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Review of *Trailblazers: The Lives and Times of Michael Ewanchuk and Muriel (Smith) Ewanchuk*. By John Lehr and David McDowell.

Denis Hlynka

University of Manitoba, denis.hlynka@umanitoba.ca

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Trailblazers: The Lives and Times of Michael Ewanchuk and Muriel (Smith) Ewanchuk. By John Lehr and David McDowell. Winnipeg, MB: Carpathia Publishers, 2011. vi + 226 pp. Photographs, notes, maps, tables, appendices, index. C\$28.50 paper.

Belonging to the genre of local history, *Trailblazers* explores the lives of two Canadians in the province of Manitoba spanning the 20th century. They were, as the introduction states, ordinary people, just like us. There is much here to interest the casual reader and the serious historian alike. Readers of *Great Plains Research* may need to be reminded that while the geographic designation "Great Plains" extends into the western Canadian provinces, the term is purely American. Canadians use the generic term "prairie."

Michael Ewanchuk was a teacher, a principal, and finally a school inspector for 23 years; Muriel was a teacher whose professional career effectively ended in 1941 when she married, since married female teachers were not hireable in that era. In their introduction and conclusion, John Lehr and David McDowell effectively place the story of Michael and Muriel within the cultural and social milieu of their times. Issues of environment, colonialism, racism, and feminism are integrated into the narrative without ever being heavy-handed or overly academic.

The book broaches some tantalizing social questions, but often fails to resolve them. For example, when were females (like Muriel) allowed to continue teaching after marriage? How much of a problem was Michael's non-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant heritage? Why does the fact that women first won the right to vote in Manitoba in 1916 not figure into Muriel's story? These and other questions are hinted at, but left unanswered.

The back cover calls Michael the "quintessential" Ukrainian immigrant, yet he was not an immigrant at all, but born in Manitoba and therefore a British subject. The book further argues that a major theme is "migration," but both Muriel and Michael remained relatively close to their rural Manitoba roots.

What is not explained is that Winnipeg, where Michael and Muriel spent the last half of their lives, was one of the largest up-and-coming cities at the turn of the 20th century, poised to be a leading urban center. But technology was to pass Winnipeg by; air travel replaced the railroad; and the Panama Canal opened up a sea route around North America instead of the slower and more expensive land routes. Winnipeg (and Manitoba) became a curious anomaly, quickly dropping from Canada's third-largest city to eighth. Yet it boasted some unique

achievements as one of the cosmopolitan capitals of the world (namesake of the original Winnie the Pooh; birthplace of William Stephenson, the “man called intrepid,” who became the model for James Bond; a city visited by Mark Twain and Arthur Conan Doyle).

The book has its minor flaws. While there are detailed maps of the land of Michael’s ancestors in western Ukraine and Muriel’s ancestors in Nova Scotia, the map of Manitoba at the end of the book (which should have appeared in the opening pages) fails to identify the pivotal towns of Gimli and Killarney.

Trainblazers does not pretend to be a scholarly history, but a recollection of a time and a place. If portions appear problematic, it is because the book is essentially a localized and celebratory story. But given its aims, those faults can be overlooked. There are thousands of such life stories. This book deals engagingly with two of them.

DENIS HLYNKA

Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning
University of Manitoba