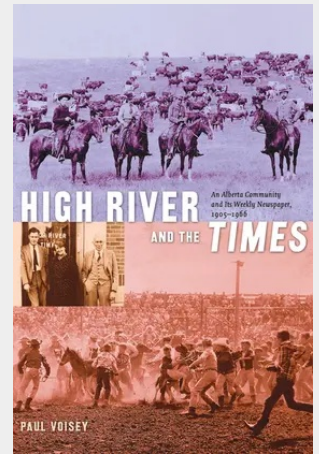


High River and the Times

Founded in 1905, the High River Times served a community of small town advertisers and an extensive hinterland of ranchers and farmers in southern Alberta. Under the ownership of the Charles Clark family for over 60 years, the Times established itself as the epitome of the rural weekly press in Alberta. Even Joe Clark, the future prime minister, worked for the family business. While historians rely heavily on local newspapers to write about rural and small town life, Paul Voisey has studied the influence of the Times on shaping the community of High River. Foreword by Rt. Hon. Joe Clark, PC CC.

High River and the Times is an engaging case study of how weekly newspapers reflect and articulate the values and aspirations of the rural communities they serve. Among thousands of weeklies that have appeared (and often disappeared) throughout Canadian history, the High River Times occupies a special position. Many times it received awards and honours as one of the best weekly newspapers in the country. From its founding in 1905 until 1966 it was owned and operated by the family of former Prime Minister Joe Clark. Based in the small town of High River, Alberta, 38 miles south of Calgary, the Times served an extensive hinterland of ranchers and farmers. Over six decades the community experienced three distinctive eras in its development, and the Times reflected the concerns and hopes of each them. When settlers poured into the district early in the twentieth century, High River thrived by supplying them with goods and services. Like other boom towns, it launched promotional campaigns to stimulate further growth. The Times played an aggressive role in this crusade, serving as the chief organ of local boosterism and fashioning a vision of High River as an emerging city commanding a vast hinterland of resource development, railways, and industry. After the Great War when the settlement boom ended, and drought and recession gripped Western Canada, urban growth fizzled in most prairie towns, including High River. It soon faced the reality that it would long remain a small service centre. The Times now began to promote small town and rural life as a virtue, and contrasted it favourably with the trouble-plagued big city. It cleverly combined this new vision with a campaign to promote tourism as the catalyst for future economic growth by emphasizing such pastoral attractions as the scenery of the foothills and mountains, hunting and fishing, and dude ranches. The Great Depression ensured that the town would remain small, the district rural, and the wilderness unspoiled. World War II and the post-war era brought renewed prosperity to the community, but the spectre of rural depopulation threatened to undermine growth, a troubling development that received considerable attention in the Times. Moreover, the roads and automobiles that once promised to bring visitors to the district now whisked them to the city. Faced with commercial decline, High River sought to make a virtue of its very obsolescence. The Times now presented the district as a living relic of the old, wild west, and it promoted rodeo, chuckwagon racing, and other cowtown attractions designed to attract tourists. A town that once presented itself as "bustling and modern," and then "small and friendly," now prided itself on being "old-fashioned," and with the help of the Times, constructed a mythical past to fit the image.



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