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Review of *Views from Fort Battleford: Constructed Visions of an Anglo-Canadian West* By Walter Hildebrandt

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Saskatchewan originated in the unease he felt beginning work with the federal agency in the 1970s at its tendency to diminish the role of aboriginal groups and valorize non-Native “pioneers,” such as the mounted police, at the Fort Battleford historic site. *Views from Fort Battleford* provides a case study of the way in which public history, especially at historic sites, is contested terrain on which different groups vie to have their story told, or sometimes to have it dominate other narratives.

Hildebrandt’s account succeeds best when it traces—unfortunately not until its final substantive chapter—the history of historical interpretation at Fort Battleford. This portion of the work lays bare the clash between metropolitan interpretations of Canadian history that originated in central Canada and local sensibilities in the prairie west. It also illustrates a key point of the book: Natives are shoved into the background in favor of red-coated mounties.

Where *Views from Fort Battleford* is somewhat less successful is in its treatment of the history of First Nations, mounted police, and settler society in the Battleford region. The problem is not so much that Hildebrandt’s account of the principal events is erroneous. Rather, the main difficulty is that the author’s effort to be a revisionist interpreter of mounted police history often involves him in criticisms of other historians he fails to sustain effectively. For example, Hildebrandt is critical of Rod Macleod’s interpretation of police-Native relations, although he eventually comes to concede that relations were good until 1885. When he builds a case for an excessively coercive police force after 1885, he does so by citing such measures as the pass system, which sought to confine Indians to their reserves, and the permit system, which attempted to regulate their sale of agricultural produce. Unfortunately, in spite of his assertions, Hildebrandt does not demonstrate that such repressive measures were effectively enforced. Nor does he note that mounted police officers opposed enforcement of the pass system in the early 1890s.

Views from Fort Battleford: Constructed Visions of an Anglo-Canadian West. By Walter Hildebrandt. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1994. Photographs, maps, appendices, notes bibliography, index. x + 130 pp. \$30.00 paper.

Walter Hildebrandt, a former Parks Canada historian, explains that his interest in telling the story of the Battleford area in west-central

This evidentiary deficiency is symptomatic of a broader weakness in the research on which the volume is based. A key manuscript collection, the papers of the principal of Battleford Industrial School, Thomas Clarke (not Canon Matheson, as Hildebrandt states), is not cited; nor is a critically important published primary source such as treaty interpreter Peter Erasmus's *Buffalo Days and Nights*. Secondary works that would have supported the author's case, such as those of Noel Dyck, R. Huel, and Brian Titley, are similarly absent.

Views from Fort Battleford, although deficient in research, tackles an important issue for historians. We all need to reflect more carefully, as Hildebrandt's volume usefully reminds us, on whose history we choose to tell and commemorate publicly, not to mention how we and our governments choose to tell it.

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