

Brennan, J. William. *Regina: An Illustrated History*. Toronto: James Lorimer and the Canadian Museum of Civilization, 1989. Pp. 224. Maps, illustrations

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By now, readers of this journal will be intimately acquainted with the *Illustrated History of Canadian Cities* series and should know what to expect from its standard format: a profusely illustrated urban biography that tells a city's story from its founding to the near present. Each volume explores such major themes as growth, landscape, politics, population structure, and social and cultural development. Each is further supplemented by many statistical tables, maps, footnotes, and a bibliography. Given these common features, J. William Brennan's *Regina* contains no surprises. Indeed, while Brennan is anxious to point out the city's unique features, Regina can be taken as an example of how the process of urbanization has worked in the prairie region generally.

Founded and largely shaped by the Canadian Pacific Railway and (alone in Regina's case) by the lieutenant-governor of the North-West Territories, Regina illustrates perfectly how little specific site mattered compared to the political and speculative influences of the railway age. Although hurriedly gridded on arid plain with no trees and little water, Regina nonetheless enjoyed explosive growth prior to World War I when the great settlement boom in western Canada created instant demand for urban goods and services. Although its population soared in an atmosphere of intense speculation and boosterism, Regina enjoyed only modest success as an emerging metropolis, facing severe competition from assorted prairie rivals. Early conflicts between the lieutenant governor and the CPR over the city's location led the railway to establish a division point at nearby Moose Jaw, and Winnipeg's command of preferential freight rates crippled the city's development as a wholesale centre. Saskatoon snatched the provincial university from an overconfident Regina, and would later assume control over potash

development. In spite of such industry-luring bait as free land, tax exemptions, and bonusing, regional manufacturers preferred to locate in Winnipeg, Edmonton and Calgary. Regina was left with the provincial government, the NWMP training headquarters, and a commercial presence unable to burst the bounds of southern Saskatchewan.

As elsewhere in the region, the period between 1914 and 1939 witnessed a slower, uneven rate of growth, as the settlement boom ended and the fortunes of prairie cities fluctuated with that of wheat. Collapsing land values, vacant lots, mounting back taxes, and property seizures marked much of the period, as did considerable social unrest among ethnic groups and social classes. Municipal government reflected this turmoil; burdened with debt and declining revenues, its structure changed several times and loosely organized political parties rose and fell as labour challenged the domination of city hall by businessmen. As in the boom era, urban institutions, activities and services continued to imitate those found elsewhere and often reflected social divisions.

The post-war recovery of agriculture, combined with the benefits of petroleum wealth and increased state activity, led to vigorous renewed growth characterized by the proliferation of white collar workers, automobiles, suburbs and shopping centres. These developments created a much larger city with a different social structure, but failed to add much to Regina's metropolitan stature in the broader urban world. The city also grew more socially homogenous as post-war immigrants avoided Saskatchewan and the descendants of earlier generations blended into the Anglo-dominated society, a trend disrupted only by the large influx of native peoples.

Brennan, who has previously published much research on the city, marches through these major phases of urban development in a factual, concise, straightforward manner. Coverage is not altogether balanced. The half

century since 1939 receives only 38 pages, a reflection of how little the modern era has been studied historically in the monographic literature compared to the wealth of publications by historians on earlier urban periods. Thus, while the broad features of the post-World War II urban scene are duly noted, they are not studied within the richer context that informs the first three-quarters of the study.

Since the illustrations form a major component of the book, they are worthy of special attention in any review. As in many previous volumes in the series, they seem strangely detached from the text. While some photos illuminate important aspects of urban development and life, none are subjected to lengthy analytical captions and many are not discussed in the narrative itself. This stands in contrast to the excellent maps which clearly demonstrate points that do receive extended commentary. But many of the photographs are not even related to the major themes. Portraits of leading Reginans and group photos of club members may hold some appeal for elderly local residents who might actually recall the subjects personally, but they do not contribute much to an understanding of urbanization or urban life.

These complaints aside, which also apply to several other volumes in the series, both general and scholarly readers will find *Regina* authoritative and useful. Taken as a set, the series is a significant addition to the literature on Canadian urban history, but without a book on Edmonton or any city east of Ottawa (most notably Montreal), it remains a curiously imbalanced collection.

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