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**Review of *Everett Baker's Saskatchewan: Portraits of an Era.*  
Selected by Bill Waiser**

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*Everett Baker's Saskatchewan: Portraits of an Era.* Selected by Bill Waiser. Calgary, AB: Fifth House, 2007. 201 pp. Map, photographs, appendix, notes, index. C\$39.99.

The photographs that Everett Baker (1893-1981) took in Saskatchewan from the 1940s to the 1960s cover just about one-half of the province, mostly the prairie part, at the northern end of the Great Plains. An American citizen, Baker was not drafted into World War I because of an asthmatic condition; after obtaining a BS degree he went to work in Saskatchewan in the hope that the dry climate would be better for his health. There he sold books and farmed in the Palliser Triangle, soon sharing with its rural population the hardships that accompanied the Great Depression. This was for him and his wife the school of hard knocks: "Their second child, daughter Jean Marie, died before she was one. Everett was also struck down with typhoid fever, followed by a bout with Spanish influenza that nearly killed him. Then his father and two sisters perished in a car crash in Minnesota." In keeping with the cooperative entrepreneurial spirit then characterizing the province, he became involved in the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Field Service Division, within which he showed education and entertainment-oriented films to sundry audiences in isolated communities: "By the end of the 1930s, field men were hosting about seven hundred film nights a year, a phenomenon that is remembered with affection to this day." Soon Baker would take advantage of these evenings to show his own slides of contemporary rural life.

He had bought a Leica in 1939, at the very end of the Great Depression. With the help of this lightweight camera and the recently developed Kodachrome 16 and 25 ASA films, he was able to take fine-grained, long-lasting color slides of local people and their landscapes. Two comparisons come to mind immediately: with Walker Evans and Henri Cartier-Bresson. In *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941), the former illustrated with stark black-and-white, mostly posed, photographs a poetic text James Agee dedicated to the rural poverty of the American South. As for Cartier-Bresson, who also worked with a Leica, his black-and-white snapshots are famous for the artistry caught at what he called "the decisive moment."

It is perhaps unfair to compare Baker to these two masters, as his photographs, although well constructed, do not offer an obvious message (Evans) or an artistic revelation (Cartier-Bresson). But they are in color, and as such help us correct the grim impression left by traditional “historical” photography. This small sample, carefully selected from some 10,000 slides left by Baker to the Saskatchewan History and Folklore Society (of which he was first president), gives us a realistic impression of what the province looked like before the great modernization of the 1960s. It is also a homage to a man who was deeply interested in preserving local history and in promoting well-being through cooperation.

The relevance of Everett Baker’s slides to Prairie history is made obvious by two facts: they are still shown in traveling presentations to rural communities by Finn Andersen, of the Saskatchewan History and Folklore Society; and a few years ago 3rd Eye Media Productions included some of them in a video, titled *Everett Baker’s Saskatchewan*. This book will ensure that Baker’s legacy reaches an even wider audience.

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