

## Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW  
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

McGahan, Elizabeth W. *The Port of Saint John. Vol. I: From Confederation to Nationalization, 1867-1927*. Saint John, N.B.: National Harbours Board, 1982. Pp. 333. \$14.95

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Volume 12, numéro 3, february 1984

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1018946ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018946ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Sutherland, D. A. (1984). Compte rendu de [McGahan, Elizabeth W. *The Port of Saint John. Vol. I: From Confederation to Nationalization, 1867-1927*. Saint John, N.B.: National Harbours Board, 1982. Pp. 333. \$14.95]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 12(3), 81–82. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018946ar>

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

McGahan, Elizabeth W. *The Port of Saint John. Vol. I: From Confederation to Nationalization, 1867–1927*. Saint John, N.B.: National Harbours Board, 1982. Pp. 333. \$14.95.

This first element of what will eventually become a two volume study opens new dimensions in Canada's regional and urban historiography. Until now, the history of Saint John, especially during the post-Confederation era, has been almost entirely overlooked by professional historians. Moreover, relatively little detailed attention has been given to the dynamics involved in the building of an integrated Canadian urban system during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This study was inspired by the work of Harold Innis, in particular by his "ecological approach" to the study of Canada's past. Accordingly, the book emphasizes the interaction of such casual factors as environment, technology, population and social structure. Taking Saint John as a case study, indicative of a pattern of events that transcends any single community, Professor McGahan explores "the role of transport development in the process of integration by which at least one Maritime city became part of a Canadian system of cities."

Having thus defined her theme, McGahan proceeds to an analysis which is rigorously focused on Saint John's port and rail facilities, along with the various interest groups involved in the development and utilization of those facilities. This stands in sharp contrast to more conventional urban biographies which discuss a broad spectrum of issues and events in an attempt to give an overview of city life. Accordingly, the general reader who approaches this work in search of a sweeping narrative will be disappointed. What McGahan offers is not descriptive colour and anecdote but rather a densely packed dissection of what was involved in the protracted struggle to Canadianize the trading function of what was at the time of Confederation, the chief metropolis of the Maritimes.

In this account, Saint John's transition from autonomous regional entrepot to satellite dependency of Montreal and Toronto occurred as a four stage process. An initial phase of relative affluence and isolation from Canada ended in 1879, with construction of the Intercolonial railway. What followed was a traditional era, during which Saint John endeavoured amidst economic malaise to define its relationship with Canada's St. Lawrence heartland. That quest ended in 1895 when the New Brunswick city opted to become basically a winter port for the nation, a role which, at the climax of the Laurier boom, appeared to give Saint John a firm grasp on prosperity. After 1911, structural integration into the national economy proceeded at an accelerated pace. Paradoxically, however, this achievement brought not sustained growth but rather a descent into economic stagnation

and marginality. By the time Canada celebrated its sixtieth birthday, it had become highly unlikely that Saint John would ever become the dynamic entrepot long envisioned by its residents.

Professor McGahan musters convincing detail to argue that the promotional efforts of community leaders, notably the Board of Trade and municipal administration (known as the Common Council), exerted a significant impact on the course of development in Saint John. Although their priorities diverged from time to time, the city's business and governmental elites were united by the ideology of boosterism. Convinced that their city possessed a potential for greatness, they continually sought to stimulate economic expansion through such improvements as: better rail connections with the interior, modernized docking facilities, harbour dredging, additional steamship service, more efficient navigational aids, and expanded bridge and ferry capacity. The development strategy pursued by local entrepreneurs included mobilization of indigenous private and public capital, but over time increasing emphasis came to be placed upon the recruitment of external resources for the attainment of Saint John's growth. In this endeavour they proved to be remarkably successful. Between Confederation and World War One, the federal government invested millions in enhancement of the city's transportation facilities. Moreover, after its entry into Saint John in 1889, the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) became a major source of investment and entrepreneurial initiative for the port, much to the envy of centres such as Halifax. Viewed from an Edwardian perspective, it was a record which appeared to make Saint John one of the great success stories of the Maritimes.

Appearances, however, were deceiving. Professor McGahan insists that Saint John paid a high price for the progress it achieved. As the port became increasingly integrated into a national system of transportation, it suffered a steady erosion of its capacity to shape its own destiny. By the early twentieth century, Saint John's businessmen and politicians had declined from the rank of major players to that of mere supplicants, with little capacity to influence the decisions made by Ottawa and the CPR. The full extent of the city's vulnerability became apparent in the 1920s, when federal initiatives to raise freight rates and deflect rail traffic through Portland, Maine accentuated problems associated with de-industrialization within the region. Having attained integration into the national economy, Saint John then discovered that its new status did not provide a sound basis for sustained urban expansion. Bewildered local boosters turned to the Maritime Rights movement in the hope that collective regional protest might offer a remedy for the problems faced by their city. In the end, the agitation secured nothing more

than a superficial alleviation of the symptoms of distress. More importantly, hard times became the basis for completion of Saint John's integration into the Canadian urban system. In 1927, demoralized community leaders surrendered all of their remaining formal control over port facilities to the federal government, seeing this move as "a desperately needed mechanism to relieve the city of a responsibility it could no longer afford to bear."

Professor McGahan offers a story without a happy ending. Integration coincided with Saint John's subordination and severe curtailment of its prospects for expansion. All this is interesting, but the analysis would have been strengthened had the author placed her study within the context of the discussion now prevailing about the origins of regional disparity within Atlantic Canada. Why, for example, did Saint John fail to derive greater benefit from enhancement of its transportation links with central Canada? Did geography dictate that local expectations must be disappointed or should we probe the dynamics of monopoly capitalism for an explanation of Saint John's dilemma? Alternately, to what extent can it be argued that entrepreneurial failure (either inertia or miscalculation) was chiefly responsible for the negative character of this city's long term development? Unfortunately, these questions receive no discussion in Professor McGahan's book. The "ecological approach," at least as employed here, offers no synthesis of the basic elements operating to shape the history of post-Confederation Saint John. The reader is left to draw his own conclusions. Thus, although innovative, Professor McGahan's work falls short of becoming a landmark contribution to discussion of the city building process in Canada.

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*Early Canadian Court Houses.* Studies in Archaeology, Architecture and History. Ottawa: National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, Parks Canada, 1983. Pp. 258. \$13.95.

This volume makes a significant contribution to the growing body of literature dealing with the architectural heritage of Canadian cities. Seeking to examine court houses from the perspective of "the court systems they were built to serve, the choice of designs and means of construction employed . . . , and the roles" they "subsequently performed within their respective communities," the authors have uncovered a wealth of information concerning extant buildings constructed before 1914 in the Maritimes, Quebec and southern Ontario, and before 1930 in northern Ontario and the western provinces. In addition, the book is profusely illustrated. More than 180 drawings and photographs have been reproduced in the main text, and the appendix contains

an illustration of virtually every court house included in the study.

Even though the existence of a common judicial system gave rise to certain similarities, the pattern of court house construction varied significantly across the country. A regional perspective has therefore been adopted with a separate essay being devoted to each of the following areas — Newfoundland, the Maritime provinces, Quebec, Ontario, the Prairies and British Columbia. The six essays are characterized by an admirable attention to detail. Thoroughly researched and carefully documented, they trace the history of Canadian court houses from the time of settlement to the early twentieth century. The authors consider the judicial history of each region, and they ably relate politico-constitutional developments to the general pattern of court house construction. Particular emphasis is placed upon the task of documenting the circumstances surrounding the construction of each building. The authors focus on factors such as court house design and construction methods, and for the convenience of the reader, much of this information has been summarized in the appendix.

The essays by Kelly Crossman and Dana Johnson, André Giroux, and C.A. Hale will be of special interest to urban historians. In addition to providing a detailed account of the relevant construction facts, these authors tackle a number of broader issues relating to Canadian urban development. They illustrate, for example, that boosterism and inter-urban rivalry provided a major impetus to the construction of grandiose court houses "with sophisticated stylistic and decorative details." They also recognize the great symbolic importance of civic architecture. While discussing the ornamentation which embellished the buildings constructed in the Maritimes, C.A. Hale suggests that the inclusion of classical details stemmed from the "serious need for a distinct symbol of justice to represent and reinforce the new system of government." Similarly, André Giroux maintains that the use of brick and stone in Quebec was intended to "evoke the judicial system's image of durability," and as Kelly Crossman and Dana Johnson conclude, the court houses of nineteenth century Ontario symbolized the aspirations of that province's emergent urban communities. The symbolic importance of the early court houses could have been examined in a fuller and more systematic manner, but the authors of these three essays must be commended for initiating this difficult task.

The primary weakness of *Early Canadian Court Houses* is that it lacks cohesion. The authors do not employ a uniform approach and, although Margaret Carter's introductory remarks attempt to present an overview, neither the introduction nor the conclusion are capable of binding the disparate actions together. A clearer statement of the authors' goals, along with a more detailed comparison of the regional patterns of court house construction, could have been incorporated into the introduction. It is also unfortunate that many