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Review of *High River and the Times: An Alberta Community and Its Weekly Newspaper, 1905-1966* By Paul Voisey

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High River and the Times: An Alberta Community and Its Weekly Newspaper, 1905-1966. By Paul Voisey. Foreword by Joe Clark. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2004. xxx + 270 pp. Photographs, maps, notes, selected bibliography, index. \$45.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper.

Paul Voisey investigates the town's storyteller rather than the story of High River. Dismissing postmodernist media theories of communication as too abstract, Voisey opts for informal textual analysis: his personal interpretation. The pages of the *High River Times*, supplemented with personal papers of the proprietors and archives at the Glenbow Museum, evidence a cycle common to small town prairie history: boosterism, economic hardship, reappraisal, and reactionary rural idealism.

The *Times* initially declares the potential of High River in term of progress, says Voisey; the local weekly newspaper becomes a publicity agent for speculators, governments, and railways. But economic and geographical limitations eventually alter the story, he adds. The *High River Times's* editorial slant thus adjusts from metropolitan progress to small town virtue.

Voisey thoroughly explores how the *Times* helps High River to rediscover its past, creating an identity through its cowboy heroes and rodeo legends. He gleans from the weekly's pages what sets the southern Alberta foothills community apart from most Plains settlements, scattered over rolling grassland to the east and south: the Stampede. The history of High River becomes inseparable from the story of cowboys, ranches, and rodeos. High River loses to Calgary for metropolitan status, he notes, but wins a legitimate share in the fame surrounding the Calgary Stampede. While many communities of the Plains struggle for identity, manufacturing links to celebrities of popular culture or building contrived tourist attractions like commercial theme parks, Voisey argues High River reinvents its authentic ranching history into the legend of the cowboy.

Yet Voisey's rigorous attention to details occasionally distracts rather than informs the

reader; a more critical scholar might want the *Times's* struggle with the Social Credit government more developed. The tension between commercial imperatives and freedom of expression becomes particularly salient to the Clarks, the weekly's owners. Because local private advertisers are few and government sources like paid notices and printing contracts represent an opportunity to fill the void, Charles Clark, the founder, faces the prospect of publishing a government gazette rather than legitimate news. In particular, the weekly's struggle with the Social Credit government over the *Alberta Press Act* seems compelling; the *Times* plays a central role in successfully resisting formally codified government censorship.

Still, the disciplined dedication to research, the easy flow of words, and the coherent arguments make reading *High River and the Times* a rewarding experience for those interested in an authentic story of storytellers—the Clarks, proprietors of the *High River Times*.

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