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Review of From the Prairies With Hope and My Dear Maggie: Letters from a Western Manitoba Pioneer

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Faber, Becky, "Review of From the Prairies With Hope and My Dear Maggie: Letters from a Western Manitoba Pioneer" (1994). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 864.

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From the Prairies With Hope. By Jane L. Aber-
son. Edited by Robert E. VanderVennen. In-
troduced by Mark Boekelman. Regina:
Canadian Plains Research Center, 1991. Il-
lustrations, preface, introduction. xxxiv + 177
pp. \$18.00.

*My Dear Maggie: Letters from a Western Mani-
toba Pioneer.* By William Wallace. Edited by
Kenneth S. Coates and William R. Morrison.
Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center,
1991. Illustrations, introduction, epilogue. xx
+ 245 pp. \$18.00.

The frontier of Canada became the new
home for many Europeans who believed that
they could improve their lives by leaving their

homelands. Two such moves to the prairies of Manitoba are chronicled in Aberson's and Wallace's books, both collections of personal reflections on their lives on Manitoba farms.

My Dear Maggie is a collection of letters from William Wallace to his sister Maggie, detailing the life William, his brother Andrew, and his father Peter built on their Manitoba farm after leaving Maggie behind in Scotland in 1881. About every two weeks William wrote a detailed letter to his sister telling of their efforts to establish a successful farm and productive life. The letters begin in March of 1881 on the S.S. *Prussia*, telling of their trip from Glasgow, and continue through January, 1886, giving all kinds of facts about what the Wallace family endured to be able to make a reasonable living from their farm.

From the Prairies With Hope is a collection of articles written by Jane Aberson in rural Dauphin, Manitoba, which were printed in her native Netherlands in the Dutch weekly *Het Nieuwsblad van het Noorden* to appease the curiosity of those Dutch who were anxious to know about the life, especially the agricultural life, of Canada. During the seven years of these columns, 1929 to 1936, Aberson relates the steps she, her husband, and their three sons take in adjusting to the life of hard work and natural joy in building their farm.

Both books contain first-person accounts of a frontier life that is difficult, a life that none of these people were completely prepared for. Readers realize the extremes in Manitoba weather and how prairie life depended on its whims. Facts about farming, farm prices, prices of goods, basic household chores, meager educational and religious facilities, neighborhood ethnicities, and the simple social contacts that enabled them to survive difficult daily lives are covered in each book, bringing the reader into the realities of each writer's life. Each book contains a few photographs of the writers and their families, helping to bring the book to life.

These books flow smoothly, as if the reader is actually in conversation with the writer, hearing tales of hard times, perseverance, and

reward, proving that fact can be every bit as entertaining as fiction.

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