

CRISTA BRADLEY, If These Places Could Talk: Snapshots of Saskatchewan

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Numéro 91, printemps-été 2021

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1078472ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078472ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Association of Canadian Archivists

ISSN

0318-6954 (imprimé)

1923-6409 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Sweeney, S. (2021). Compte rendu de [CRISTA BRADLEY, If These Places Could Talk: Snapshots of Saskatchewan]. *Archivaria*, (91), 212–216.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1078472ar>

If These Places Could Talk: Snapshots of Saskatchewan.

Crista Bradley, with artwork by Wendi Nordell. Regina: Your Nickel's Worth Publishing, 2020. 48 pp. 978-1-9888783-59-8

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Crista Bradley, an archivist at the University of Regina, Saskatchewan, recently produced an interesting resource for children that may well be the first of its kind. It introduces children to the diversity of Saskatchewan's people and regions, but with a particularly archival twist. What sets this 48-page book apart is that it is filled with more than 100 archival and contemporary images of places, gathered from a wide variety of archives, libraries, and museums around the province of Saskatchewan, and a few contemporary images gathered from individuals. A listing at the back of the book informs educators and readers where each of the images was obtained. The images are arranged in 10 thematic groups with headings such as "Places of Hunt and Harvest," "Places of Conflict and Peace," and "Places We Call Home." The images are enhanced with engaging original artwork by Wendi Nordell. There are two pages dedicated to "Places of Record," describing what archives are; what archivists do; why archives matter; and where students, teachers, and others can find more information about them.

There is also a free 11-page educator's guide and an additional 17-page resource list.¹ The guide is "intended to help support educators by connecting Goals and Outcomes identified in the Grade One to Grade Four Saskatchewan Social Studies Curriculum with book content, and suggested related classroom activities."² Crista

1 See the resources page at <https://sasksnapshots.weebly.com/resources.html>.

2 Crista Bradley, *If These Places Could Talk: Snapshots of Saskatchewan: Educators Guide*, January 2021, accessed

conducted a survey in 2020 that asked Saskatchewan educators about their preferences for educator guides. She has encouraged additional feedback by providing an email address so that individuals can contact her to facilitate improvements for future iterations of the book. These two supports are important for busy teachers, as other resources often fail because they are not “classroom ready.” Although the book is aimed primarily at children from four to ten, it appeals to seniors and other adults pining for home or interested in exploring their backyard. Crista has indicated that therapists have also been using her book with people experiencing dementia and memory loss.³

Archivists might ask themselves, Why is this book so important? When it comes to children, archives have struggled to find the best way to connect. There are few archives with the facilities to easily accommodate a classroom-sized group of small children all at one time. Classroom visits by archivists obviate the need for space but still require significant time for interacting with the students and teacher and for preparing surrogates. These classroom materials have often come in the form of kits of facsimiles with accompanying teacher guides and have required major effort and expense to replicate.

Saskatchewan has a long history of promoting archives to children. In the early 1980s, Ian Wilson, then-Provincial Archivist of Saskatchewan, and his staff made a concerted effort to bring archives specifically to children. In 1980, as part of the effort to celebrate the 75th anniversary of Saskatchewan entering Confederation, the Archives launched the children and grandparents’ oral history program. This program sent 7,000 cassette tapes out to grade 7 students, who were each asked to interview either their own grandparent or another senior.⁴ The tapes were collected and deposited with the Saskatchewan Archives Board after the project finished. The post-project assessment was positive.⁵ Following that monumental effort, oral history archivist Krzysztof Gebhard then published *Community as Classroom: A Teacher’s Practical Guide to Oral History* in 1985.

February 28, 2021, https://sasksnapshots.weebly.com/uploads/4/5/5/4/45546573/educatorguide_31jan2021.pdf.

3 Crista Bradley, email to author, February 2021.

4 Ian and Ruth Wilson, in discussion with the author via Zoom, February 7, 2021.

5 See *The Saskatchewan Oral History Conference, 1981: Proceedings: Held at the University of Regina, May 1–2, 1981* ([Regina]: Saskatchewan Archives Board, 1981).

The Archives had a separate and ambitious program aimed at Fransaskois children and directed by Francophone archivist Marie-Louise Perron. There were three separate projects. *Les Archives à l'école* was an edupack with a video of two children visiting the archives (presented as a time machine), where they find documents related to the history of their family home; a teachers' guide; and laminated facsimiles of archival documents related to Saskatchewan history. A second project contained cassette recordings of people talking about their lives as francophone settlers in the province, transcriptions of the recordings, and a teacher's guide. The third project, *Chants que les anciens m'ont donnés*, included a book of lyrics and a cassette of some traditional French folksongs sung in the province.⁶

When I became Head of the University of Manitoba Archives and Special Collections in 1998, I began looking for projects that would bring our holdings to children, since our reference room could not hold a large number of small children. We were able to hire a historian with curriculum development experience, who was able to produce a number of online modules on Louis Riel for students in grades four and six as part of our Canadian Wartime Experience website.⁷ But it is difficult to bring websites such as these to the attention of appropriate teachers, and while the website did achieve some modest success when it was first launched, use of the site gradually tapered off.

With a physical picture book, however, Crista has turned the traditional paradigm of introducing children to archives on its head. Instead of teachers transporting busloads of children to busy reference rooms or archivists either selecting and creating facsimiles of a limited number of archival materials that children then work on in the classroom, guided by teachers and/or archivists, or even providing the next generation of facsimiles via websites, teachers and parents can employ this book at home or at school for both education and entertainment – both of which broaden perspectives and introduce children to the field of archives. Children can read it on their own or with assistance from teachers, parents, older siblings, or other adults, as the contents are scalable to different reading levels, but everyone – child or adult alike – who interacts with

6 Marie-Louise Perron, email to author, February 8, 2021.

7 University of Manitoba Libraries, Archives & Special Collections, "Canadian Wartime Experience," 1998–2004, Internet Archive, December 4, 2018, accessed February 28, 2021, https://web.archive.org/web/20181204010809/https://www.umanitoba.ca/canadian_wartime.

the book will come away with an awareness of archives and the role of archivists.

The theme of place, closely tied to the full diversity of Saskatchewan's people, is important, particularly at a time of racial tension and reckoning. There is the important treaty acknowledgement at the beginning of the book, and an excellent mix of places, which ties different cultural and racialized communities to Saskatchewan's heritage. The photo of the one-room Shiloh Baptist Church, which was built in 1911–1912 by the first Black community in Saskatchewan, for example, helps link the past to today's people, an important concept for children to grasp. The book features a nice balance of adults and children, and it does not shy away from the uglier sides of Saskatchewan's past: harmful residential schools, which housed Indigenous children, and the conflict at Batoche, which saw Métis peoples fighting for their rights against the government of Canada, are included. Thus, the book fulfils four important and critical roles: it brings archival materials to new audiences; it introduces the notion of archives and archivists to children and adults; it improves children's awareness and appreciation for the broad and diverse range of members of the community; and it instills in them a love of heritage – their heritage.

There were three relatively minor things that I would change. Although there are instructions on page 7 explaining how to match photo numbers to sidebar paragraphs, the photos on pages 6 and 7 are numbered, but there is no accompanying sidebar, which I felt was confusing. Also, I did not find the poetry compelling; it did not always scan, which is an important aspect when reading aloud; it definitely plays a strong and necessary part in the book, however. I found the illustrated map at the end to be backwards to my expectation, which would have been a left-to-right orientation, rather than right to left.

As I leafed through the book, I found three surprises. The first was that Crista has included a photo of the late archivist Don Richan (in photo 93, from 1987) as part of her explanation of the roles of archives and archivists. Don is not identified in the photo, but I immediately recognized him, as we started at around the same time – he at the Saskatchewan Archives Board and I at the University of Regina Archives. What Crista did not know, however, was that his son, John Richan, has taken up the archival mantle and is now the Digital Archivist at Concordia University, and so I was able to let him know that his dad's photo was in the book, to his and his family's delight. The second surprise was that I recognized Crista from behind in a photo (number 92) of researchers looking at collections. She

laughingly explained that they were short of in-person researchers at the time the photographer was there and so she had stepped in. How many times has one of us archivists done the same?

And the final surprise, which brought tears to my eyes, was in photo 54, titled “#39 Service Flight Training School, Swift Current, 1942.” A strong magnifying glass was no help, but the date is correct and there is a strong possibility that my father is in the photo. Although it is impossible to tell from the tiny image whether my father is among the many men standing in the photo, I like to think that he is. There are real people with real families behind every photo in the book. Some have been obscured by time, but many will still be accessible to individuals living today. How wonderful for people to see their families, their friends’ families, and their communities and to be able to share that information with their children, their grandparents, and their neighbours.

Of course, this endeavour would not be possible for very many archivists or archives. Crista was able to take a sabbatical that allowed her to review the literature, review the curriculum, complete a survey of educators, find and choose appropriate resources for the book, write the text, and work closely with the illustrator and publisher to produce the final product. And despite a Creative Saskatchewan grant to assist with publishing this book, Crista was in fact obligated to contribute funds of her own up front.⁸ She was also uniquely qualified to approach this project through her dissertation, which examined specialized archival public programming for older Canadians, as well as her work with the Saskatchewan Heritage Fair, for which she is a judge for the joint “archives prize” for “the student who makes best use of primary sources in the course of their project.”⁹ This book, however, could still serve as an example for others wishing to create something similar for their own provinces. For all the reasons indicated above, the power of archives is very real, and as much as possible, archivists should let the records speak.

8 Crista Bradley, in discussion with the author via Zoom, February 12, 2021.

9 Crista L. Bradley, “Coming of Age: Specialized Archival Public Programming for Older Canadians” (MAS thesis, University of Manitoba, 2005); and Crista Bradley, email to author, February 22, 2021.