

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Hodge, G.D., and M.A. Qadeer. *Towns and Villages in Canada: The Importance of Being Unimportant*. Toronto: Butterworths, 1983. Pp. xx, 250. Tables, figures, maps, illustrations. \$19.95

Darrell A. Norris

Volume 14, Number 3, February 1986

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1018088ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018088ar>

[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

Norris, D. A. (1986). Review of [Hodge, G.D., and M.A. Qadeer. *Towns and Villages in Canada: The Importance of Being Unimportant*. Toronto: Butterworths, 1983. Pp. xx, 250. Tables, figures, maps, illustrations. \$19.95]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 14(3), 285-285.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1018088ar>

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

Hodge, G.D., and M.A. Qadeer. *Towns and Villages in Canada: The Importance of Being Unimportant*. Toronto: Butterworths, 1983. Pp. xx, 250. Tables, figures, maps, illustrations. \$19.95.

Canada's 9,500 towns and villages are home to five million persons. This book is a timely counterpoint to the common perception of Canada as an archipelago of metropolitan regions. The authors' subject is, inevitably, a large helping from the smorgasbord of Canadian society. For one thing, Canada's towns and villages span and reflect a cultural, economic, and political regionalism which defies synthesis and challenges description. Moreover, these 9,500 communities range from minor places with fewer than a hundred inhabitants to urban centres with as many as ten thousand residents. In their attempt to comprehend the *totality* of this mosaic of small places, the authors are apt to disregard the character and size of its constituent elements.

The book is an outgrowth of a report prepared for the Ministry of Urban Affairs in 1978. It has evidently been extensively revised to include information from the 1981 Census. The chapter organization is topical, and anchored on close to one hundred tables of data. The authors' intent is descriptive, "to *explore* conditions that prevail in small communities in Canada rather than *testing* hypotheses about them" (p. 13). Thus their second chapter, devoted to population shifts, reveals, but falls short of explaining, an *overall* rapid growth of towns and villages (a net increase of one million population in one generation) coupled with population *decline* in one half of these centres between 1961 and 1976.

The bureaucratic pedigree of the book is evident not only in its tabular excess, but in the text as well. The mind reels from towns and villages "integrated in the multichannelled national spatial system and washed over by urbanism" (p. 54). To be fair, the authors have excised such word-salad from several sections; I was particularly impressed by the last four chapters, which are a refreshingly clear outline of planning issues and approaches in small communities.

The authors' treatment of social structure is primarily an exercise in basic demography, leavened by a discussion of patterns of educational attainment. The evidence leads support to the notion of increasing social convergence in Canadian society. But it ignores much that is not measured, or perhaps not measurable. Chapter Six, which follows, concerns town and village life. It draws, properly, on the work of Canadian authors who have tried to encapsulate small town life. But it is much too short and, curiously, lifeless.

In contrast, the authors' treatment of economic issues in the third and fourth chapters is good. They provide a bal-

anced treatment of historical background and current forces, notably the correlates of population size within and outside the orbits of metropolitan regions. Throughout the book, the special circumstances of primary resource or manufacturing centres are given insufficient attention, despite their central role in several Canadian regions.

Despite its shortcomings, this book fills a key void in Canadian urban studies. Hodge and Qadeer have assembled a reasonably coherent body of evidence, much of which dispels the preconception that small places are losing ground. One hopes that their work will stimulate further investigation of the impressive resilience of Canadian town and village society in the late twentieth century.

Darrell A. Norris
Department of Geography
State University College
Geneseo, New York

Lemon, James. *Toronto Since 1918: An Illustrated History*. Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1985. Pp. 224. Tables, maps, illustrations. \$26.95.

Packed with an abundance of factual riches, *Toronto Since 1918* rises above narrative. James Lemon presents forthright views benefitting from an analytic understanding of cities, knowledge gained as a teacher who encourages and credits research by able students, participation in civic affairs as a concerned citizen, and his great affection for Toronto. His thematic strings pull events and personalities into patterns of observations that will leave an attentive reader with a deepened understanding of the city's recent physical, social, and cultural development. Several of the underlying points of view that inform the analysis make the study controversial, but it is hard to imagine any worthwhile account of Toronto that could evade disputation. To outsiders, for example, it may seem that the "hometown" dimensions have been soft-peddled, though certainly not ignored, for Lemon critically details across all chapters an account of consolidations in banking and in the English-language media. References to the importance of the provincial government as employer and builder helping to effect Metro Toronto's prosperous development come as welcome concessions to views held in Ontario's other cities, but he judiciously steps back to scorn mayors of adjacent centres who "vie with one another for development with nineteenth-century boosterism." It is hard to be a Torontonian and not a trifle smug; it's also hard to bestow laurels of wisdom upon a Torontonian when he criticizes other communities' leaders.