

*Farmers "Making Good": The Development of Abernethy District, Saskatchewan, 1880-1920.* By Lyle Dick. Studies in Archeology, Architecture and History. Ottawa: Canadian Parks Service Research Publications, 1989. Preface, appendix, notes, bibliography. 259 pp. \$17.40 Can.

Incidental to interpretation of the W. R. Motherwell home, in Saskatchewan, Canada Parks Service presents the community of regional historians with this excellent monograph

questions traditionally. Old-time political economy still is the engine of western Canadian historiography.

THOMAS D. ISERN  
Division of Social Sciences  
Emporia State University