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Monopoly's Moment: The Organization and Regulation of Canadian Utilities, 1830-1930. Christopher Armstrong and H.V. Nelles, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986. Pp xvii + 393, index

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[See table of contents](#)

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Monopoly's Moment: The Organization and Regulation of Canadian Utilities, 1830-1930. Christopher Armstrong and H.V. Nelles, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986. Pp xvii + 393, index.

For historians of technology, it is always a pleasure when historians from other specialties recognize the importance of technology to their topics. That pleasure is doubled when, as in this case, technical issues are handled effectively.

As the sub-title suggests, the authors of this book are primarily concerned with the political economy of the utilities -- water, gas, electric power, traction and telephones -- and in particular the role of the state in its manifold aspects. However, the utilities are not just businesses or public services; they are technologies of considerable complexity. Technological matters are not peripheral but central to the authors' arguments. Thus, they observe that Canada had not just to obtain the hardware and skilled personnel for its utilities but also had to 'develop the social forms, the institutions and organizations, to operate the technologies' (p. 12). They describe how the public had to be sold on the new technologies which would so alter their lives. At first luxuries -- telephones, electric lights and street railways -- became necessities. All the while, technology proposed but capital disposed. 'First technology widened the realm of the possible; then business narrowed that realm to certain permissible particulars' (p. 54). Nowhere was technology an autonomous force divorced from the society in which it was implemented. Rather, the technology reflected the ideals and priorities of that society in ways both profound and frivolous. Thus Montreal's first telephones served a seminary while 'in Nova Scotia they connected a mine with its office; in Hamilton, a merchant's home and his warehouse' (p. 67).

Like any good work of scholarship, this book raises a host of questions and suggests areas for further investigation. What was the process and significance of technical standardization in Canadian utilities? How did control of and access to technical knowledge affect bargaining among utility monopolies, governments and regulatory bodies? What does the very rapid diffusion of new electrical technologies tell us about the existing industrial and technological infrastructure of late nineteenth century Canada? How did municipalities equip themselves with the necessary expertise to respond effectively to the new technologies which so transformed the urban landscape? Echoes of M.L. Cooke's duel with the National Electric Light Association can be observed in Francis Dagger's relationship to Bell Telephone, but did Canadian engineers as a body develop a distinct set of positions on the formation of public policy with respect to utilities? These questions hint at both the scope of this moderately-sized and eminently well-written book and the amount of work waiting to be done.

The most serious criticisms which may be levelled at *Monopoly's Moment* are not properly directed at the authors but at Temple University Press. The editorial process was sloppy, with missing text and other obvious errors. The index is an embarrassment; there is an (incomplete) entry for puncheons but none for public health, for example. No bibliography, bibliographic essay or even note on sources is provided, an inexcusable lacuna in a modern scholarly publication. Temple can, has and should have done better than this.

But it would be churlish to end on such a note. The authors at least have done their work very, very well. It challenges Canadian historians of technology to handle political and financial issues as deftly as Armstrong and Nelles have handled technical ones.

James P. Hull