



# How the West Was Written: The Life and Times of James H. Gray

*Brian Brennan*

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*How the West Was Written* is published to celebrate the centenary of James H. Gray's birth. He was born on 31 August 1906.

James H. Gray was the first Canadian social historian to tackle such previously taboo subjects as the sex lives and boozing habits of the early settlers. His books were on the national and Toronto Star bestseller lists before those of Pierre Berton and have since become classics of Canadian literature. Gray's *Red Lights on the Prairies* stunned readers with its straight-forward approach to prostitution on the prairies and was named one of the one hundred most important Canadian books of all time by the Literary Review of Canada.

In this first-ever biography of Gray, Brian Brennan covers aspects of the Gray story including:

- His early, poverty-stricken years during WWI in Winnipeg.
- His working career as an office boy, brokerage firm employee and budding entrepreneur and gambler who invested in racehorses, a candy business that went broke, and a miniature golf course.
- His 12-year career with the Free Press where he "could write like hell and was afraid of no one," which ended abruptly when he became the "only reporter in history to be fired as a result of policy disagreement with his editor".
- How he accepted a public relations job at Home Oil to promote a Canadian pipeline project and, when that project evaporated, redirected his energies into writing best-selling histories that produced sales of 400,000 and brought the high-school dropout three honorary doctorates, the Order of Canada, and the Pierre Berton Award for distinguished achievement in popularizing Canadian history.

Brennan draws on information gleaned from interviews with Gray family members and associates, from Gray's books, his newspaper articles, research papers, correspondence and diaries. Brennan covers the Gray story with engaging wit and impressive authority.

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#### **Richard Graham:**

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