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## Review of *Storied Landscapes: Ethno-Religious Identity and the Canadian Prairies*. By Frances Swyripa

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**Storied Landscapes: Ethno-Religious Identity and the Canadian Prairies.** By Frances Swyripa. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2010. xi + 296 pp. Maps, illustrations, photographs, notes, index. C\$55.00 cloth, C\$26.95 paper.

Frances Swyripa's study of the ethno-religious landscape of the Canadian prairies is a delightful painting of the visual legacy of the settlement landscape and at the same time a careful analysis of the nuances that undergirded the religious sensibilities of the particular groups she examines. *Storied Landscapes* pays most attention to Mennonites, Ukrainians, Doukhobors, and Icelanders, and less to other Scandinavians, other Europeans, and Mormons. Three single location settlements in Saskatchewan are also represented: the Esterhazy-Kaposvar Hungarian settlement, the English Barr Colony near Lloydminster, and the German St. Peter's Colony at Muenster.

The book sets out to examine the settlement history of the Canadian prairies through new eyes. Swyripa aims to tease out how a "sense of identity or belonging was shaped by the complex interplay" of the land, group experience, and shared histories with other westerners. Following an introduction, the book begins at the local level and gradually expands its analysis in successive chapters to explore regional group consciousness; the role of prairie-based identities in relation to the Canadian nation; and the impact of international ties with the homeland, the diaspora, and the United States. The final three chapters redirect the reader to the legacy of the ethno-religious settlement experience from the point of view of successive generations.

One is struck by the richness of the ethno-religious influence in creating the prairie landscape, from the grotto of Mundane, Alberta, to the diverse symbolism found in obscure cemeteries. More interesting, perhaps, is the author's elaboration of the diverse ways in which successive generations hybridized and reified the meanings of both the artifacts and symbols of the early settlers. Landing sites, for example, were sometimes transformed into sacred ground, such as Willow Point on Lake Winnipeg, which for Icelandic descendants became the subject of a painting, a poem, and annual pilgrimages.

To be sure, comparing a number of ethno-religious groups over the vast expanse of the prairies over 150 years has meant some important cultural aspects of the landscape and its meanings have been left out, or mentioned only in passing. How did the cultural imprint of the landscape change when 6,000 Mennonites left southern Manitoba and Saskatchewan for Mexico in the 1920s? Does the Jewish imprint on the landscape not go beyond the story of failed agricultural settlement?

On the whole, however, *Storied Landscapes* is a welcome and novel way of looking at ethno-religious settlement on the Canadian prairies. Its comparative approach helps to lay bare the multiplicity of meanings the land came to have as religious and ethnic space.

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