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Rasporich, A. W. and Klassen, H. C., eds. *Frontier Calgary: Town, City, and Region, 1875-1914*. Calgary: McClelland and Stewart West and the University of Calgary, 1975. Pp. v, 306. Illustrations. \$4.85

Ian MacPherson

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## BOOK REVIEWS

Rasporich, A. W. and Klassen, H. C., eds. Frontier Calgary: Town, City, and Region, 1875-1914. Calgary: McClelland and Stewart West and the University of Calgary, 1975. Pp. v, 306. Illustrations. \$4.85.

Meetings that draw together amateur and professional historians have, in the experience of this reviewer, seldom lived up to expectations. The interests of the two groups regrettably seem to have widened considerably in the last few years. Thus this successful book, the result of a conference hosted by the University of Calgary and the Chinook County Chapter of the Historical Society of Alberta, is particularly welcomed. The authors of the twenty essays in this volume represent several institutions and community organizations as well as academic worlds. As a group they produced a volume which is enjoyable to read for both its exploration of fascinating detail and its suggestions of analytical frameworks; whatever else this book represents, it suggests that those involved in the conference both profited and enjoyed themselves immensely.

The development of any city, even the more-recently fashioned Prairie cities, is difficult to conceptualize. Frontier Calgary is a reflection of that problem. The twenty authors involved have each pursued a fascinating topic out of that almost unpatterned period between 1875 and 1914. They have traced aspects of the relationships between town and country; the city's built environment; the impact of white settlement on the Calgary region; the ranching community; the imposition of law and order; the fate of minority groups; the role of educational institutions; the careers of the economic elites; and the condition of labor at the turn of the century. Finally, in a graceful, personal way, George Stanley has contributed an analysis of R. B. Bennett, that restless tory who was never content in any of his three homes, New Brunswick, Alberta, or England.

Because of the problem of conceptualization, perhaps because of the nature of the conference's participants, few threads connect the essays in this book. Rather, they form a series of vignettes which in themselves are worth examining even if their context is somewhat unclear. The most absorbing features of these vignettes is their careful recapturing of colorful individuals and life styles of several decades ago and their submerged concern for preserving a sense of the city's past.

There are also absorbing insights into how different authors visualized specific groups in Calgary's past. Inevitably, and despite valiant efforts to study Chinese, Indians, and workingmen, the ranching and business elites have received the most attention. It is intriguing, though, to see how different authors treat essentially the same historical figures. The same men in their social lives hardly seem like the same men at work; their ambitions and actions take on somewhat different perspectives when seen in local, national, or international terms; Max Foran's or Paul Voisey's businessmen seem somewhat different from Bishop Carter's Anglicans or Fraser Perry's Methodists. Interestingly enough, too, the ranching elite received a much more sympathetic view than their urban counterparts; but then it is much easier to attack the urban entrepreneur than it is a figure romantically caught between the Prairie cowboy and the English gentry.

Many interesting insights are raised in the essays for those heavily-burdened figures, the future researchers: they include the social and economic relationships between the city and its hinterland; the pathetic attempts to duplicate eastern and British precedents; the effects of an incredibly rapid turnover of people; the liabilities of coming late to the region; the nature of the growth ethic; and the value of educational and religious themes in urban history. Indeed, this reviewer found such insights, albeit in varying degrees, in each of the essays; in fact, his only frequent source of frustration was that the essays were often so brief that they could not deal adequately with the

topics they had so interestingly raised.

Strangely enough, given the diversity of backgrounds represented by the authors there was little evidence of variety of methodology. Few charts were employed to demonstrate demographic growth; only a few pictures (and not particularly effective ones at that) were used to demonstrate changes in the built environment; and only three authors used tables to show shifts in population, economic development, and social patterns. Perhaps most surprisingly, there were no maps of the city itself; the absence or near-absence of such aids inevitably means that those unfamiliar with Calgary will lose the significance of much of the detail in the essays themselves.

Nevertheless, despite these limitations, Frontier Calgary is a delightful book that will be well received and usefully employed by both laymen and professional historians. Hopefully, it will encourage similar kinds of conferences in other cities and help bring together various local groups genuinely and enjoyably interested in understanding the history of their cities.

Ian MacPherson  
Department of History  
University of Victoria

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THE CENTURY CALGARY HISTORICAL SERIES

Volume One. Past and Present: People, Places and Events in Calgary.

Calgary: Century Calgary Publications, 1975. Pp. 391. Illustrations. \$5.00.

Volume Two. Communities of Calgary: From Scattered Towns to a Major City. Calgary: Century Calgary Publications, 1975. Pp. 424.

Illustrations. \$5.00.