

## Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW  
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Gagan, David. *Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land, and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981. Pp. xxi, 197. Tables, figures, maps

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Volume 11, Number 3, February 1983

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019019ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019019ar>

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### Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

### ISSN

0703-0428 (print)

1918-5138 (digital)

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### Cite this review

Gaffield, C. (1983). Review of [Gagan, David. *Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land, and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981. Pp. xxi, 197. Tables, figures, maps]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 11(3), 81–82.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1019019ar>

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

Gagan, David. *Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land, and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981. Pp.xxi, 197. Tables, figures, maps.

The revisionist fervour of historical research during the 1970s is now subsiding to the more familiar quiet scholarship. The exciting debates about theory and method reached some conclusions and did have an impact on the discipline, but they were often prematurely shelved as new approaches became institutionalized in new journals on the "periphery" and as "mainstream" historical attention continued with traditional topics and sources. This phenomenon is explained in part by the paucity of faculty openings during the decade which left few career positions for those at the revisionist cutting-edge. In this context, the appearance of David Gagan's book is at once a reminder of recent energy and excitement and a loud shout in the increasingly tranquil hush of the early 1980s.

In North America, the heated debates about the nature of history generally focused on the experience of cities during the nineteenth century. Historians employed this urban focus to emphasize the two related and paradoxical themes of widespread geographic mobility and social structural rigidity. Their research undermined the image of a residentially stable society which enjoyed a large measure of social fluidity. None the less, this urban research was quite anachronistic in the sense that cities represented the experience of only a minority of the North American population in the nineteenth century. Moreover, the early development of cities was rarely examined and so the process of urbanization remained a vague phenomenon clouding otherwise discrete analysis.

*Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land, and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County* represents a serious attempt to bring the twin themes of geographic and social mobility from the city to the countryside and then back again in the context of an emerging urban frontier. This book is the culmination of Gagan's Peel County History Project, which began in 1971 and which has produced an important series of articles devoted to population turnover, family structure, inheritance patterns and rural economic development. The project brought together data from sources such as the manuscript census, abstracts of deeds, and probate records and created computer files allowing cross-sectional as well as some longitudinal analysis. In addition, Gagan and assistants thoroughly surveyed contemporary observations in literature, such as travellers' accounts and diaries, and integrated these impressions into the more controlled environment of the project's

routinely generated sources. Gagan includes effective summaries of most of his journal articles in *Hopeful Travellers* but, more importantly, offers an overall perspective on the social evolution of Peel County, especially from 1851 to 1871.

In Gagan's view, land was the critical concern of human thought and behaviour at the time of rapid settlement in Canada West. Perceptions of land availability attracted and then repelled nineteenth-century families, who saw independent farming as the best security in an expanding but uncertain capitalist economy. Gagan extends to the hinterland the urban characteristics of transiency and social inequality but he locates these phenomena within a complex array of family-oriented considerations. For example, Gagan shows that well-established families were among the emigrants from Peel County by the 1860s, and he argues that these families were responding to declining land availability. This decline did not immediately affect the heads of household but did prevent the establishment of their grown children in nearby farms. In this analysis, emigration becomes more than the result of individualized Malthusian push-pull factors and takes on meaning as a kinship strategy collectively pursued by family members.

For urban historians, the most interesting chapter will be "The Urban Frontier," in which Gagan discusses the emergence of Brampton as the dominant community within Peel County. This discussion offers several important perspectives on the early phases of urbanization, including the suggestion that an urban consciousness quickly began to separate town and country residents. This separate consciousness engendered behavioural differences such as in family formation and limitation. As the nineteenth century matured, Brampton became a distinct "world" within Peel County, increasingly exhibiting the values and attitudes associated with modern urban society and leaving behind the rural mentality and structures of earlier years. Urban historians will want to know more about this development than Gagan can offer in one chapter, and some scholars will be sceptical about the implication that urban air was primarily responsible for blowing new thoughts into the minds of nineteenth-century residents. In terms of fertility, for example, recent research has emphasized that urbanization *per se* was much less important than traditionally assumed in inspiring birth control. This research downplays rural-urban dichotomies and suggests an important degree of spatial continuity in behavioural patterns. Gagan's perspective gives new stimulus to this debate by offering an integrated regional approach to individual-level data. By implication, *Hopeful*

*Travellers* suggests that scholars must look beyond the boundaries of cities to appreciate the real meaning of “urban” as it developed in the nineteenth century. In this sense, Gagan’s regional perspective should spark debate among urban historians and, as with all fine books, *Hopeful Travellers* should stimulate a flurry of new studies. In the current context, these results would be welcome indeed.

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Gertler, Len. *Habitat and Land*. Human Settlement Issues 1. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1978. Pp.xi, 42. Tables, illustrations.

Seidler, Harry. *Planning and Building Down Under*. Human Settlement Issues 2. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1978. Pp.x, 37. Illustrations.

Anthony, Harry Antoniadis. *The Challenge of Squatter Settlements, with Special Reference to the Cities of Latin America*. Human Settlement Issues 3. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1979. Pp.xi, 76. Tables, figures, illustrations.

Lichfield, Nathaniel. *Settlement Planning and Development: A Strategy for Land Policy*. Human Settlement Issues 4. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1980. Pp.52. Figures, illustrations.

Robinson, Ira M. *Canadian Urban Growth Trends: Implications for a National Settlement Policy*. Human Settlement Issues 5. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1981. Pp.xvii, 154. Tables, figures, illustrations.

Jacobs, Peter. *Environmental Strategy and Action: The Challenge of the World Conservation Strategy*. Human Settlement Issues 6. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1981. Pp.xviii, 99. Maps, illustrations.

The United Nations Conference on Human Settlements – Habitat ‘76 – held in Vancouver in June 1976 represented an important event in the history of urban policy development. The “Declaration of Principles” and more specific recommendations that emerged from this conference dealt with a variety of issues affecting human settlements throughout the world. To encourage continued research on and discussion of these issues, the University of British Columbia established a Centre for Human Settlements and commenced publication of its proceedings and the work of its scholars-in-residence in this *Human Settlement Issues* series. The set of monographs

by these planners and architects forms a valuable contribution to the general debate over the types of urban policy and planning that are necessary for regulating current and future settlement trends. These provide us not only with succinct statements of urban land and development issues, but wisely remind us of the benefits to be gained from examining how these issues have been addressed in a variety of countries and cultures. On-going experiments in urban planning elsewhere in the world can furnish us with valuable suggestions of how we might improve the planning process here in Canada. Each monograph is relatively short and is generally free of unnecessary jargon. The series as a whole can be of much use in courses in urban studies and to those who wish brief overviews of some of the debates and experiments in settlement planning.

The first volume in the series, by Len Gertler, focuses on land policy and compares how such countries as Great Britain, the United States, France, Australia, Sweden and others have dealt with the issues of land resource management, control of changes in land use, recovery of the unearned increment in land values, and public vs. private ownership of land – issues that Habitat ‘76 vigorously debated. The great diversity of policy responses to the problems of urban sprawl, overconcentration and land speculation is clearly evident. Attempts to frame comprehensive policies at the national level are found especially in societies where resolution of these issues is paramount, such as Singapore. In Britain land policy has been improved greatly with the Community Land Act of 1975 and the Development Land Tax Bill of 1976, which seek to establish successful land development and management on a national level and in the public interest. France’s even more structured strategy contrasts greatly with the *laissez-faire* approach in the United States, where private control over land remains a central value. Gertler does not deal with the Canadian context directly, but most of the countries he examines show greater sophistication in dealing with land problems than does Canada, a fact that is, indeed, “cause for great concern.” He reiterates how we need to explore more fully this “international pool of experience” in policy making and select those elements congruent with our governmental and cultural systems.

Much can be learned, for example, from the Australian efforts since 1972 to devise a national population settlement strategy, which Harry Seidler outlines in Volume 2. To reduce overconcentration in Australia’s major urban areas, a growth centre programme has been developed. Regional growth centres (located at significant distances from metropolitan communities) and metropolitan growth centres (planned as self-contained not dormitory communities) are being encouraged through this programme. Seidler illustrates the nature of each by describing the essential characteristics of Albury-Wodonga,