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## Review of *The Methodist Church on the Prairies, 1896- 1914* By George Emery

Sandra Beardsall

*St. Andrew's College, Saskatoon*

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*The Methodist Church on the Prairies, 1896-1914.* By George Emery. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001. Photographs, tables, maps, notes, bibliography, index. xxi + 259 pp. \$55.00.

Mission efforts in Canada's midwest played a major part in the development of both the mainline Protestant churches and the young Canadian nation itself. It was on the prairies that Protestants cut their teeth on the interdenominational cooperation that would eventually create Canada's largest Protestant church, The United Church of Canada. And it was in the multifarious ethnic stew of the Canadian Plains that the churches attempted most zealously to forge "Christian Canadian citizens" out of both First Nations populations and immigrants of all stripes. Despite this significant history, there has been no recent monograph focusing on Methodism in this region. George Emery's book begins to fill that gap with its study of the boom settlement years of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Emery analyzes prairie Methodism from several angles: polity, traditions, personnel, finances, and missions to immigrants, both urban and rural. Blending statistical research and archival anecdotes, he draws a portrait of a denomination determined to uphold its structures and disciplines in a difficult land. In their quest to maintain an enduring presence in the West, prairie Methodists confronted multiple challenges: geographical distance, indifference among a preoccupied settler flock, straitened finances, conflicting theologies of mission, and a cross-class membership. The chapters on immigrant missions bring the complexity of prairie Methodism into particularly sharp relief.

I see two gaps in this study. One is its silence around First Nations missions. While Emery rightly notes that these were not in the forefront of Methodist concerns in the era under consideration, Methodists did begin in this period to participate in managing Indian residential schools across the West. This legacy has come in recent years to haunt the main-

stream Canadian churches through lawsuits claiming sexual, physical, and cultural abuse of Native children. The second, less tangible, lacuna relates to the "spirit" of prairie Methodism. There is little in this work to help us catch the glow of this sometimes passionate faith and its practitioners. What moved them to weep at their own stinginess in making financial contributions, or to tear down denominational walls to form union congregations? Why did they bother to struggle with the competing claims of their diverse theologies? There is clearly more to be said about Methodist life on the Canadian prairies. This book forms an important base upon which to build that narrative.

SANDRA BEARDSALL

Department of Church History and Ecumenics  
St. Andrew's College, Saskatoon