

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and
Social Sciences

Great Plains Studies, Center for

Fall 2012

Review of *Agricultural History: History of the Prairie West Series, Volume 3*. Edited by Gregory P. Marchildon.

Bradford Rennie

University of Calgary, brennie@ucalgary.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch>



Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), [Canadian History Commons](#), and the [Geography Commons](#)

Rennie, Bradford, "Review of *Agricultural History: History of the Prairie West Series, Volume 3*. Edited by Gregory P. Marchildon." (2012). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 1255.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch/1255>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Agricultural History: History of the Prairie West Series, Volume 3. Edited by Gregory P. Marchildon. Regina, SK: Canadian Plains Research Center Press, 2011. xvi + 410 pp. Maps, notes, photographs, illustrations, tables, index. C\$59.95 cloth.

This is the third book of the History of the Prairie West Series published by the Canadian Plains Research Center in Regina, Saskatchewan. The series, edited by Gregory P. Marchildon, consists of articles previously published in *Prairie Forum*, a journal devoted to the northern Great Plains, primarily the region encompassing the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. The book is organized into four sections: the first contains broad articles that survey prairie history; the other three focus on farming, ranching, and marketing, respectively.

D. Wayne Moodie and Barry Kaye's contribution describes First Nations maize-beans-squash agriculture in what now constitutes Manitoba before Euro-Canadian settlement in the area, reminding us that not all Aborigines of this period relied exclusively on hunting and gathering. Sheilagh S. Jameson's piece, first published in 1976, provides a lively account of western Canadian ranching up to 1910, emphasizing, as would much of the subsequent literature on the subject, ranching society's British and Canadian—as opposed to American—origins. Bruce Dawson's 2003 article offers a useful historiographical analysis of First Nations agriculture under the federal government's control. While noting different scholarly views, the article brings out the general consensus that Native agriculture failed largely owing to substandard farm land, climate problems, and, especially, federal policy.

Analyzing the costs of establishing a farm in Saskatchewan in the early settlement era, Lyle Dick concludes that costs, while not uniform, were relatively low, implying “a degree of economic democracy in the prairie settlement experience.” Warren Elofson's analysis of mixed and dryland farming in

southwestern Alberta before World War I introduces his thesis, highlighted in his later works on Canadian ranching, that Canadian agricultural practices, like those south of the border, were greatly shaped by environmental and frontier conditions. Articles by Tony Ward and R. Bruce Shepard deal with technological advancements and their inexorable impact on farming and rural life: increased acreages and production, downward pressure on farm product prices, and, eventually, rural depopulation.

The first of Simon Evans's two contributions considers a little-known chapter in pre-World War One Canadian ranching: the place of American cattlemen. His second piece ably explains the demise of the open range in the Canadian West. David Hall's article—essential for any student of the early Canadian prairie economy or the early prairie farm movement—details early legislation affecting the grain industry and prairie producers, while in two articles Robert Irwin acutely analyzes Canadian farmers' efforts to improve the marketing of their products, culminating with the Wheat Board, a subject of current debate among Canadian farmers.

There are other useful articles in this generally strong collection, but two issues raise some unease. First, I question whether, in this age of databases and online scholarly articles, there is a need for a book of this type, a collection of previously published journal articles from a single periodical. Second, none of the articles deal with Great Plains rural women, even though there are *Prairie Forum* articles on this subject that could have been included. Be that as it may, *Agricultural History* sheds light on many central elements of the northern Great Plains experience in an era when ranchers and farmers ruled the region.

BRADFORD RENNIE
Department of History
University of Calgary