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**Review of *"Toil and Peaceful Life": Doukhobor Village Settlement
in Saskatchewan, 1899-1918* by Carl J. Tracie**

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“Toil and Peaceful Life”: Doukhobor Village Settlement in Saskatchewan, 1899-1918. Carl J. Tracie. Regina, Saskatchewan: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1996. vii+230 pp. Maps, tables, figures, notes, bibliography, index. \$24.00 paper (ISBN 0-88977-100-6).

The Doukhobor story has had an abiding interest for students of group settlement on the Canadian Prairies. Doukhobors were pacifist Russian peasants and some of the more exotic of Clifford Sifton’s sturdy immigrant farmers. The 7,400 Doukhobors who came to Canada established some fifty-seven villages on three reserved blocks of prairie and parkland in Saskatchewan. By 1918 the original villages were abandoned and the reserved lands were lost. Carl Tracie’s study of Community Doukhobor settlement in Saskatchewan seeks to explain “past cultural landscapes—the distinctive marks on the land which people of differing cultures make in the process of occupying and managing varying physical environments” (p. x).

Tracie’s study considers the landscape a cultural expression of Doukhobor “beliefs, values and traditions” (p. xi). Using a traditional

historical geography approach, the study “freezes” the landscape at three points in time, 1899 the first year of settlement; 1905 when the settlement was at its peak; and 1913, when the villages had been abandoned. Narrative transition chapters are inserted between these detailed snapshots. Although seemingly not inherent in the method, in Tracie’s study this structure results in considerable repetition of certain elements of the Doukhobor story. Another interesting feature of the book’s organization are the summaries inserted at the end of each major section. These summaries not only recap the main arguments of the section, but frequently add new arguments—a feature that is somewhat disconcerting.

The main theme that emerges from Tracie’s study is the overriding importance of community living for the Doukhobors. Their choice of poorer agricultural land in favor of land with an abundance of water illustrates the dominance of group values over decisions based on the environmental factors. Tracie concludes that for Community Doukhobors, “preservation of the group and group values took precedence over the commercial factors related to agricultural viability” (p. 94).

The most important illustration of Doukhobor adherence to their ideology was their constant difficulty in relating to the Canadian government. Tracie’s conclusion parallels that of an earlier history by Woodcock and Avakumovic. Both portray Doukhobors as having local rather than centrally based loyalties. In Tracie’s study the immediacy of having to swear allegiance to the Crown looms larger than any Doukhobor’s desire to circumvent the prescribed settlement pattern intended by the Dominion Lands Act. Tracie maintains that “there is absolutely no evidence that had the Doukhobors compromised their beliefs and taken the oath of allegiance, they could not have continued their communal operations on patented land” (p. 212).

Tracie’s study of the Doukhobors is a thoughtful and multi-dimensional analysis of a small group of Canadian immigrants. The suggestion that the essential cultural values of the Doukhobor community can be uncovered by a detailed examination of the marks they left upon the land is effectively illustrated by this study. The technique of “freezing” the community at three junctures for the purposes of analysis, however, masks the intensity of change that Tracie acknowledges was always present. With these few caveats, Tracie’s study of Doukhobors can serve as a model upon which other settlement studies can build. **Hans P. Werner**, *Department of History, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba*