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**Review of *A Harvest Yet to Reap: A History of Prairie Women*  
Researched and compiled by Linda Rasmussen, Lorna  
Rasmussen, Candace Savage, and Anne wheeler**

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*A Harvest Yet to Reap: A History of Prairie Women.* Researched and compiled by Linda Rasmussen, Lorna Rasmussen, Candace Savage, and Anne Wheeler. Toronto: Women's Press, 1981. Distributed by the University of Nebraska Press. Illustrations, bibliography, index. 240 pp. \$12.50, paper.

This striking collection of quotes by and pictures of Canadian prairie women resulted from several years of research by two of the authors for their film on pioneer women, *Great Grand Mother*. When that project successfully terminated, Anne Wheeler and Lorna Rasmussen faced the prospect of seeing a myriad of unused photographs, diaries, and other documents return to oblivion. Instead, they joined with Linda Rasmussen and Candace Savage to arrange a selection of these sources in one volume.

The result of their labors is a valuable,

graphic view of the experiences of white women on the Canadian prairies between the 1890s and the 1920s. But while the compilers demonstrate a certain deftness in selecting and arranging the materials, they fall prey to generalization and superficiality in their brief attempts to analyze them. Their own sympathies for prairie women, combined with an apparent lack of utilization of recent scholarly work on frontierswomen, interferes with a sense of balance in their overall approach.

As a result, the image they present is one of hard-pressed prairie women, the type to whom one wants to apply the word "plight." While it would be inaccurate to claim that prairie women did *not* face difficult life situations, it is equally inaccurate to present their lives as highly unusual in difficulty. Prairie men, for example, also endured hard times; "advantages" they had over their women such as mobility and land ownership were accompanied by their own problems and responsibilities. And women in other locales also struggled against harsh conditions. Women factory workers, immigrant women toiling as pieceworkers in urban slums, rural southern women, and black slave women bore equal or greater burdens than prairie women without any of the hopes for the future that western settlement seemed to offer.

Many of the trials that the authors lament as the lot of prairie women were in reality the lot of women in general. Inequalities in the marriage relationship, woes of childbirth, inferior education, and lack of economic opportunity faced women everywhere. Their view also overlooks the value attached to women's domestic manufacture in western regions and the not infrequent expressions of joy at conquering challenges that appear in the quotations and photos.

The history of prairie women is only further obscured by unsupported statements that they complied with the back-home movement after World War I "because the percentage of prairie women described as gainfully employed was very nearly the same in 1921 as it had been 10 years before" (p. 89) or that "because western settlement began in Manitoba, the women's

movement did too" (p. 174). Without these cursory attempts at "explanation," the book would have been a *coup*; as it stands, however, it is somewhat flawed.

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