

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

1996

Review of *O Little Town: Remembering Life in a Prairie Village* By Harlo L. Jones

Sharon Butala

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Butala, Sharon, "Review of *O Little Town: Remembering Life in a Prairie Village* By Harlo L. Jones" (1996). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1111.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/1111>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

○ *Little Town: Remembering Life in a Prairie Village*. By Harlo L. Jones. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1995. Photographs. xxvii + 236 pp. \$17.50 paper.

Harlo Jones, the last of four children, was born in 1923 in Dinsmore, Saskatchewan (population at the time under 200), ten years after his parents moved from Nebraska to this prairie village. Here, after four years of farming and contract land-breaking, his father became an important, if not wealthy, businessman, whose enterprises varied from electrifying the town to selling hardware and cars, to becoming a mortician. Seventeen years later, in 1940, having spent his entire childhood in Dinsmore, the author left for university. It is those seventeen years, with some harking back as far as the town's founding in 1913 and forward to after World War II, that are the subject of this book.

○ *Little Town* is organized in an unexpected way, in chapters titled "The Homes," "Nature," "School," and "Church," instead of by the child's progress through life in the town, or through the family's vicissitudes in it, or any other people-centered arrangement. Thus, the book becomes an exhaustive catalogue of the daily texture of life, enlivened by the occasional anecdote, with only a few details about Jones's family members mentioned at rare points in the manuscript. (His sister virtually disappears.) If I missed, and I did, the story of his family with the town as background, Jones has made it clear that this was never his intention, which he states was to answer his

grandchildren's questions about life in "the olden-days."

As a result, the book has a truly amazing, vast collection of details about every aspect of such a childhood: the games, such as "Antey, Antey I-Over," "Run Sheep Run," "Pom-Pom Pull-Away," "Hide and Seek," and what the rules were; kinds of ice skates the children wore, when they changed styles, what their attitudes were to each; building materials and methods; fires in the town and what they meant to the children. What a labor of love it must have been to gather all this and shape it with such clarity.

The author writes about the life of boys, with only occasional, passing references to girls and their activities, however. It's interesting to contemplate a book exactly the same, but written by a woman. Moreover, the volume also omits, for the most part, the *angst* of childhood, and the nasty side I remember from a small town childhood: the relentless baiting of a Down's Syndrome girl, the beating of children, the teasing of poor youngsters by those better off, the prejudice against any Native people (although he does mention prejudice against the Chinese cafe-owner).

○ *Little Town* is competently written in clear, concise prose which, despite some masterful description, on the whole doesn't quite reach the level of art. All of this makes for many of us a pleasant, undemanding read, but for others—historians, people of the future, and those who remember with fondness and nostalgia their childhoods in small town North America of the first half of this century—it is something much more: a valuable document of a—by this rendering, anyway—sweeter time, forever lost.

SHARON BUTALA
Eastend, Saskatchewan