

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

Fall 1985

Review of *Prairie Fire: The 1885 North-West Rebellion* By Bob Beal and Rod Macleod

George Woodcock
Vancouver, Canada

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



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

Woodcock, George, "Review of *Prairie Fire: The 1885 North-West Rebellion* By Bob Beal and Rod Macleod" (1985). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1837.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/1837>

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.

BOOK REVIEWS

Prairie Fire: The 1885 North-West Rebellion. By Bob Beal and Rod Macleod. Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1984. Maps, illustrations, photographs, notes bibliography, index. 384 pp. \$19.95.

The North-West Rebellion is one of those events in Canadian history about which much has been written without the mass of available information having been put together in a single comprehensive account. There have been narratives of participants on both sides in the rebellion and biographies of leading figures like Louis Riel and Gabriel Dumont, Poundmaker and Big Bear. The causes of the rebellion have been established in regional histories like George F. Stanley's *The Birth of Western Canada*, and the military aspects of the incident have been described in books like Desmond Morton's *The Last War Drums*. At last, in *Prairie Fire*, Bob Beal and Rod Macleod have attempted what the publisher describes as "the definitive book."

Prairie Fire is not quite that; it is a good general introduction to the rebellion which will save readers from checking separate works to get a broad view of the rebellion and some sense of why it happened and how it was fought. Clearly the intent of the authors—a prairie journalist and an academic historian—was to combine their approaches in a book that would be widely readable and at the same time academically respectable.

They have succeeded in the first aim, producing a fluent book that draws together the many threads of the rebellion—Métis and Indian—in a clear sequence of events. They are less searching when they discuss the extent to which the rebellion was provoked by the devious workings of Canadian politics. But on the second level they have produced almost nothing unfamiliar to anyone schooled in

Rebellion literature and they have neglected some important source material. Their bibliography is startlingly incomplete and a number of important works are missing, including Norma Sluman's excellent biography of Poundmaker. Their map-making is at times misleading; in one sketch the settlement of St. Laurent appears on the east bank of the South Saskatchewan, whereas it stood on the west bank; the settlement on the east bank was, of course, Batoche.

Prairie Fire is a good book for beginners. Anyone needing deeper insight and comprehensive information should study the biographies, personal narratives, regional histories, and collections of contemporary newspaper accounts like N. and M. Mitka's *The Riel Rebellion, 1885*, which Beal and Macleod do not even mention. The "definitive book," which should supersede all others, we still await.

GEORGE WOODCOCK
Vancouver