

## Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW  
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Bettison, David G.; Kenwards, John K.; and Taylor, Larrie.  
*Urban Affairs in Alberta*. Edmonton: University of Alberta  
Press, 1975. Pp. xii, 529. \$8.50

Leslie Bella

Number 3-77, February 1978

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019506ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019506ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (print)

1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Bella, L. (1978). Review of [Bettison, David G.; Kenwards, John K.; and Taylor, Larrie. *Urban Affairs in Alberta*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1975. Pp. xii, 529. \$8.50]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, (3-77), 103–106. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019506ar>

provinces. Of course, it will take some doing to have Ontarians realize they are Ontarians! I come away from this collection feeling that more of the commentators had the right points to make than the authors.

But I must exempt Wiesman despite my basic complaint above, and for historically minded persons we should ponder his assertion "that previous experience is not a very reliable guide to action" (p. 41). What use is history? It must then be a guide to what we should not do, if it is to be relevant. Of course, we could say history provides its own intrinsic interest for impartial historians, and certainly the integrity of past ages must be upheld. Yet this can be done only in dialogue with our living present. Otherwise, as another reviewer stated recently: "impartiality can easily verge into a narrow specialization, triviality, and detail for its own sake" (Theodore Zeldin, New York Review of Books, XXIV, 19 (Nov. 24, 1977), pp.45). So all those people at Guelph who presented woeful tales about planning should take heart for they were up to a point saying the right things.

James T. Lemon  
Department of Geography  
University of Toronto

\* \* \*

Bettison, David G.; Kenwards, John K.; and Taylor, Larrie. Urban Affairs in Alberta. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1975. Pp. xii, 529. \$8.50.

Urban Affairs in Alberta is the second and concluding volume of the series on urbanization in Canada prepared by the now defunct Human Resources Research Council of Alberta. The authors have collected into this second volume all the research completed by HRRC on Urbanization in Alberta, the first volume having focussed primarily on the Canadian scene.

The first part of this book (Chapters 1, 2, and 3) describes the development of urban planning and development in Alberta, from the

towns of early Alberta, to the new planning act proposed in the last years of the Social Credit regime. The second part of the book contains studies of Edmonton and Calgary; the annexation process in Edmonton is the specific focus of Chapter 4 while chapter 5 reviews a variety of urban policy developments in Calgary. The challenge for the reviewer is to describe and evaluate a series of studies that, although presented in one volume, are in effect unconnected and lack a consistent theoretical framework. This review will comment briefly on each section of the book, and on the "themes" discovered by the authors through their work and identified in a concluding section. First, however, there are some comments about style and presentation which must be made.

Urban Affairs in Alberta contains some five hundred pages of ponderous prose. Sentences are often long and convoluted, and the vocabulary unnecessarily complex. The word "inconsequential," for example, is used when "ineffective" is the intended meaning, and "accommodate" is used, when the meaning is "contain." Both the title of the book, and the chapter headings are misleading. The book claims to be about urban affairs, but deals primarily with planning legislation and urban growth. The social and service sectors of urban affairs are almost totally ignored. The politics of urban affairs are often treated superficially, as if interfering with rational planning, while the economics of urban growth receive somewhat better treatment. The title, therefore, might more appropriately be "Planning and Urban Growth in Alberta." The chapter headings also are misleading, but this problem might have been overcome had an index been provided. Without such an index the reader becomes easily bored with the poorer sections of the book, and misses altogether specific instances of valuable research and documentation within the text. The book is also rife with typographical errors; one chapter heading "Disorderly Practice Within Social Urban Policy" omits the word "Credit," giving a totally misleading impression of chapter contents.

The first three chapters describe the development of urban policy in Alberta. Chapter I contains a preliminary section on the general history of settlement, urbanization, local and provincial government to 1935 in Alberta. This is the best written section of the book, but

unfortunately relies on popular secondary sources. (Berton's Last Spike; Blue's Alberta Past and Present; MacGregor's Edmonton: A History; and standard works on Social Credit by Irving and MacPherson.) The review of planning legislation that follows in chapter 1 is descriptive, technical, and lacks interpretation of the intent of legislation. Chapters 2 and 3 focus on the urban policy of Social Credit, but also tend to degenerate into a catalogue of legislation rather than an analysis of policy.

"Edmonton and Environs" is the heading for chapter 4; a neutral title for a useful account of urban growth in Edmonton and its surrounding communities. The annexation process, in particular, is carefully documented, and the influential part played by private developers is amply demonstrated. More primary documentation is provided than in previous chapters, including City Council minutes, correspondence, and unpublished student theses. The authors conclude that three factors have led to the domination by private developers of the process of urban growth. These are identified as the financial problems of the Cities, the lack of coherent planning, and ambivalence to interference by government with private market forces. This useful analysis, however, is submerged in a lengthy chapter (125 pages) with an ambiguous heading, and is unlikely to be read and appreciated except by those with the task of reviewer.

"Calgary and Urban Politics" is the chosen title for chapter 5, but again the title is misleading. The authors present a planner's critique of political "ad hocery," with examples from the budget process, citizen participation, housing, transportation and regional planning. This chapter, like chapter 4, contains some valuable primary source material. There is, however, no consistent framework evident in the political analysis, and no synthesis except for a general comment about "inhibitions to attempts to promote rational planning."

The authors claim in the conclusion to have found two basic themes- "local autonomy" and "encapsulation" - that dominate the process of urban growth in Alberta. Fair and equal treatment for all, and the defense of local autonomy, were to Social Credit the cornerstones of provincial-municipal relations. This policy of local self-determination, according to the authors, reinforced metropolitan growth in Edmonton

and Calgary, as both Cities continued to attract new population and investment. Rural degradation, apparently, accompanied this metropolitan growth, although the authors do not substantiate this conclusion.

This belief in local autonomy had left the provincial government "boxed in" (i.e., encapsulated), without any way to control urban growth. The cities themselves were also encapsulated between private developers on one hand, and the demands of citizens for a higher standard of services on the others. Urban development was sought for an increased tax base, and so cities played into the hands of developers. Urban growth brought more demands for city services, and increased financial strain - a vicious circle. A vacuum of provincial policy left the cities and smaller municipalities helpless.

My own research onto public policy in Alberta also supports the importance to Social Credit of the idea of "local autonomy." However, the idea was not as completely honoured as the authors imply in this book. Successive provincial programs were introduced by the Social Credit government of Alberta to influence or control local governments. The fields of education, welfare, public health, culture and recreation contain many examples, as well as "hard" services such as housing, urban renewal and road building. A more balanced, and broader analysis of urban affairs in Alberta would include these other aspects of urban life. The authors of Urban Affairs in Alberta have provided a source book for others who might begin the task.

Leslie Bella  
University of Alberta

\* \* \*

Lorimer, James, and Ross, Evelyn, eds. The Second City Book: Studies of Urban and Suburban Canada. Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1977. Pp. 180. Maps. Illustrations. \$15.00 cloth, \$5.95 paper.

This book is a sequel to The City Book published in 1976. Like its predecessor, The Second City Book offers analysis and case studies of