

Canada, dans l'Atlantique Nord, l'Islande, la Grande-Bretagne, la Manche, la France, à Hong Kong, au Japon, en Italie, en Belgique, en Hollande, en Allemagne et en Asie. Le livre rappelle aussi que, dans bien des cas, la période opérationnelle fut courte par rapport à la période de formation et d'attente. Le lecteur constate encore que le sort qui attendait les hommes fut divers : certains s'en tirèrent bien, d'autres furent gravement blessés, plusieurs y laissèrent leur vie, certains – plusieurs en fait, mais certains plus que d'autres – en gardèrent des séquelles toute leur vie. La lecture de cet ouvrage montre aussi que l'expérience de la guerre, une expérience de groupe, fut en même temps une expérience individuelle qui marqua tous et chacun de façon particulière et qui fut enrichissante malgré tout pour plusieurs. Elle créa aussi entre les volontaires des liens qui perdurèrent longtemps après la fin du conflit.

Grâce au travail de Sébastien Vincent, des témoignages intéressants et émouvants sur la participation canadienne-française à la Deuxième Guerre mondiale resteront. C'est là un mérite qu'il me fait plaisir de souligner. Cependant, puisqu'il faut rendre à César ce qui appartient à César, ce n'est pas dans la décennie 1970, comme le prétend l'auteur (p. 26), que l'intérêt pour le soldat apparaît dans l'historiographie, mais dans la décennie précédente avec les travaux d'André Corvisier, qui a laissé sa marque en histoire militaire.

Jean-Pierre Gagnon  
Gatineau

VOISEY, Paul — *High River and the Times: An Alberta Community and its Weekly Newspaper, 1905–1966*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2004. Pp. xxx, 270.

When most Canadians think about the Prairie West, they usually associate the region with agriculture, small towns, and rurality in general. When they think about the history of the Prairies, images of pioneers, homesteads, and the false-fronted small towns come to mind. Yet, surprisingly, little attention is paid to the history of these small rural communities. Historian Paul Voisey of the University of Alberta largely established the field of small-town history for the region in 1988 with the publication of his highly influential work, *Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community*. At that time, Voisey also called for more work to be done. As is often the case, however, his call was generally not heeded. Now, Voisey is continuing to plough the field himself with the release of his latest work, *High River and the Times: An Alberta Community and its Weekly Newspaper, 1905–1966*.

This book, however, is not strictly a history of a Prairie small town. It emerged from a major research initiative led by Joe Clark (who has written the foreword), who envisioned a series of publications related to the history and politics of his era in public life. Clark hoped that one project might feature his hometown of High River, Alberta. Since the Clark family had owned and operated the local newspaper from its founding in 1905 until 1966, Voisey suggested a study of the weekly press and its relationship with the community over that period. The book then has two

parallel threads: one describes the growth and development of the community of High River; the second examines how these developments were represented in the *Times*.

Voisey approaches local history through the community weekly newspaper. He claims that most Canadian studies on the press focus on the metropolitan papers. But readers will not find in this book any deeply analytical or theoretical discussions of the role of the press and media in society. As Voisey admits, "In pursuing its themes, the study does not employ any overarching theoretical framework. It borrows useful ideas from a variety of disciplines, but does not wade into the murky conceptual swamp of communications theory." While it is perfectly acceptable for Voisey to employ "a traditional and narrative approach" to the topic and to avoid "abstract approaches, including postmodernism", and its accompanying partners of "deconstruction" and "discourse analysis" (p. xiv), the lack of any theoretical discussion of the relationship between the community and its newspaper is a weakness. Ultimately, it questions Voisey's decision to undertake a work that brings the two together into one study. Canadian historians in general seem so defensive against the apostles of postmodernism, so concerned that by actually engaging them they themselves will disappear into the murky depths, that they fail to accept and embrace what are in fact some useful insights from the discipline.

Despite the disclaimer, Voisey does produce a useful discussion of the importance of the local newspapers for these Prairie communities. As Clark points out in the foreword, the events "describing how a rooted community grew" (p. viii) were recorded in that newspaper. In this sense, a new place was being constructed, and the *Times* became the chronicler of that story. More particularly, the newspaper voiced that history and, in doing so, played a significant role in constructing and shaping the resulting identity of the community.

Voisey highlights the differences between the rural and metropolitan press as well as between the daily and the weekly newspaper. This, in part, explains the choice of the *High River Times* as a worthy subject of study. As Voisey points out, "under the ownership of the Clark family, the *High River Times* came to epitomize the nature of the rural weekly press ... it is a model of the genre that others aspired to emulate. From its pages, one can probe the nature of the rural weekly and unravel its purpose" (pp. xix–xx). But is this objective successfully or adequately achieved? Voisey provides a thorough discussion of the primary role of the weekly as a vehicle for boosterism, but he fails to enter the private world of the small town to reveal the more intimate relationship between the community and its mouth-piece. Voisey admits that small towns have their own familial, ethnic, racial, and religious elites, and he does spend some limited time discussing the nativistic sentiments expressed through the pages of the newspaper. Not enough attention is paid to this facet of the relationship, however. "The media largely reflects and reinforces the deeply ingrained values and views of its audience," Voisey notes. "It articulates bias, but does not create it" (p. xxiv). This is not to say that the objective should be to emphasize the more sordid and negative characteristics of small-time life, such as nativism and xenophobia. Not to give these very real sentiments adequate attention, however, seems to allow the book to fall into the same booster role as that played by the newspaper. As Voisey

claims, the object of the *Times* was to promote social cohesion by avoiding conflict. This does not mean, however, that either was necessarily always successful.

The book provides an intriguing analysis of the development of the Prairie small town. The way in which the *Times* promoted the High River community varied over time, and this variance reflected challenges that faced and ultimately forced its remaking. During the immigration boom of the early part of the twentieth century, High River was a thriving service centre for the surrounding agricultural community: “The *Times* played an aggressive role in this crusade, serving as the chief organ of local boosterism and fashioning a vision of High River as an emerging city commanding a vast hinterland of resource development, railways, and industry” (p. xxix). During the post-war recession and the Great Depression, when the growth of High River fizzled and the town had to come to terms with its much more modest destiny, the *Times* “began to promote small town and rural life as a virtue, and contrasted it favourably with the trouble-plagued big city” (p. xxix). During World War II and into the decades that followed, prosperity returned to High River, but the spectre of rural depopulation brought about by improvements in automobiles, roads, and mass communication posed a new challenge: “Faced with commercial decline, High River sought to make a virtue of its very obsolescence. The *Times* now presented the district as a living relic of the old Wild West ... designed to attract tourists” (p. xxx). It constructed a mythical past to fit the image. The discussion of High River’s quest for an identity, particularly after 1945 (an era that receives such scant attention in Canadian rural historiography), is the most valuable feature of this work.

Despite some shortcomings, this good book is undoubtedly needed in the surprisingly scant field of rural Prairie history. It is well written and engaging, and, while it does not go far enough in certain directions, it offers substantial contributions to the history of the Prairie small town, the role of media and newspapers, and the development of rural communities in the Canadian West, particularly after 1945.

Robert Wardhaugh  
*University of Western Ontario*