

GOLDEN PRAIRIE



JEROME MARTIN



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this e-book. I hope you enjoy your journey to Golden Prairie.

I've photographed in Golden Prairie most of my life, although I lived there for only eleven years (1949-1960). I continue to visit and photograph the town and the surrounding area regularly. Creating this book has been an interesting and challenging task, but I've enjoyed the process.

I would be pleased to receive [your comments](#) and ideas with respect to this book and to the idea of publishing using e-books or multimedia products. Clicking on the directional arrows ◀ or ▶ beside the page number will navigate, and the audio icon 🔊 will play my reflections on each collection of photos.

Please visit [my photo site](#) to see more photographs of the prairies and prairie people, as well as photographs from other parts of the world.

Thanks for taking the time to pay a virtual visit to Golden Prairie, my home town.

Jerome Martin

Edmonton, Alberta

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To hear the audio, click on the audio icon. This should raise a set of controllers for volume, pausing, and exiting.

GOLDEN PRAIRIE, SASKATCHEWAN

Golden Prairie is located in southwestern Saskatchewan, 30 miles north of Maple Creek , within sight of the Cypress Hills.

This part of Saskatchewan is shortgrass country with a wide range of soil types and relatively low rainfall. It's more suited to ranching than farming.

The Golden Prairie area was settled largely by German-speaking immigrants who came to Saskatchewan via Ellis Island and North Dakota. They left the deep, fertile soils of North Dakota and moved to Saskatchewan because they were offered free land. Some of them would later regret that move when they learned that southern Saskatchewan was not as productive as the area they had left.

The settlers used the same farming techniques they had brought from Europe and used in North Dakota. Government provided a free quarter section to each of the settlers and told them that this was fertile, productive farmland. Drought and wind in the thirties across the Great Plains caused irreparable damage to some of this land and the people who attempted to farm it.

Golden Prairie had become a village (we called it a town) in 1929. When I lived there we had three grocery stores, two and, for a short time, three restaurants, a lumber yard, four grain elevators, and several farm fuel and implement dealers. The population peaked at about 600 in the late 1950s.

Dr. John W. Bennett, who would be later described by one of his colleagues as '... one of the most brilliant and productive researchers of historical and ecological anthropology', conducted research in the Maple Creek area in the late





1950s. In his book *Northern Plainsmen: Adaptive Strategy and Agrarian Life* Bennett refers to [Maple Creek](#) as 'Jasper' and Golden Prairie as 'Sunrise.' The book, one of the most significant books written about the people of the Great Plains, contains excellent photographs which he made of the area and its people.

The German immigrants brought the Baptist Church with them when they came to Golden Prairie. While my father's mother and her siblings were Baptists and my mother's parents were Lutheran, my parents chose to attend the United Church in Golden Prairie (see my book [To the Horizon and Beyond: Student Ministers in Golden Prairie, Saskatchewan, 1929-1975](#)).

The [United Church of Canada](#), the largest Protestant church in Canada, sent student ministers from central and eastern Canada to serve small congregations in western Canada. Student ministers who came to Golden Prairie would live in the church manse and conduct services in town and in several rural locations. Golden Prairie also had a Catholic church that was served by clergy from other towns.

The fifties were productive years: lots of rain and high grain prices. This was a new land. We were certain that agriculture would continue to prosper and that villages like Golden Prairie would grow into towns and towns would grow into cities.

During the prosperous fifties virtually every family bought a new car every two or three years. Bill May bought a new Cadillac in 1955; Henry Widmer bought a Packard in the same year; and Ken Sawby bought a 1956 Ford convertible a year later. There were new trucks, new tractors and combines parked in farmyards. Farmers were buying land expecting that prices and yields would continue to be high. Life was good and could only get better.

Times changed. Better roads and better vehicles allowed people to travel to larger centres more easily. They bought groceries and farm supplies in Maple Creek because they had more choice and probably better prices. When they retired they moved to Medicine Hat.



Local stores failed. Merchants left. Having small machinery dealerships and bulk fuel stations was not profitable. The grain elevators remained, but there were concerns that the spur railway line from Medicine Hat would be closed.

Some young people left to attend University and technical schools; very few of them returned. Others married and took over their parents' farms.

Farming changed. Prices declined, input costs increased. Some farmers bought more land and larger equipment; others retired or simply quit farming.

Golden Prairie is now home to approximately 35 people, most of whom work in the oil and gas industry. Some farmers in the area have been very successful in terms of their businesses, but for many the revenue from oil and gas wells on their land and the money they earn working off the farm (often for the oil and gas companies working in the area) has made it possible for them to continue farming.

When I was in school in Golden Prairie in the 1950s we had two grades per room, a total of about 30 students and one teacher. All of our classes in elementary school were taught by our home room teachers.

The schools in Golden Prairie were closed in 2006 due to low enrollment. The High School that had been built in 1955 had been abandoned several years earlier due to construction problems and newer facilities had been constructed for High School and Elementary School. Students are now bused to other communities.

One grain elevator stands in Golden Prairie. The others have been dismantled. Some houses have been sold and moved; and some are abandoned. There are many lots without houses. Calling them vacant is not appropriate since they are home to trees, shrubs, grass, birds and animals.

The last time I visited Golden Prairie I saw one person and four deer in the town. One of the deer was grazing on lush grass in a vacant lot. It was the lot on which we first lived when we moved to the town. The house was dismantled years ago. The deer seemed content and unconcerned about me standing just a few feet from him.

The town also seems content. It's certainly quiet. There were no sounds of cars on gravel streets, no whines from trucks hauling loads of grain up the steep inclines into the elevators, no pop-pop-pop from the motors in the elevators as grain was elevated into bins.

The air was clean and clear: and the silence seemed appropriate.



June - 1952.

THE PHOTOGRAPHS

I became a documentary photographer in 1955 when I was thirteen, although at that time I did not know what that term meant.

I had volunteered to take photographs of the important buildings in Golden Prairie so that these photographs could be included in a school publication which celebrated Saskatchewan's Jubilee (the province was established in 1905).

When my black and white prints arrived in the mail the teacher told me that it was too late to include them in the publication. That may have been the beginning of my interest in publishing and being responsible for producing my own work. It certainly was the beginning of my interest in photography.

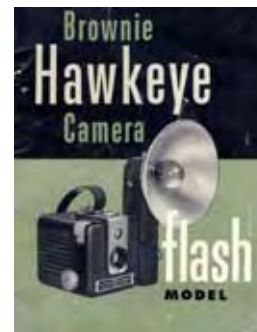
The camera I used in 1955 was a [Kodak Brownie Hawkeye](#) which used 620 roll film. I still have the camera, the prints and the negatives from that first assignment. Prints made recently from the original negatives are included in this book.

Most of the images in this book were made with 35mm Nikons although several are large-format, 4x5, images.

The photographs are arranged in four sections: 1955, 1970-79, 1979-1999, and 2001 to date. The 1979-1999 sections contain photographs from two reunions, the first of which (1979) attracted 1,000 to 1,500 people from various parts of Canada and the United States.

Silver-gelatin prints of the photographs contained in this book are available for purchase (jmartin@spottedcowpress.ca).

To see more of my photographs please go to my [photo website](#).



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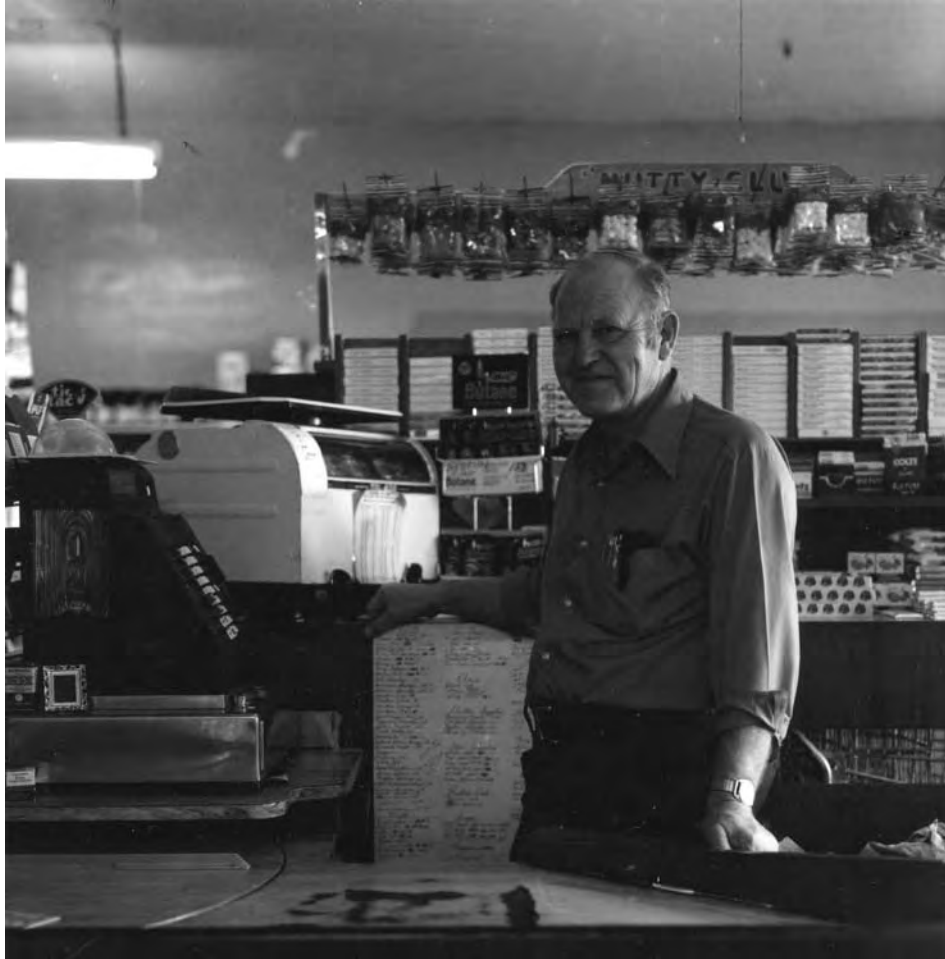
































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REMEMBERING THE TOWN



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J E R O M E M A R T I N

Jerome Martin was born in Maple Creek, Saskatchewan at the edge of the Cypress Hills in the summer of 1942.

He lived on a farm south and east of Golden Prairie until he was seven years old. He and his family then moved to the village of Golden Prairie where he and his sister were closer to school (he had attended a one room school for Grade One and part of Grade Two) and where his father took a job operating a grain elevator to supplement his income from the farm. Eleven years later his parents built a new house on the farm and moved back, although his father continued to manage the elevator for several years after that.

He attended the University of Saskatchewan where he earned BSA (Bachelor of Science in Agriculture) and MSc degrees, then moved to Alberta to work with Alberta Agriculture. He completed a PhD in Animal Nutrition at the University of Alberta while working for the Government of Alberta.

Jerome has worked in the private sector and has also served in administrative and teaching roles for several years with the University of Alberta.

In 1976 he was awarded a Canada Council (Explorations) Grant for a photographic project entitled *An Investigation of a Personal Photographic History*. He has photographed extensively on the Great Plains of North America and in various other countries and regions. His photographs may be found in numerous public and private collections.

Jerome is the owner and publisher of Spotted Cow Press. He is the author of *Cappuccino U: new approaches to learning and working*, *Alternative Futures for Prairie Agricultural Communities*, and *To the Horizon and Beyond: Student Ministers in Golden Prairie, Saskatchewan, 1929-1975*.



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Cover photo: Looking down Main Street, Golden Prairie, Saskatchewan, 2001.

All photographs in the book are by Jerome Martin, with the exception of those on pages 3, 5 and 8, for which the photographer is unknown.