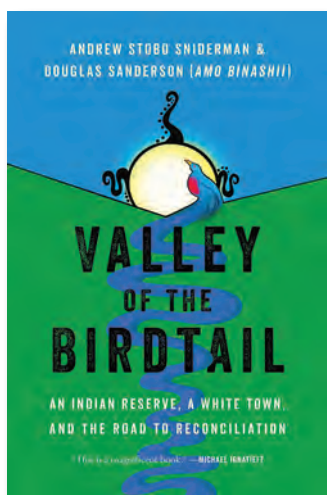


**Andrew Stobo Sniderman and Douglas Sanderson (Amo Binashii),
*Valley of the Birdtail: An Indian Reserve, a White Town, and The Road to
 Reconciliation*, HarperCollins, 2022, 368 pages, ISBN: 9781443466301,
 \$29.95 (hardcover) \$29.95; ISBN: 9781443466318, \$17.99 (ebook)**



Booksellers in my hometown of Winnipeg recognised the importance of this book and its relevance to Western Canadians. McNally Robinson Booksellers hosted an evening with the authors, available both live at the store and via YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Delj139oe5o&t=3s>). My neighbourhood bookstore, Whodunit Books, provided a display of the book. The owner, Michael Bumsted, later took a

supply of books to a well-attended event at the Rosburn curling club.

If you know little about the relationship between Indigenous and Settler people, this book is an excellent place to start, whatever part of Canada you live in. If you know more than a little, as readers of *Prairie History* presumably do, this book is still worth reading. Painful as the story is, we need to keep hearing it. As we learn from the title, with words many Canadians now try to avoid using, it is about the people of two neighbouring Manitoba communities; the Sioux of Waywayseecappo First Nation (Ojibwe: *Wewezhigaabawing*) and the people of Rosburn, many of them of Ukrainian descent.

The authors, Andrew Stobo Sniderman and Douglas Sanderson (Amo Binashii), are writers and lawyers. Sniderman has appeared as a columnist in papers such as the *National Post*. Their background may account for the book's style, which is clear and direct. The two also embody the diversity of the title. Sanderson is Swampy Cree, Beaver Clan, of Opaskwayak Cree Nation in northern Manitoba. If the book jacket had not provided any information about the two authors, it would be easy to assume that they are journalists. I mean that as a compliment. They have the heart for, and the art of, allowing others to tell their stories. These stories, which the

people of the two communities were prepared to share with courage and honesty, give the book its power.

Indigenous and Settler people have interacted in many ways over the centuries. One of those ways has been through schools, which is the subject of the most painful parts of this book to read. Learning about the horrors of residential schools is not new to many Canadians. Even so, reading the experiences of survivors as told in this book has not lost its power to shock and shame. The book's subtitle does, however, include the words "The Road to Reconciliation." The steps along this road for these two communities involved something practical: finding a way to get more money to support the Waywayseecappo school. Of course, as chapter 18 of the book clarifies, reconciliation cannot be solely about money.

Money spent on education (or anything else, for that matter) must be sufficient for the desired result. The old assumption of school systems was that Indigenous children were not worth educating or were incapable of being educated, so why waste money on them? Thinking about this took me back to the 1960s when I was a River Heights Junior High student in Winnipeg's South End. At the beginning of the school year, we were asked to examine our textbooks to see if they were in sufficiently good shape to be used. Having decided they were, we encased them in paper covers supplied by Neilson's, the chocolate bar manufacturers. One year somebody asked what happened to the textbooks that we judged too shabby. A boy replied: "They go to the Indian kids." He may have been thinking specifically of students at the Assiniboia Residential School on Academy Road (1958–1973). Or he may have spoken out of our shared understanding that Indians were the natural recipients of the charitable cast-offs of White people such as ourselves. As I remember it, nobody questioned what he said. Nobody asked: "If they aren't good enough for us, why are they okay for the Indian kids?" It was just the way things were.

It isn't easy to read this book without reflecting on where you fit into the story. As the descendant of settlers in Ontario and Manitoba, I have certainly done so and continue to do so. I was drawn to the book by its title. One of my ancestors, Henry Albert Manwaring (1847–1929), settled in the valley of the Birdtail. My father's mother was one of his daughters. He was a Londoner, a Cockney from Lambeth, where his father was a carter. The building which housed his store can still be seen in Birtle. While working on this review, I came across an image of his store on the MHS website. It was more impressive than I expected (<http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/sites/prattblock.shtml>). I could not help but be reminded of another remarkable building in the neighbourhood—the Birtle Residential School. This building can be seen in “Hidden Manitoba: Birtle Residential School” on the MHS YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/c/ManitobaHistoricalSociety/videos>).

Valley of the Birdtail concludes with an Afterword by Maureen TwoVoice, *Binesi Ikwe* (Thunderbird Woman), one of the people readers met at the book's beginning. She tells us about Canada Day 2021 (p. 308). The plan for the day was to start with a pipe ceremony at the Birtle Residential School and then walk to *Wewezhigaabawing*. As she sat on the ground looking at the school, she thought, “My grandparents were dropped off at schools like this, taken from my great-grandparents by law and

left alone with hundreds of other children. . . . This is where intergenerational trauma started for my family.” Her words made me wonder if Grandpa Manwaring had done business with the school. It seems likely. There are records of his business at the Archives of Manitoba, and I intend to go and look at them. Whether or not I find proof of a connection with the school, the search will be a way of understanding my responsibility as a Settler.

Finally, a third person involved in making this book should be acknowledged. This is Karen McBride, who created the cover illustration. It is beautiful, hopeful, and, from a practical point of view, must encourage bookstore browsers to reach out and pick up the book. McBride is an Algonquin Anishinaabe writer and illustrator from Timiskaming First Nation in Quebec and the creator of the novel *Crow Winter*. The novel's front cover bears these words of endorsement from Katherena Vermette: “Full of spirit, love, mystery, and good medicine.” I endorse her praise. I borrowed the book from the library and subsequently bought my copy.

Miigweech to Andrew Sniderman & Douglas Sanderson, to Karen McBride and, most of all, to the people of *Wewezhigaabawing* [Waywayseecappo] and Rossburn, for all you did, challenging as it must have been, to create this book.

Anne Morton
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Terry Dann, *Land Title: A Novel of the Prairies*, independently published, 2020, 404 pages, ISBN: 9798582453079, \$22.95 (paperback)



Writers of historical fiction have the two-fold challenge of making a ripping-good yarn that is coherent while treating real events and people accurately. Even skilled writers often sprinkle the text gratuitously with historical factoids to bolster the impression that they “know their stuff”. In my view, there should only be as much historical detail as necessary to set the story in space and time, and advance the narrative.

In this respect, Terry Dan has done a masterful job with his first work of fiction which is set mostly in western Manitoba between 1883 and 1929. The book starts

with three initially unrelated stories that ultimately interweave: Howahkan, a mechanically-gifted Dakota boy who joins White society but is never fully accepted; Ontario-born Violet and Harry Hartney who seek new lives as farmers; and ne'er-do-well Angus McLennan who abuses his power and privilege for personal gain. Along the way, Dann deals with significant events in Manitoba's past: the woeful treatment of Indigenous peoples in residential schools, the conversion of the prairies to an agricultural landscape by settlers from around the world, the home front during the First World War, the Flu Pandemic of 1918–1919, and more.

I became quite invested in the characters, especially Howahkan whose story arc turned out quite differently from what I had expected. It was an altogether engaging story that left me wanting more.

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