

Research Directions for the Prairies/Plains Region

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The Prairies/Plains Region of North America is comprised of two provinces – Manitoba and Saskatchewan – sharing the 49th parallel with western Minnesota, North Dakota and eastern Montana. This section of the international border bisects a borderland region characterized by physical uniformity in its grassland ecosystem and continental climate, although there are widely divergent soil types, vegetation, and surface features on the local scale. The two sides also maintain a socioeconomic affinity in both enjoying a predominantly rural, resource and agrarian economy, with low population density and a geographical isolation from markets. Yet while integration of the two sides has occurred to a considerable degree because of shared physical geographies, migration and capitalist influences, there have also developed divergent forces that have acted to distinguish the Canadian and American components.

This presentation outlines very briefly some of the research directions I am following in my work on the evolution of the Prairies/Plains borderland region. My intention is to write two papers that will examine the evolution of the international region from the late eighteenth century to 1870 and from 1870 to 1989 respectively, focusing on the flows and networks of peoples, goods, ideas and capital that served to integrate and, in some cases, differentiate those societies developing on both sides of the forty-ninth parallel. I also intend to explore the theme of cultural continuity across the 49th parallel.