PRAIRIE PERSPECTIVES:
GEOGRAPHICAL ESSAYS

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Volume 1, October 1998

Printed by
University of Winnipeg
Printing Services

ISBN 0-9694203-2-3

Table of Contents

Introduction

It is not surprising that this volume of papers, drawn from the 1997 annual conference of the Canadian Geographers' Prairie Division held at Portage La Prairie, is largely concerned with water. Earlier in the year, Manitoba had experienced its worst spring flooding of the century. In fact, as Rannie points out in the lead article, it was the worst flood in the Red River Valley since 1826.

The grandaddy of them all, the flooding of the Pleistocene Epoch, dramatically altered the physical geography of the Prairies and was largely responsible for current topography. In her paper, Grant analyzes the effects of subglacial meltwaters in Central Saskatchewan, arguing that the North Battleford fluting field and the broad plain adjacent to it were produced by flooding at regional scale.

Rannie's article provides a useful historical perspective of flood hazard in the Red River Valley as well as thoroughly chronicling the preconditions leading up to the flood and the procedures used in coping with the 1997 disaster. He also addresses some of the questions raised by the flood experience. Haque and Rahman offer a parallel paper that also relates to the 1997 flood. Their principal concern is to highlight the issues raised by the event and to propose ways of mitigating the effects of the flood threat and its aftermath on the affected population.

McDonald and McGinn are also concerned with spring meltwaters. Their paper deals with the influence and extent to which detention ponding delays runoff in small streams feeding into Clear Lake at Riding Mountain. Their work points to the advantages of creating retention ponds in the headwaters of larger drainage systems

The next two papers, by Kumar, Haque and Pawlak, and Kumar and Haque, respectively, address the obverse side of the coin. Their concern is to find ways of defining, forecasting and anticipating the effects of drought in the Canadian Prairies. Their research involves the development of models combining satellite data with agricultural and climatic records. The strategic advantages of such models in forecasting yields, and for the management and planning for marketing the crop, promises to be invaluable to the grain trade.

Just as the relative importance of cereal grain cultivation in Western Canada has declined, the economic importance of tourism and recreation has increased. Although tourism has not generally been regarded as especially important in Manitoba or Saskatchewan, it is of growing significance in both provincial economies. Much tourism and recreational development in both provinces depends in one way or another on water-based activities. The papers by Welsted and Everitt and Terry and McGinn both deal with the use of water as a recreational resource. Welsted and Everitt examine the requirements of water-based sports events at the 1997 Canada Games held in Brandon, Manitoba. They detail the course specifications and decision-making involved in locating the various outdoor, open water events included in the Games. One of these sites, the waterski facility on the Assiniboine River in Brandon, required significant modifications to the existing watercourse. Terry and McGinn recount the measures taken to minimize the impact of the changes and to monitor the downstream effects of the works.

The paper by Simpson and Hathout also addresses the potential impact of public works on the environment. They illustrate how GIS modelling can be used to determine the optimum routeway for an all weather road on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. The road, when built, will undoubtedly be used to open up new areas in the region to recreation and resource extraction. Wiseman and Berta likewise employ GIS modelling techniques in their investigation of indicator species analyis as a means of carrying out ecogeographic analyses of ecosystems. Their work has relevance for the management of such systems for a variety of purposes that would include recreation and conservation.

In contrast to the foregoing presentations which have a more physical orientation, the following two studies have a distinctly

urban focus. Both the paper by Thraves and Barriault and that by Selwood and Kohm address the changing structure of tertiary activities in the inner city. Thraves and Barriault, employing Murphy and Vance's delimitation method, demonstrate that Regina's CBD has expanded over recent decades. However, they also show its functions have undergone extensive restructuring over the same period. In a similar vein, Selwood and Kohm examine elements of the sex trade, traditionally a centrally located function, that is now widely dispersed through the suburbs in response to changes in the industry and in consumer demand.

An integral component of the annual conference has always been a field trip to explore the local geography of the meeting venue. Rather than compiling an itinerary of the trip, Carlyle has elected to highlight its central theme, that is, the complex and varied nature of the so-called family farm in Manitoba's Portage la Prairie district. His paper discusses two widely different examples: a family-owned, large-scale corporation specializing in fresh vegetable production, and a Hutterite colony's multi-family, mixed-farming operation.

The editors would like to express their deep appreciation to Weldon Hiebert for his invaluable contribution to the production of this volume of *Prairie Perspectives.* Weldon designed its cover and either edited or drafted all of the figures and maps in the volume. He was also responsible for the page layout. In effect, Weldon oversaw the entire production process and the professional quality of the final product is due to his cartographic and design abilities.

It is hoped that this volume will serve as the model for a continuing series of volumes devoted to the diverse works of prairie geographers and those with an interest in the geography of the Canadian Prairies.

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Winnipeg 1998