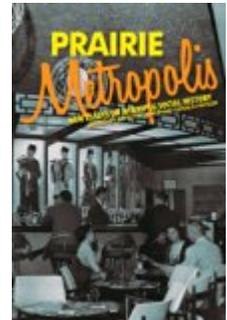


Esyllt W. Jones, Gerald Friesen, eds.. *Prairie Metropolis: New Essays on Winnipeg Social History*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2009. 264 pp. \$29.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-88755-713-2.



Reviewed by Jason McCollom

Published on H-Canada (May, 2012)

Commissioned by Jane Nicholas (University of Waterloo/St. Jerome's)

Prairie Metropolis is a collection of graduate student essays from the University of Manitoba, made possible by the financial support of the Winnipeg Foundation. The editors are respected scholars of western Canadian and prairie history. Esyllt W. Jones is an award-winning author for her work on the World War I-era influenza in Winnipeg, and Gerald Friesen is a doyen who published the seminal work *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (1987). The student authors now hold a variety of degrees. Some have PhDs, others have master's degrees, while some work outside academia.

The essays are divided into two sections, the pre- and post-World War II eras. The historical literature on Winnipeg's history is heavily skewed toward the pre-1930 period, but this collection also makes contributions to and opens up new avenues for research on the Great Depression, World War II, and the postwar period. The editors note in the introduction that many of the essays grapple with explaining distinctive elements of Winnipeg's history while placing their analysis

within a broader framework of Canadian urban and social history.

J. Edgar Rea, respected historian for forty years at the University of Manitoba, wrote the epilogue to this collection, which presents some major themes of Winnipeg's history. He touched on the historical anxiety in Winnipeg. Rea, who died in 2003, argued that there "has always been the sense that our fate would be determined elsewhere, that we were part of someone else's plan" (p. 242). Rea also emphasized the rich immigrant component of Winnipeg's late nineteenth- and twentieth-century history. He tied this anxiety, this sense of "insecurity" in Winnipeg's history to British Protestant settlers who struggled to deal with the absorption of immigrants, mostly non-Protestants from eastern, central, and southeastern Europe (p. 245). He ended the brief chapter by explaining how, in the 1960s and 1970s, Winnipeggers moved to embrace ethnic consciousness, and thus accepted the city's immigrant past.

Part 1, "Reform and Growth in the First Sixty Years," looks at the time period from the late nineteenth century through about 1940. Though not organized in such a way, the six essays (and one from part 2, "War and Post-War in Winnipeg") reflect four general themes: urban reform; law, order, and policing; health and health care; and business and art. With regard to urban reform, Kurt Korneski demonstrates the connections between reform and imperialism via the professional history of Minnie J. B. Campbell. Campbell, through such organizations in Winnipeg as the United Empire Loyalists and the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, worked to promote Canadian-British loyalty; pursue "social medicine" (educating patients about how impoverishment and illness might be related to moral shortcomings) at the Winnipeg General Hospital; and "refine" immigrants into the predominant British-Canadian mold. For Campbell, imperialism and reform were indivisible.

Both Megan Kozminski and Cassandra Woloschuk engage in research on law, order, and justice during the late 1800s and early 1900s, and both come to similar conclusions regarding class, gender, and ethnic assumptions inherent in the Winnipeg police and judicial systems. In "Empty-handed Constables and Notorious Offenders: Policing an Early Prairie City 'According to Order,'" Kozminski uses the daily records of Constable John Grady to argue that law enforcers in the city were primarily concerned with upholding moral order by targeting drunkenness, vagrancy, gambling, prostitution, and the like. Their responsibilities were colored by ethnic and sexual assumptions, as Métis and indigenous peoples were disproportionately arrested and prostitutes were viewed as the most disruptive elements in the city. Similarly, Woloschuk's "Protecting and Policing Children: The Origins and Nature of Juvenile Justice in Winnipeg" delineates models of discrimination based on ethnicity, class, and religion. Through its decisions, the paternalistic juvenile court especially focused on breaches of common

ideas of morality and femininity among girls in the city. The predominately middle-class Anglo-Canadian Protestant probation officers and court officials were preoccupied with working-class youth and Winnipeg's heavily immigrant North End.

As part of the third broad theme of health and health care, Tamara Miller's analysis of the Margaret Scott Nursing Mission during the early twentieth century demonstrates that the nurses operated within British-Canadian middle-class assumptions and dealt mostly with immigrants and the working-class poor from the North End. In "The Tubercular Cow Must Go': Business, Politics, and Winnipeg's Milk Supply, 1894-1922," Marion McKay traces the complexities of the city's health officials' efforts to deal with incidences of tuberculosis in the milk supply. McKay concludes that despite several decades' efforts, "by 1922 ... the safety of Winnipeg's milk supply was never firmly established" and "the contribution of the health department's clean milk campaign remains uncertain" (p. 118).

The final essay of part 1 shows that business-oriented art flourished in Winnipeg in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Angela E. Davis traces the development of the art scene and its relationship with business in Winnipeg via an investigation into the histories of Frederick Brigden's Toronto Engraving Company and Eaton's Catalogue in the prairie city. She concludes that before World War II, artists' connections with business were essential and provided employment for artists in an era when only few of them operated independently.

The opening essay in part 2 picks up on the health and health care theme developed in part 1. Tracing the improvement of quality of life in elderly care homes between 1907 and 1984, Crista Bradley uses Winnipeg's Middlechurch Home as a case study. More specifically, the quality of life at Middlechurch improved as reflected through three trends: elderly care institutions came to be

seen not as a place to die but a place to live; the focus shifted from an “institution” to a “home”; and opportunities increased for residents’ physical, social, and intellectual pursuits.

The remaining works in part 2 are defined by two themes: women’s roles and gender, and non-Protestant and non-Anglo-Canadian groups in Winnipeg history during and after World War II. Jody Perrun shows that women did play a significant role in voluntary services in Winnipeg during World War II. Married, upper-class housewives held prominent positions in the Red Cross, Young Women’s Christian Association, and Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire. But the most interesting aspect of “The Spirit of Service: Winnipeg’s Voluntary War Services during the Second World War” is the “picture of unity” (p. 180). In Winnipeg, the Central Volunteer Board worked for needy groups regardless of ethnicity. The cross-cultural response of volunteers included especially prominent activism by Poles and Jews in the city, and even the Chinese. Dale Barbour’s piece highlights the complex gender and class assumptions inherent in Manitoba’s liquor laws during the 1950s. Barbour unearths the embedded language in the liquor laws representing anxieties regarding mixed-gender, interethnic, and interclass drinking establishments in Winnipeg.

The final two essays in part 2 deal with Mennonites and First Nations. Janis Thiessen uses the Mennonite business Palliser Furniture as a case study to explain how Mennonites reacted to labor activism in the province from 1974 to 1996. As Mennonites increasingly migrated from country to city, they had to reevaluate their traditional religious antiunion views. Throughout this period, the Mennonite Central Committee slowly helped to shape the religious community’s view from unions as bastions of socialism and communism to unions as legitimate entities that sought justice and protection for workers. However, by the 1990s, the Mennonite owners of Palliser Furniture were ambivalent toward unions, as they attempt-

ed to deal with the unionization efforts of their own employees.

Like Manitoba’s Mennonites, many indigenous groups moved to cities after World War II. In urban areas like Winnipeg, the Métis and other First Nations groups found themselves without support in many social and cultural realms. Leslie Hall investigates the history of the Winnipeg Indian and Métis Friendship Centre (IMFC). After opening in 1959, the IMFC provided needed services to the growing indigenous population, including assistance in adjusting to urban life, community integration efforts, employment support, and health care.

These essays span a broad time period and a variety of themes. A conspicuous omission is any aspect of Winnipeg’s central place as a prairie wheat hub. As the location for the influential Winnipeg Grain Exchange, the city encompassed a vibrant farmer organizational culture and many other aspects related to the grain trade of the northern plains. There certainly were aspects related to social history enveloped in the farm community and wheat economy of Winnipeg.

Other than this modest critique, *Prairie Metropolis* stands out for two primary reasons. First, it does lead the way for further research on the post-1930 period. The essays suggest themes of this period that are ripe for further work. Second, this book would be useful for graduate classes. The essays are solid examples of what strong graduate work looks like and can serve as models especially for master’s students.

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Citation: Jason McCollom. Review of Jones, Esvllt W.; Friesen, Gerald, eds. *Prairie Metropolis: New Essays on Winnipeg Social History*. H-Canada, H-Net Reviews. May, 2012.

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