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## Review of *The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan: A Living Legacy*

Patrick Brennan

*University of Calgary*

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*The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan: A Living Legacy.* Regina, SK: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 2005. xx + 1,071 pp. Maps, photographs, figures, tables, appendixes, index. \$125.00.

Saskatchewan celebrated its centennial as a Canadian province in 2005, and the *Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan* resulted from the admirable desire to make a lasting commemoration of that milestone. When one considers that the project had a tortured history of chronic underfunding, and, as a result, failed to engage many in the scholarly community, the final product, flawed though it might be, is still a remarkable success.

The goal of the *Encyclopedia*, publisher David Gauthier informs readers in an introductory preamble, was to create "a substantial memorial to the people of Saskatchewan that highlights their achievements and provide a comprehensive synthesis of the people, places and events that have helped to shape the province." The resultant reference work contains over 2,000 entries and more than 1,000 photographs in just under 1,100 pages of text. Twenty-one "theme essays" written by "noted experts" (a questionable claim in some instances) provide an overview of such broad topics as aboriginal peoples, women, arts and culture, labor, and science and technology.

The individual entries indeed offer a potpourri for the inquisitive—from the Autonomy Bills of 1905 and the Avalokitesvara Buddhist Temple Society to the Trans-Hudson Orogen

(the geological remains of a 1.8 billion-year-old mountain range) and Treaty 6. In a project of such magnitude compressed into a single volume, it is no wonder some entries one might have expected to see had to be left out and others reduced in scale. Those were difficult editorial decisions. But the readily apparent inconsistency in the selection of topics covered is disturbing.

A survey of the military history entries, a subject with which the reviewer happens to be especially familiar, shows glaring absences (three of the four Saskatchewan-based battalions serving in France with the Canadian Corps have entries, but the 1st Canadian Mounted Rifles does not). On the other hand, numerous post-World War II militia units, frankly obscure subjects all, have been included individually when a short general piece on the contemporary militia would have more than sufficed. Overall, the military history component of the *Encyclopedia* is replete with incomplete research and weak analysis as well as numerous irritating factual errors and inadequate suggestions for further reading. The South Saskatchewan Regiment didn't land on D-Day as the World War II entry claims, and General A. G. L. McNaughton was forced to resign in 1943 because of his manifest incompetence to command the First Canadian Army, not because of "political difficulties." It should be pointed out that the reviewer turned down an offer to participate in assembling this part of the encyclopedia, though he did provide considerable guidance, some of which actually appears to have been followed. Simply put, there doesn't seem to have been anyone knowledgeable in the field to edit the work.

Of course, military history is a minor component of the encyclopedia, and rightfully so, but unfortunately the problems highlighted there appear elsewhere in a book in which the scholarly quality fluctuates dramatically from the superb to the amateurish. Apart from this, there are also irritating tendencies toward "presentism" and "localism" throughout the text. The latter makes parts of the encyclopedia read like a contemporary tourist guide boost-

ing the attractions of each and every locale, no matter how obscure. Why is the tiny community of Scott, where nothing of interest appears to have happened, included? Or the Saskatchewan Turkey Producers' Marketing Board? Or a space shuttle experiment? As for the former tendency, there are simply too many individuals whose entries are frozen in midcareer and not likely, in this reviewer's opinion, to make a contribution ultimately worthy of inclusion, including a host of recently retired (or defeated) New Democratic Party politicians.

It needs to be remembered, however, that the principal users of the *Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan* will be the general public and students, and the deficiencies outlined will be less apparent and certainly matter less to them. In fact, the *Encyclopedia* provides a wealth of information, the great majority of it apparently accurate, on an extraordinarily broad range of subjects extending, as they should in such a reference work, well beyond history. The publishers are also to be commended for the lavish use of illustrations, maps, and charts, many in color, which bring the subject matter to life and make it more understandable. Finally, the logical organization of the material, supplemented with an excellent index, makes the information readily accessible.

Against long odds, a dedicated band brought the *Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan* to fruition. Those responsible deserve credit. Yes, it would have been preferable if a greater proportion of the contributors had had more knowledge to match their evident enthusiasm, and sadly the end result is too often weakened by this misfortune. But despite its flaws, the *Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan* is a reference which all of those interested in the province and its people will find useful.

PATRICK H. BRENNAN  
Department of History  
University of Calgary