

In Search of a Usable Urban History

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suffocation is to be avoided, but his answers must await the test of a populace with a transformed consciousness.

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In Search of a Usable Urban History

ONE OF THE CONTINUING CHARACTERISTICS of Canadian historiography is a commitment to the present. When the unique problems of city growth became a focus of public concern in the late 1960s, Canadian historians turned readily to the study of the urban past. Current attention to urban history in Canada can be dated generally from that time and is contemporaneous with the rise of the heritage movement and campaigns for the preservation of the ecology in our major centres. In the past 15 to 20 years the production of material pertaining to urban history has been overwhelming. Occasionally a list of active scholars and their projects is prepared for *Urban History Review*: a compilation completed in 1976 had 130 entries; an update done in 1980 listed 305 individuals.¹ Urban-related topics now represent a significant proportion of the output of our historical scholarship.

Of course interest in the development of various communities has been widespread for many years and much has been accomplished in the area of local history, a field akin to urban history and at times virtually indistinguishable from it. The difference between the two may lie partly in the skills of the practitioners, but it has more to do with the local historian's concentration on

1 Gilbert A. Stelter, "Current Research in Canadian Urban History", *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, No. 3-75 (February, 1976), pp. 27-36 and *ibid.*, Vol. IX No. 1 (June 1980), pp. 110-28. An interdisciplinary journal concerned with the historical evolution of urban Canada, *UHR* was published by the National Museum of Man with the assistance of the Urban History Committee of the Canadian Historical Association from 1972 to 1983. It is now issued by the Institute of Urban Studies, University of Winnipeg in co-operation with the Canadian Urban History Association.

chronology as opposed to the urban historian's interest in the pattern and dynamics of change. Urban history from its beginnings has met its need to explain the hows and whys of the urban past through reference to a wide variety of other disciplines. It is the early and persisting susceptibility to interdisciplinary influences that marks this field's major historiographical innovation and achievement. Indeed, some of the most interesting studies have been undertaken by geographers, architectural historians and folklorists, as well as by historians. The intention here is to examine a few of the more general books available in the field of urban history. This may help to permit entry to the massive bibliography and to construct a backdrop against which regional distinctions can ultimately be drawn.

The obvious starting points are research guides and bibliographies. An aging but still useful guide outlining major research results, the research materials available for ongoing study, and centres where work is being done was produced several years ago by the now extinct federal Ministry of State for Urban Affairs. Entitled *Directory of Canadian Urban Information Sources*,² it has the modest objective of "sorting out what material is available. . .and where it can be found". Its structure is simple. There is a lengthy chapter on the basic literature and a review of principal repositories for research data. The latter segment is weakened by somewhat whimsical selection standards. Relevant federal, provincial and civic libraries are noted, and city archives are included, but with the exception of Newfoundland, no provincial archives are mentioned, nor is the federal Public Archives. Corporate archives are also omitted. The names and services of organizations, mainly of the non-governmental variety, make up the third section. The fourth segment, which is dated but still helpful for general researchers and students, is a listing of universities, indicating relevant departments and institutes, often with accompanying outlines of course offerings. Despite the incomplete nature of the work, the *Directory* is a useful and readily available reference device. The edition examined, 1977, was the third in what was expected to be a continuing series. Unfortunately the disbanding of the urban affairs ministry appears to have terminated this very worthwhile project, though the most recent edition is available from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation free of charge.

A considerably more expensive but ultimately much more useful reference tool has been produced by the entrepreneurial duo of Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan F.J. Artibise, two godfathers of the field in Canada. *Canada's Urban Past: A Bibliography to 1980 and Guide to Canadian Urban Studies* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1982) is a flexible but precise tool for the study of urban history and includes more than 7,000 titles. Access to the list can be had in four ways: through indices of specific authors, subjects and

2 Canada, Ministry of State for Urban Affairs, *Directory of Canadian Urban Information Sources, 1977* (Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada, 1977). Available from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0P7.

places and by reference to the main body of citations. There are sections devoted to the Maritimes, Ontario, Quebec, and the West, with parallel headings for provinces and subheadings for communities having several entries. Newfoundland, however, is tucked away under "Maritimes", while "Western Canada" has been awarded custody of the North for the purposes of this volume. For major cities, such as Montreal and Winnipeg, additional subdivisions separate general works from listings focusing on conventionally-accepted historical periods. The volume also includes a general section containing entries for bibliographies, general studies and works of methodology. Additional entries are grouped under headings for economic development, population, urban environment and municipal government. Furthermore, the authors have included a guide to Canadian urban studies listing major archival repositories, journals and other research tools. As with the earlier *Directory*, corporate archives are not included. The significance of this failing can be measured by reference to *A Guide to the history and records of selected Montreal businesses before 1947* (Montreal, McGill University Montreal Business History Project, c.1978). Corporate archives are important, much more numerous than commonly believed, and often readily accessible.

Everyone is going to find something missing from *Canada's Urban Past*. Such omissions are most likely to be recent publications appearing after the bibliography was assembled or obscure works: the editors have been exceptionally thorough; furthermore, updates and missed titles are currently being collected by Elizabeth Bloomfield of the University of Guelph, and her annual checklist of new material is a feature of the *Urban History Review*. Still, one would wish that *Canada's Urban Past* had a broader editorial range. Mention of Ian MacPherson's work on the co-operative movement, *Each for All* (1979), is surely deserved because the subject bears directly upon aspects of urban life, and one wonders why Michael Bliss' *Flavelle* (1978) or Robert Bothwell and William Kilbourn's *C.D. Howe* (1979) could be regarded as being beyond the scope of the work. Some coverage is spotty. For instance an attempt has been made to compensate for urban historians' neglect of the intellectual responses to the city by including such works as Douglas Durkin's *The Magpie* and Alan Sullivan's *The Rapids*. Better known works, including *The Tin Flute* by Gabrielle Roy and *Such is My Beloved* by Morley Callaghan, are not there. Nor, for that matter, is *This Thing Called Love*, a novel set in Saint John by Louis Cunningham, although omission of this scarce item is understandable since it was also missed by the editors of the *Literary History of Canada*. Despite the inevitable problems, the bibliography is bound to meet most people's needs most of the time. Artibise and Stelter have produced a concise, reliable and informative sourcebook which should be an essential reference work for years to come.

Not the least significant part of the achievement of *Canada's Urban Past* is the introduction. It should be read with care by anyone approaching the field for

the first time. Sketching out the various themes and analytical approaches one will meet in the bibliography, the authors provide a well-organized and effective exposition of their subject-matter. At times they become bogged down in self-imposed intricacies, such as the concept of density to explain interrelations which could be outlined more effectively without such conceptualizations, and discussion of one piece of labour history almost appears to be gratuitous axe-grinding, but these lapses are overshadowed by the presentation of a handy categorization of urban scholarship which can be recommended to any reader. By far the largest segment of the bibliography falls within the bounds of "urban as entity"; that is, the factors which shape the urban environment. The city is, in effect, the product of the interplay of strong political and socio-economic forces, and works of this nature place their subjects within their local, regional and national contexts. Paul O'Neill's two-volume *The Story of St. John's* (1975, 1976) is cited as one example of this form. A second but much smaller group is composed of works focusing on "urban as process" having as their intent the demonstration of how cities moulded the people and activities found within their confines. The article by Judith Fingard on the relief of the unemployed in Saint John, Halifax and St. John's, published in *Acadiensis*, V, 1 (Autumn 1975), indicates some of the potential of this approach. The third variant is "urban as setting", an example of which is Christopher Moore's charming *Louisbourg Portraits* (1983) in which the town is the backdrop for vignettes of five individuals. Fingard's able investigation of *Jack in Port* (1982) is another example; Jack receives the bulk of the attention and the ports are treated as the setting for his activities.

A good jumping-off point for the study of urban history is the two-volume work by George A. Nader, *Cities of Canada, Vol. I: Theoretical, Historical and Planning Perspectives, Vol. II: Profiles of Fifteen Metropolitan Centres* (Toronto, Macmillan, 1975, 1976). Offering a survey of the evolution and characteristics of Canada's urban system, this is an appropriate introduction to urban studies, particularly if the issues and methodology are unfamiliar. Nader is a geographer and most at home covering questions relating to town planning. In an introductory chapter to volume one, he details the relationship of cities and the forces governing that relationship; replete as it is with jargon and mathematical equations, the discussion may be a bit intimidating, but the author never lets his feet leave the ground. Having explained the theories, Nader concedes the divergence of theory and actuality brought about by a multiplicity of variables. Several additional chapters follow in which the theoretical approaches to land-use studies are combined with general synopses of what has occurred recently in the use of land in our cities. His approach to the material gives this volume an odd identity as part textbook and part analytical monograph. It is not altogether clear that his analysis compensates for the loss of the tightness and organization found in a good textbook. Moreover the scope of the subject, all of Canada, has forced Nader to use broad interpretations which at

times inadequately reflect newer research results. In his review of land use issues, a lot of information presented would be familiar to even the occasional newspaper reader.

A similar level of generality pervades the second segment of volume one, a series of chapters on the historical evolution of our cities. The presentation of the economic context in which our cities grew is superficial, and there is an undue emphasis on keeping track of population growth. While the breadth and generous timeframe of the study have obviously limited its depth, the author retains a high level of accuracy. When he returns to the field of planning in the third part of volume one, Nader exhibits vitality and lucidity in his presentation of current urban problems. He clearly demonstrates a need for more planning and for tax reform in which regressive property taxes are replaced by progressive income taxes. Even so, little hope is extended for a comprehensive resolution of our urban woes. This is so in part because the national city system is a hierarchical one and has needs running counter to the prevailing spirit of regionalism. Until there is a reestablishment of a commitment to a national identity, he argues, there is little likelihood that the effectiveness of our urban-based economic and political regimes will be maximized.

In volume two Nader examines in greater detail the development of 15 major centres from St. John's to Victoria. His subject material has been organized to reflect the historical development of each city and to give a presentation of their economic bases, land-use structures and planning policies. Besides St. John's, among the cities of Atlantic Canada Nader has also included chapters on Halifax and Saint John. Although the treatment they receive reflects local peculiarities and regional distinctions, the strengths and weaknesses parallel those of volume one, including too brief historical descriptions and generalized explanations of the economy. Outlines of land-use patterns and the physical expansion of each city will be obvious to local folk, but for individuals less familiar with the locale, they will prove informative and useful. The sections on planning are possibly the most disappointing. Nader was at his provocative best in volume one when dealing with this topic, but in volume two his treatment is brief and uninspired. In part this may be due to his sources, many of whom were civic officials, but the result denies the volume some of its best opportunities for comment and comparison. Nader has clearly assimilated a vast amount of material, organized it well and presented it in a literate fashion. With such an array of civic sketches readily available, the invitation to compare and contrast the development of various communities is strong. Indeed it was one of the author's objectives in assembling the volume. More's the pity, then, that no comparisons are made in the book. Nader has set himself a course which can produce valuable results, and one must hope that he will eventually follow it to its conclusion.

While broad comparative analyses are yet to come, works of more limited intent have contributed much to a general outline of our urban past. John C.

Weaver, in a slender volume entitled *Shaping the Canadian City: Essays on Urban Politics and Policy, 1890-1970* (Kingston, Queen's University Institute of Local Government, 1977) concentrates on how the administration of our cities changed to meet the various challenges of expansion and how different components in the community reacted to the new conditions. Weaver's perspective is a national one, in which common elements are selected for discussion and then illustrated with reference to particular locales. Only Toronto is given extensive attention in a chapter discussing the struggle for a board of control. A search for particular details about an individual community may prove fruitless, but a persuasive overall argument is presented which is pertinent to most cities.

Weaver recounts the massive problems of poverty, social dislocation and inadequate services which accompanied the rise of our cities and notes that they were regarded by contemporaries as functional in nature although they were actually systemic. With this misconception guiding them, politicians, businessmen and other community leaders turned to administrative techniques as remedial measures. Standard prescriptions included moral rejuvenation, tightened health and building codes, urban planning, and public ownership of major civic utilities. These reforms were considered a matter of good management, so an essential step forward was seen as the removal of influences conducive to bad management. Political corruption and patronage were identified as two prime targets. Provincial governments were urged to create structures suited to administration by experts and protected from direct political interference. The result was a growth of bureaucracy, an undermining of democracy, and the continuation of urban social problems.

Weaver gives the clear impression that an important advance in current urban reform is the introduction of democratic influences which had been averted by earlier reform movements. Although he firmly establishes his historical interpretation, hopes for present improvements may be misplaced. Many so-called democratic community-action groups are of the beggar-thy-neighbour variety. Also, greater legitimacy for civic administrations may be frustrated by provincial governments jealous of their role as the authentic voice of the people. The contemporary provincial drive to accumulate power may in fact be seen as a threat to the possibilities of greater democratic control at the civic level.

The works by Nader and Weaver both place the development of Canada's cities into an analytical framework. Another work is more successful in establishing the diversity of Canadian urban history. *The Canadian City* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1979), edited by Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan Artibise, is based on the assumption "that there are many acceptable ways of studying the complexity of the urban dimension". What is provided is a careful selection of studies grouped under the themes of frontier communities, urban growth, the physical environment, urban society, urban reform, and methodology. Many of the pieces in the work are familiar, especially two which originally appeared in *Acadiensis*: Bill Acheson's "The National Policy and the Industrialization of the

Maritimes, 1880-1910," and Judith Fingard's "The Relief of the Unemployed Poor in Saint John, Halifax and St. John's, 1815-1860." Both have weathered the passage of time very well and continue to provide useful insights into urban society in the Maritimes. Some other contributions, although perhaps still useful, now appear dated. Several, however, retain current appeal, including Michael Katz's "The People of a Canadian City, 1851-1852", a treatment of the lives of ordinary people in pre-industrial Hamilton. Suzanne Cross in "The Neglected Majority: The Changing Role of Women in Nineteenth-Century Montreal" shatters the image of the ornamental Victorian lady. The high point remains one of only three items not published before elsewhere, and it alone may justify the purchase of the volume for those who have otherwise seen most of the remaining material. Deryck Holdsworth's "House and Home in Vancouver" describes the effects on the housing environment of essentially British cultural preferences expressed through building and marketing techniques indigenous to the American West Coast. The result, low density suburban housing on individually-owned separate lots, shows how cultural baggage carried by city dwellers influenced the building of the city.

The Canadian City, still widely used in undergraduate history courses, is now a bit tired, and plans are apparently underway to issue a revised version. Because of its prominence, this volume offers a useful benchmark against which progress in the field can be measured. A concluding chapter by Stelter, "A Sense of Time and Place: The Historian's Approach to Canada's Urban Past", recapitulates the various ways in which scholars have studied urban history, many of which are represented in the volume. While discouraged by the thinness of the conceptual framework, Stelter is heartened by the growing activity in the field and the increased sophistication of approach, and he places considerable hope on the expected results of comparative urban biographies. The general reader is just as likely to look forward to less domination of the field by the West and less of a focus on Toronto and Montreal when dealing with Central Canada. There emerges from *The Canadian City* a paradigm which is essentially whiggish. City-building seems to be done in a spirit of free will in which a pattern of success is established in a period of plenty. Limited options and relative decline were the fate of many communities and deserve more attention, if only to provide what Stelter is seeking, comparative data on which to construct an analysis of the Canadian city-building process.

Following hard on the heels of *The Canadian City* was another volume produced by Artibise and Stelter. *The Usable Urban Past: Planning and Politics in the Modern Canadian City* (Toronto, Macmillan, 1979) is a series of 13 articles which have not hitherto been published elsewhere. Through the examination of the dynamics and pattern of urban growth, the material presented here tends to undermine the whiggism of the previous collection and illustrate the complexity of the forces at work in the city-building process. The articles demonstrate some of the depth of urban history as it is practised in

Canada and also some of its limitations. As with others of their endeavours, the editors provide a very useful introduction and guide to the field.

Although there are differing views on the sources of economic growth in the urban context, only an allusion is made to the interpretation of the city as an originator of development within a particular region. Instead a thought-provoking analysis of the identification and assessment of trends in economic growth is presented by a geographer, James W. Simmons. In this analysis cities are seen as the beneficiaries of regional growth, which is in turn a product of worldwide demand for primary commodities. A rather complicated "interdependency matrix" is introduced in an attempt to explain how various factors reinforce or neutralize a community's potential for expansion. Unfortunately a high degree of variability exists in these factors due to the "openness" of the Canadian economy, and this tends to confuse the interpretation and limit its usefulness. Thus, while we are denied the satisfaction of a straightforward, easily explained exposé of how cities grow, the review of the elements one must consider is challenging and innovative. In that sense this contribution is perhaps the most usable in the book.

If urban economics are confusing, civic politics are devious. In a second section of five articles, *The Usable Urban Past* focuses on municipal government, particularly in the crucial period from 1900 to 1940. John Weaver looks specifically at Toronto as an example of how turn-of-the-century reform resulted in bureaucratization and avoidance of democratic control. This theme is picked up by James D. Anderson in the context of Western Canada where the process is shown to have protected the vested interests of economically privileged social elements. Artibise develops Anderson's interpretation to show that on the Prairies a portion of this class, the booster businessmen, used their positions to foster pre-1914 policies of expansion well into the century at considerable cost to their cities' wellbeing and at the expense of succeeding generations. Ed Rea shows that in Winnipeg a cloak of non-partisanship camouflaged the political consummation of this process. The fate of politicians obstructing the will of similar groups in Montreal is revealed by Terry Copp in his description of the fall of Camillien Houde, the populist scapegoat undercut by the city's comfortable classes and by buck-passing provincial legislators.

A third section is dedicated to the analysis of how the experts, that is the urban planners, have promoted their ideas and their profession since the turn of the century. A number of articles examine planning in a variety of contexts, while others deal with the vocational adjustments of the individuals involved. Most of these contributions focus on specific municipalities, although P.J. Smith looks at provincial planning legislation in Alberta. Oiva Saarinen treats two new frontier towns, Iroquois Falls, Ontario and Temiscaming, Quebec, as experiments in the application of the "Garden City" concepts and concludes that there are many slips between the planning cup and the built-environment lip. Town planners worked in a pragmatic world in which members of the gener-

al public kept self-interest to the fore. Max Foran views positively the work of Calgarians in planning their city, concluding that what was practicable was done, in good times and bad. Shirley Spragge is not so charitable with the housing reformers of Toronto and deprecates the provision of several hundred well-designed homes as "failure . . . to achieve", while noting their additional dereliction of not promoting a "new type of woman" sufficiently well. If the larger visions of planners were not fulfilled, some of the compromises fell short too, as Walter Van Nus shows in his examination of zoning, the preservation of delimited areas for certain purposes, as a fallback position which was undermined by the combined influences of property owners and developers. Peter Moore compares zoning and planning as approaches reflecting community pressures, concluding that early in this century zoning responded to populist demands while planning reflected the elite taste. The adoption of zoning as a planning technique later on placed the two influences in a dialectical struggle for dominance of regulatory controls. Having failed to achieve many of their ideals, planners searched for explanations. Thomas Gunton reaches a perhaps self-evident conclusion that a fragmented approach to problems prohibited the adoption of a unified programme which would be convincing enough to move a cautious public in times of economic reverses.

The clear intent of *The Usable Urban Past* is to show the pitfalls confronting desires for a humane urban environment. In identifying the economic, social and political factors of the past, the editors offer lessons on how to deal with current problems of reform. The wideranging subject-matter is an impressive display of the analytical tools at the service of urban historians today. If the whiggism of *The Canadian City* has been banished by the complexities and frustrations recounted in *The Usable Urban Past*, readers are given some sense of the control that may possibly be achieved by reform elements in their battles for change. Yet despite the wider scholarly perspective, the volume exhibits a certain repetitiousness in the recounting of events. This points to one of the problems of urban history. To determine the generality of the urban past, the development of many communities must be studied. This rather tedious task of playing slightly varying renditions of the same theme is necessary to achieve a subtle and full understanding of our urban past. It is with some regret, therefore, to note that little in this volume had to do with parts of Canada outside Ontario and the West. The editors acknowledge the fact. Tantalizing references to the town planning act in New Brunswick, which preceded the Alberta legislation, and to a housing association in Halifax, pique the curiosity. Until the cities of French Canada and Atlantic Canada receive attention similar to that paid to the younger communities of the West, a realistic interpretation of Canada's urban identity is impossible.

A hint of the rewards possible from a study of eastern Canadian cities may be gained from a third Stelter and Artibise venture, *Shaping the Urban Landscape: Aspects of the Canadian City-Building Process* (Ottawa, Carleton University

Press, 1982). This volume, while collecting its contents under three headings, "Introduction", "Urban Growth Strategies" and "Evolving Urban Form", is in reality a generally-related selection of new and previously-published articles bearing on some aspect of the formation of our cityscapes. In some ways it is the most interesting of the three editions of essays, although it is not uniformly appealing. A significant contribution is made by Stelter in the introduction in which the concepts of urban as "entity", "process", and "setting" is developed. Focusing on "urban as entity", as does the volume generally, he proposes an interpretative framework for the Canadian city-building process which includes three phases characteristic of our past: the mercantile, to the early 19th century, in which considerable imperial control marked town development; the commercial, in which autonomous civic interests promoted local economic growth; and the industrial, after the 1870s, in which central Canadian metropolitan centres established a national cities system. An elaboration of this interpretation makes frequent reference to places in Atlantic Canada, thereby broadening what has hitherto been a rather westward-looking view of our urban past. In addition two articles deal specifically with a Maritime city, Halifax. Both will be familiar to the readers of *Acadiensis* as having appeared initially on its pages. Susan Bugey in "Building Halifax" looks at the physical erection of the city between 1841 and 1871, a period which was marked by increasing sophistication of design, construction techniques, labour organization and entrepreneurship. The result was the transformation of a wooden town into a substantial and coherent urban environment. Larry McCann in "Staples and the New Industrialism in the Growth of Post-Confederation Halifax" offers a less positive assessment of the city's performance as an emergent industrial community. Addressing the larger question of regional economic development, the author utilizes a number of interesting and helpful analytical methodologies which may confuse a non-specialist despite their associated graphs and tables. His conclusions, however, are forcefully clear. The poor showing Halifax made as an industrial centre was due to its inability to control regional staple production. This was combined with problems of output and marketing attributable to the city's peripheral location within Canada.

Three articles dealing with Quebec reflect the theme of regional disadvantage in the city-building process. Ron Rudin in "Montreal Banks and the Urban Development of Quebec, 1840-1914" links the speed of urban development to the availability of capital. He notes that English-language banks, even those headquartered in Montreal, preferred to invest their money in English communities and with anglophones. Smaller French-Canadian banks attempted to serve francophones and their communities but were unable to fill the gap completely, a fact which left Quebec cities underdeveloped by contemporary standards. Marc Lafrance and T. Ruddel examine the "Physical Expansion and Socio-Cultural Segregation in Quebec City, 1756-1840" to see if the British merchant class attempted to dominate local affairs and to measure the extent to

which this group was at odds with the rival Canadian professional class. The authors found that the merchants were successful in securing their commercial objectives and in doing so had the acquiescence of the professionals. The physical layout of the city reflected this state with the British merchants and Canadian professionals increasingly domiciled in prime locales while the working class majority was left in backward environmental conditions. Paul-André Linteau in a contribution which treats city-building in its intellectual and technological contexts describes an attempt by well-financed francophone entrepreneurs to create a wholesome and organized new town at Maisonneuve, just outside Montreal, between 1883 and 1918. As in Quebec City the working class was excluded from effective influence in the developmental process, but it was the beneficiary of the optimism and faith of the project's leaders who were concerned with beautification as well as industrialization. Unfortunately the municipality's leaders overextended themselves, and their experiment was ended by annexation to Montreal, thus reflecting the economic imperatives described by Rudin.

The more familiar concern for success and progress reasserts itself in the balance of the book. Alan Artibise, in a revision of a paper published elsewhere, looks at municipal boosterism and urban development on the Prairies between 1871 and 1913. He finds that the skill and initiative of civic leaders and the policies implemented by them affected prairie urban growth by determining both the success or failure of their communities and the pattern of the regional city system. Leo Johnson, however, suggests that the considerable imagination and energy of business leaders in Guelph, Ontario were neutralized by other competitive communities and by monopoly capitalism based in Toronto or large United States centres. Norbert MacDonald, in recounting the development of Vancouver to 1914, creates an image of a favoured, shrewdly-governed community in which the urban past is a record of physical and social expansion. This succinct account of the community's early years establishes beyond a doubt the importance of locational advantage and general economic conditions as elements in successful city-building.

The dynamics of the development process are examined in several other contributions. On a smaller scale John Weaver looks at the evolution of the Westdale suburb of Hamilton, Ontario between 1911 and 1951, a period which saw the economic and social exclusiveness envisaged by the original backers give way to greater ethnic and class variety. Michael Doucet recounts the struggle between the Toronto Railway Company and the city over the level of service to be offered by the traction company. He links the dispute to the current health of the public transit system and the compact nature of the metropolitan core. Broader forces concern Isobel Ganton who identifies three stages through which land surrounding Toronto passed in its progress from rural to developed suburban holdings, a process which was influenced by the economic climate, population growth and the individual decisions of ordinary property owners. Elizabeth

Bloomfield found that similar forces determined the fate of attempts at city planning in Kitchener-Waterloo, while Michael Doucet in a second contribution confirms the existence of these pressures in the subdivision of mid-victorian Hamilton. Finally Artibise and Stelter describe the effects of a single economic base and changing town planning concepts on the moulding of frontier resource towns.

Each of the contributions to *Shaping the Urban Landscape* has merit as a purveyor of fact and tool of analysis. Seven of the 15 papers have appeared in substantially the same form elsewhere in readily available sources. If an understanding of the Canadian city-building process is to be gained by comparison of a variety of urban pasts, greater progress will be made by publishing new findings instead of reshuffling the old. Having said this, one must admit the benefits of drawing together material with roughly the same concerns. In addition the contributions dealing with the eastern regions of Canada present a convincing argument for the need of further work in these areas.

An important breakthrough in this regard was made several years ago by Paul O'Neill with his two-volume study of St. John's, *The Oldest City: The Story of St. John's, Newfoundland, Vol. I* (Erin, Ontario, Press Porcépic, 1975), and *A Seaport Legacy: The Story of St. John's, Newfoundland, Vol. II* (Erin, Press Porcépic, 1976). In many ways this is a peculiar work; certainly it is not urban history, for the author himself points out that he intends "to compile rather than interpret events". Yet the work is more than a rendition of local folklore and a rollcall of great men, traits which are too often characteristic of local histories. It is in fact a synopsis of events, great and not-so-great, which have occurred during a long and turbulent past. If the work has one major strength, it is its abundance of detail; its principal failure is a lack of critical judgement in which details were included.

On the balance the positive outweighs the negative. Although the thematic organization may appear to be a barrier for a survey history, within the themes material is organized chronologically and a sense of progression is easily established. The themes themselves are skilfully chosen and reflect a shrewd understanding of urban life. Early settlement, administration of the city, politics, communication and defence are standard concerns with which the author deals. More specific interests of urban historians, including education, crime, commerce, city beautification and fire are also gratified. There is additional satisfaction in the separate treatment of sports, medicine and entertainment. Having selected his themes, the author outlines their development in great detail. An immense amount of energy and painstaking care have been expended and O'Neill has obviously showered a lot of love on his task. The result is often warm and entrancing. Details are woven together in a relaxed, witty style, giving the work a buoyancy which countervails the multitude of facts. On finishing a chapter, one feels not only informed but in tune with a piece of St. John's past.

Professional historians are nevertheless likely to have some difficulties with

the work. Much of the detail included is trivial. In small doses this adds charm and feeling, but its constant occurrence can render the text as a whole tedious. The accuracy of some material appears questionable, and the disclaimer that "under the circumstances" it was not possible to give all of the sources, many of which "may be important" does not inspire confidence. Moreover the author while avoiding interpretation occasionally plunges himself into the text, allotting praise and doling out criticism with an Irish flair for hyperbole. If there is no sustained argument, there is an abundant sense of goodness and evil.

Finally, mention must be made of the photographs and illustrations which precede each chapter. They are apt, skilfully chosen and sometimes evocative and make a considerable contribution to these noteworthy volumes. Anyone professing an interest in urban history or the history of Atlantic Canada should have *The Oldest City* and *A Seaport Legacy* readily at hand. The two volumes contain 1,040 pages and are very reasonably priced, truly one of the great "buys" in the field today.

Two communities in the Maritimes have also recently been the subject of extensive monographs. Moncton has been chronicled in a two-volume work by J.E. Belliveau, *The Monctonians: Citizens, Saints and Scoundrels* (Hantsport, Nova Scotia, Lancelot Press, 1981), and *The Monctonians: Scamps, Scholars and Politicians* (Hantsport, Lancelot Press, 1982), and Summerside has been studied by Allan Rankin in *Down at the Shore: A History of Summerside, Prince Edward Island (1752-1945)* (Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island Heritage Foundation, 1980). The account by Belliveau is the more ambitious of the two projects, having a total of 655 pages, including an ample selection of interesting, and at times remarkable, photographs. The text is organized into short, snappy chapters moving generally through time from the community's beginnings in the 18th century to the present. The opening of the 20th century marks the watershed between the two volumes. Each chapter focuses on a particular event or individual having to do with the social, political, economic, or cultural development of Moncton, but various surrounding embellishments and digressions add colour and diffuse the thrust of the account. Although the author on several occasions refers to his work as "a social history", these volumes are at once considerably more and substantially less than that. Without due attention to an analysis of the forces propelling social change and an acute measure of the points of departure and arrival, the material can hardly be called "social history". Yet Belliveau, through the use of extensive background readings and numerous interviews and personal memories, presents something with as widespread an appeal: a good yarn. His fluent language, concern for trivial linkages between distantly-related individuals or facts, and evocative sense of human sensitivities bear all the marks of an adept storyteller.

Volume one, which relies more on printed sources and the accounts of others, treats the subject-matter in a more fragmented fashion than volume two, which draws upon the author's own memory and personal contacts. Images are

sketched on a practical level, such as prohibition meaning brief excursions to the back room of Holstead's Pharmacy, and interpretations are subjective, as when the rise of religious tensions is associated with the arrival of middle-level managers from Toronto following the opening of the Eaton's mail order operation. There is, however, a pervasive concern for individuals, a feeling exemplified by a sympathetic note about a former mayor driven from office by an indignant newspaper editor. Tom King upon his election had arranged to have the paper sent to his proud mother only to find later that his adversary had totally banned his name and picture from its pages. All of this, of course, does not constitute a history of Moncton, but the author has astutely entitled the work, *The Monctonians*, and the publisher, on the back of volume two, refers to it as "a people-history". As such an outsider can glean some information about the city's past and while doing so attain a sense of those who lived there. Local folk, for whom names and locales have personal significance, should find the books a rich treasury of relevant detail.

Allan Rankin has created a substantially different kind of book. Shorter, but still amply illustrated with photographs and maps, *Down at the Shore* offers a sustained narrative about a community the author is obviously attempting to understand and explain. There are five chapters, each encompassing a general time period and addressing topics which are of prime importance within that era. The opening chapter outlines the early days of settlement from the middle of the 18th century to the opening of the 19th. Then follow chapters on shipbuilding, the development of Summerside as a market town, the establishment of essential social and political services, and the silver fox industry.

Throughout Rankin reminds his readers that catering to the surrounding agricultural community is the basis of the town's existence, regardless of temporary additional opportunities. Considerable attention is paid to individuals such as the merchant prince, R.T. Holman, or the silver fox magnate, Frank Tuplin, but less exists for the more commonplace citizens, and a sense of the town's spirit is somewhat lacking. Explanations of the special qualities or conditions that gave rise to the Hall Manufacturing Company, M.F. Schurman Company, or John Lefurgey's shipping business are also scanty. Nevertheless many of the elements necessary for a true urban biography are present, particularly in the chapter on community life which touches on matters of public safety, health, religion, education and public issues. Unfortunately these topics are developed mainly for the third quarter of the 19th century despite their persisting significance for urban history. In part this economy of treatment may be due to constrictions of space and in part to a haste, apparent in the closing pages, to complete the task. There is enough, however, to make *Down at the Shore* a sophisticated and substantial study of Summerside's urban past. Probably no other town of similar size in Canada is as well served.

Neither of these two works is a definitive study, but each contributes to our

overall knowledge of urban history. Integration of these and other new findings into a larger interpretation of the national city-building process will take time. About a decade ago Alan Artibise and Del Muise undertook the development of the History of Canadian Cities series with the objective of working towards "a general and comparative history of Canadian cities". A joint project involving the National Museum of Man and publisher James Lorimer and Company, it was ambitious in its attempt to include major centres in all parts of Canada. In the intervening years Artibise has guided the project forward with slow but exceedingly fine results. Volumes now exist on Winnipeg, Calgary, Vancouver, Hamilton and Kitchener.³ The latter work by Kenneth McLaughlin and John English, more perhaps than the others, reflects the distinctiveness of the community as determined by its geographical and demographic traits. This reflects the vision of the series at its inception: a mechanism intended to synthesize the city-building process in Canada by examining both consistencies and variances. Further volumes will be forthcoming, but Atlantic Canada will not be represented as well as expected. Volumes for Saint John and Fredericton have been abandoned, and progress on an in-house manuscript for Charlottetown is subject to the demands of other operational requirements. Only Halifax is being carried forward on a vigorous basis.

Even a brief review of some of the basic resources indicates the essential configuration of urban history in Canada today. Drawing on multidisciplinary approaches and convinced that our past lives in our present, this is a field oriented mainly towards large centres and communities in Ontario and the West. As one of the "new" histories, it still evinces a spirit of innovation despite its substantial growth. A concern for documentation and dissemination of scholarship encourages further work by newcomers. This is as it should be, because much remains to be done. The whole "urban as process" dimension begs greater attention, and without a significant appreciation of how people are changed by their experiences in the city, urban history will not address the fundamentally personal concerns shared by city dwellers.

The shading and texture that must be contributed by the eastern half of the country are also yet to arrive. The longer and varying histories of the cities of Atlantic Canada, for instance, should modify or overturn some of the prevailing generalizations of the city-building paradigm. There is more than one set of attitudes about cities and city-building in our past. About the time real estate dealers were singing "Getting Rich Quick in Saskatoon", the Charlottetown

3 Alan Artibise, *Winnipeg: An Illustrated History* (Toronto, James Lorimer and National Museum of Man, 1977); Max Foran, *Calgary: An Illustrated History* (Toronto, James Lorimer and National Museum of Man, 1978); Patricia E. Roy, *Vancouver: An Illustrated History* (Toronto, James Lorimer and National Museum of Man, 1980); John C. Weaver, *Hamilton: An Illustrated History* (Toronto, James Lorimer and National Museum of Man, 1982); John English and Kenneth McLaughlin, *Kitchener: An Illustrated History* (Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983).

Guardian was noting that "we know the quantity of cloth we have and we know that even that is liable to shrinkage". Many questions remain to be answered before a full history of our urban civilization is written, and we have yet to learn which urban experiences will be the most usable in the future.

PETER E. RIDER

What the Object Knew: Material History Studies in Canada

The scene is Acadia in 1750. Lack of indigenous furniture or pottery points to a people unable to supply themselves with the most rudimentary means of coping with the rigorous climate and topography. French imports inadequately fill this gap.

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The scene is Saint John in 1800. A few cabinet makers produce stylized furniture for the military and mercantile elite. Most of the refugee population lives at a subsistence level of poverty and deprivation, making their own simple homes and furnishings, unable to support specialized craftsmen. The Loyalist presumption that "Britain is better" retards craft development.

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The scene is Halifax in 1850. Railroads and steamships popularize furniture styles from as far away as Cincinnati. Quantity and range increase, but regional distinctions and characteristics succumb to standardized taste and mass production. The Maritime Provinces have yet to develop a tradition of truly opulent, truly elegant furnishings.

THESE DESCRIPTIONS are drawn from Donald Blake Webster's "Furniture and the Atlantic Canada Condition" in the *Material History Bulletin*, No. 15 (Summer 1982). Webster's deft overview uses household furnishings to document the transition in the Atlantic region from the crude life of the Acadian peasantry through the more adequate but still marginal Loyalist experience to the threshold of abundance via mass production. Man-made objects are Webster's research base, and he explores their fabrication and their style in order to record the rapid cultural evolution of these young British colonies.

This is the promise of material history. By focusing on human artifacts in their historical circumstances, it can connect our modern perceptions to the physical reality of a past culture. This can enable us to sense how previous generations coped with their everyday world through the fabrication of houses, tools,