

Preface

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The Canadian City in the 19th Century

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PREFACE

The brief position-papers in this issue will form the basis of a symposium at the Canadian Historical Association meetings in Edmonton on June 6th, 1975. The papers are preliminary statements designed to promote discussion. They will later be revised and expanded, perhaps for a volume in the Carleton Library Series. Problems inherent in any group project are probably accentuated here because urban history is such a diverse field with few commonly held assumptions. Potential participants were approached with an outline which included four themes-- economic growth and metropolitan development, population, social organization, the physical environment--in an effort to produce more than eight unrelated local histories. It proved impossible, however, to find colleagues willing to deal with several cities which should have been included. In other cases, those engaged in research on a particular city were not emphasizing the later 19th century, nor did the nature of their research interests correspond directly to the topics in the proposed outline. Some of these difficulties will be overcome before final publication but this comparative project is not as systematic or sophisticated as that described in the June, 1974, issue of the Historical Methods Newsletter.

Although a variety of approaches are represented here, some basic assumptions are shared. First, the unit of study is a whole city on the grounds that a community's life has meaning not discernible by a study of fragmentary portions only. While work on some of the themes is only beginning for most cities, we feel there is some value in a preliminary exploration of general relationships. Second, the urban historian's approach should combine an appreciation for what is unique and particular with an understanding of the general and comparative aspects of his subject.