



Prairie Perspectives
Geographical Essays

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Representing nature in Elizabeth Posthuma Simcoe’s Diary: An examination of Toronto’s colonial past A.M. Murnagham	1
W.J. Sisler’s impressions of the Chicago Columbian Exposition 1893 J.C. Lehr, M. Sawka.....	8
Symbolism and the city: From towers of power to ‘Ground Zero’ R. Patrick, A. MacDonald.....	14
This is weird...people do this?: Locational aspects of women’s latrinalia at the University of Winnipeg M. Sawka.....	19
Parking issues and aesthetics in downtown Winnipeg M. Vachon.....	25
Degree-day snowmelt runoff experiments; Clear Lake Watershed, Riding Mountain National Park R. McGinn.....	38

Preface

Prairie Perspectives: Geographical Essays is an annual peer-reviewed publication of the Prairie Division of the Canadian Association of Geographers (PCAG). The scholarly manuscripts included in each volume are a selection of those presented at the PCAG annual meetings, as well as contributions pertaining to the geography of the Western Interior solicited from, or submitted by, members of the Canadian Association of Geographers.

The Prairie Division of the Canadian Association of Geographers' annual meeting in 2011 was hosted by the geography department of the University of North Dakota. Following the tradition of holding the meeting in a small rural centre, the Department elected to hold the meeting in the town of Devils Lake, North Dakota. Some 75 people attended, including students and staff from universities and colleges in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, North Dakota and Northwestern Ontario. Numerous papers on a variety of topics in human and physical geography were presented, demonstrating the range of interests embraced by modern geography. The conference was organized by Dr. Douglas Munski of the Department of Geography at the University of North Dakota, ably assisted by Dr. Laura Munski and a number of UND geography faculty and students. Although registration and the social side of the meeting, took place in the Great American Inn and Suites, the academic side of the conference was held on the campus of Lake Region State College. The well attended field trip to the flooded communities in areas surrounding Devils Lake, held on Saturday afternoon after the conclusion of the paper sessions, showed the close relationship between physical and human geography.

This collection of papers is drawn from those presented at the 2011 meeting or submitted by members of the Prairie Division. Following the standard practice of *Prairie Perspectives* all papers were subjected to a double blind peer review editorial process. The editors would like to thank all the anonymous reviewers for agreeing to participate in this time-consuming process.

These papers are drawn from both the human and physical sides of the discipline. The first two papers show how historical geographers can use diaries to provide insights into attitudes and behaviours in the past. The opening paper, by Ann Marie Murnaghan, demonstrates how an analysis of the diaries of Elizabeth Posthuma Simcoe, a government official's wife at the turn of the nineteenth century, illustrates how gender, class, and race influence the way in which our views of nature were, and still are, constructed. Murnaghan argues these discourses of nature are still relevant as they are often uncritically incorporated in current day geographies and, moreover, still bear upon the way in which we see nature.

Lehr and Sawka take a similar, though less theoretical approach, to interpretation of the past when they explore how W.J. Sisler recorded his impressions of the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. They argue Sisler's diary highlights how this landmark event bore upon the consciousness of the age. Al-

though countless articles and brochures touted the wonders on display at the Exposition, Sisler's account is refreshingly honest, if by today's standards politically incorrect. Lehr and Sawka also suggest that the influence of the Exposition may still be seen in our modern North American landscapes.

The following paper by Robert Patrick and Amy Macdonald tackles the issue of symbolism in the built landscape. New York City's World Trade Center (WTC) was a symbol of the financial might of the United States and, arguably, a symbol of the progressive secular values of the capitalist western world. They point out that how these values were perceived, as positive or negative, depended on the philosophical and political orientation of the observer. In assessing the symbolic attributes of the World Trade Center before the horrific attack of September 11, 2001 and the values embodied in the Freedom Tower later built on the site, Patrick and Macdonald contribute to the growing literature on symbolism in our built environment.

Meaghan Sawka's paper examining the occurrence and location of graffiti in women's washroom stalls at the University of Winnipeg pushes the frontier of micro-geography. Most male geographers will be surprised to learn that graffiti is common in women's washrooms but will probably be equally surprised to learn it seems to be radically different from the graffiti commonly encountered in men's washrooms. That, however, is not the point of her paper, which is concerned with how and why women perceive and use space within the confines of the multi-stall washroom. The collision of the concepts of privacy, territory and personal space translate into a fascinating micro-geography of graffiti within a very small area.

Many of us use, or pass by, city parking lots and parkades on a daily basis, without giving them a second thought. Not so Marc Vachon, who sees them as an integral part of the urban cultural landscape. Like so many urban artifacts, parking lots and parkades carry the values of the communities that host them and parking structures reveal a great deal about the aesthetic attitudes and the social values of the times in which they were built.

The final paper of this collection by Rod McGinn tackles a completely different theme. The only paper that deals with physical geography, it assesses the effectiveness of various models used to estimate rates of snow melt and consequent runoff. Blending field work and theory he argues that models using the arithmetic mean of the degree-day melt ratio tend to overestimate snowpack depletion. His suggestion for adoption of a seven-day smoothed mean may permit more accurate predictions of snowpack melt rates.

These papers are focused on widely scattered locations ranging across North America. Nevertheless they all share common attributes: the concern with place, space, and time that lies at the core of geographical enquiry.

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Acknowledgements

The 2011 Prairie Division of the Canadian Association of Geographers annual meeting held at Devils Lake was hosted by the Department of Geography of the University of North Dakota. Special thanks are in order to a number of people who contributed to its organization and success.

First, support from the faculty included the chairperson of the department, Dr. Bradley Rundquist, and colleagues Dr. Paul Todhunter, Dr. Gregory Vandeberg, Dr. Devon Hansen, and Dr. Christopher Atkinson. Other assistance from the campus based in Grand Forks came from the Office of the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences. Particular thanks is given to Dr. Vandeberg and Dr. Todhunter for their outstanding efforts to make the field trip in the Devils Lake Basin highly informative, highly insightful, and highly enjoyable.

Second, the Association of American Geographers is to be thanked for providing the underwriting of the featured guest speaker from the University of Kentucky, Dr. Stanley Brunn. This grant was arranged by Dr. Rundquist and produced a collaboration in the process to the advantage of a number of stakeholders. Other key underwriters to be thanked are the Association of North Dakota Geographers and the Virginia George Inheritance Fund.

Third, faculty at the various institutions associated with PCAG are to be commended for helping to promote student as well as faculty participation at the conference in terms of papers and posters. Seventy five attendees saw thirty-two papers and nine posters presented.

Fourth, the staff of Lake Region State College, the conference site, and the staff of the Great American Inn, the conference hotel, are thanked for their fine efforts to make the venues comfortable as well as pleasant places in which to engage in conference activities. The “lunch room ladies” of the community college especially need recognition for arranging the special treats that were brought as snacks for the field trip.

Fifth, I wish to thank my co-editor, Dr. John Lehr of the University of Winnipeg for his assistance. Mr. Weldon Hiebert, cartographer at the University of Winnipeg, was the technical specialist behind the production of this volume. He went the extra mile to see this volume produced. I truly am grateful to him.

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Finally, I need to give a generic thank-you to all and sundry from across the member institutions of PCAG who helped me to make the PCAG 2011 as successful as it could be under difficult circumstances. Some people working behind the scenes deserve far more credit than do I, for ensuring the conference’s success and keeping the PCAG tradition alive through its 35th annual meeting.

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