

## BOOK REVIEWS

O'Neill, Paul. The Oldest City: The Story of St. John's, Newfoundland.  
Volume I. Press Porcépic, 1975. 432 pp. \$17.95.

The urban history of Newfoundland has, until recently, been almost totally neglected. Those of us concerned with Newfoundland history have therefore been awaiting Mr. O'Neill's history of St. John's with some impatience. The first volume has just appeared; the second should be published next year.

The academic reader will be somewhat disappointed, however, for this is a history of St. John's by a St. John's man for St. John's people; and this is precisely what Mr. O'Neill, a well-known local historian, had in mind. The local audience will derive great pleasure from this book. Based on wide reading and diligent research, this well-produced, profusely illustrated volume is replete with anecdote and detail, and contains a mass of information. Those readers who do not know St. John's may well find it less interesting, and wish that more adequate maps had been provided; the academic is likely to find it frustrating, and in places tedious.

Mr. O'Neill begins with a brief chapter chronicling the growth of St. John's from its early days as a summer fishing village to the great fire of 1892 which levelled most of what is now known as the old city. He then switches to a topical approach, dealing, in this volume, with military affairs from 17th century raids to World War II; sketches of various governors, few of whom had any direct impact on the city's development; communications; pastimes; medicine; sport; and short biographies of a rather arbitrary selection of local 'characters'. The second volume will deal with politics, crime, the harbour, ships, churches and so on. Mr. O'Neill writes that a chronological approach would have been very difficult, given the absence of any previous history and "the mass of information and detail which these volumes should contain." I am sure he is right; but the result of this method of