

**Roberts, David, *In the Shadow of Detroit: Gordon M. McGregor, Ford of Canada, and Motoropolis*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006. Pp. 336, illustrations US\$34.95 (cloth)**

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laissée de côté ; ce qui n'est guère étonnant car l'étude sexuée de la ville contemporaine constitue un des parents pauvres de l'histoire urbaine française. L'absence de réflexion épistémologique précise sur la notion de « crise urbaine » est quant à elle plus surprenante. En effet, parler de *Villes en crise* n'est-il pas une tautologie ? La ville contemporaine semble être constamment en crise, chaque bouleversement de l'espace urbain étant perçu comme un nouveau symbole de la maladie chronique qui touche nos cités. Car, en matière d'urbain, la mutation est souvent pensée comme une crise.

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**Roberts, David, *In the Shadow of Detroit: Gordon M. McGregor, Ford of Canada, and Motoropolis*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006. Pp. 336, illustrations US\$34.95 (cloth).**

The automobile is an unmistakable fact of life in southern Ontario, defining not only the region's economic activity but also its urban geography, labour patterns, and even its politics. It is the roots of this phenomenon in the first years of the twentieth century that David Roberts attempts to uncover in *In the Shadows of Detroit*. Roberts, an editor with the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, began, in 1997, researching the life of Gordon M. McGregor, the founder of the Ford Motor Company of Canada, with the goal of writing an article-length biography of this somewhat mysterious figure in Canadian business history. Instead, the project evolved into a unique study of Gordon McGregor's life and the early years of Ford of Canada but also of McGregor's influence on the political life and urban development of his firm's home, Windsor, Ontario.

As his research into the life of Gordon McGregor deepened, Roberts discovered that his subject was far more elusive and complex than he had initially believed. He found that "Gordon McGregor left virtually no correspondence; his movement in the ranks of Canada's leading industrialists was quiet; and in the eyes of some, then and now, he was merely an agent of Ford Detroit" (viii). Without the extensive personal and corporate papers necessary to write a conventional biography, Roberts was forced to rely on the sources available to him, particularly the strongly pro-McGregor *Windsor Evening Record/Border City Star*. Although this limited the range of material Roberts could consult, it did have the advantage of allowing him to trace McGregor's and Ford's broader influence on the Windsor region, economically, socially and politically, thereby creating an intricately woven biography of a man, a company and a community.

*In the Shadow of Detroit* has a dual focus: on Gordon McGregor the automobile pioneer and on Gordon McGregor the politician. In regard to the former, Roberts argues that prior to 1904, McGregor had been best known as a young

salesman with a brilliant singing voice and, latterly, as the rather ineffectual president of the Walkerville Wagon Works. That image began to change, however, as he cemented "a fortuitous alliance with auto maverick Henry Ford and Fordist technology, which would make McGregor rich, shaped his rapid evolution into an auto executive devoted at once to Ford Detroit (and all it came to represent) and his company's Canadian identity, never more than during the Great War." As Ford of Canada grew into a position of dominance in both the Canadian and British Imperial markets on the back of the Ford Model T, McGregor ran the company until his death in 1922 "with a mixture of authority and subservience to Ford Detroit," (2) a common theme in the history of the Canadian branch plant economy. As a result of this ambivalent position, Roberts asserts that McGregor rose to a position of prominence in his own community while being overshadowed nationally by other, more independent, Canadian auto pioneers such as Tommy Russell and Sam McLaughlin.

The second theme, that of McGregor the politician, is inexorably tied to the nature of the Border Cities. Roberts contends that the communities of the Essex County border region had a distinct Canadian-American identity which the growth of the auto industry on both sides of the Detroit River only enhanced. As Ford of Canada grew, so to did McGregor's influence municipally, initially by securing favourable municipal zoning decisions for the growing Ford facility in Walkerville. In the years immediately prior to the First World War, McGregor, a dedicated Liberal, began to champion progressive causes such as public health and sanitation in bodies such as the controversial Essex Border Utilities Commission (EBUC), which he used to advocate not only the need for the Border Cities to develop a unified sewage water treatment system but also championed American-style city management and regional governance. As head of the EBUC between 1916 and 1920, McGregor "tried repeatedly to sell the concepts of common regional needs—water and trunk lines, public health, and parks—to suspicious and resentful town councils." He did so, in battles with labour councilors "over apportionments, engineering reports, and differing urban visions" (9) as his critics attacked him for attempting to impose his autocratic managerial style on the citizens of the Border Cities. Although he did not live to see the unification of the Border Cities of Windsor, Walkerville, Ford City, Ojibway and Sandwich into the City of Windsor in 1935, Roberts credits McGregor for fighting the initial battles that made such a move possible.

Strangely, given Roberts's dual focus, McGregor's political life often seems to take second place to the story of the growth of Ford of Canada. Roberts traces, in detail, the personal relationships between McGregor and Henry Ford and his trusted Chatham, Ontario-born deputy James Couzens, the development of imperial markets and domestic dealer networks, the innovations in automobile marketing and McGregor's attempts to deal with an increasingly restless labour force. However, his role as a key Liberal Party organizer

and the chair of the EBUC seem to be glossed over far too quickly. For example, Roberts notes that in January and February 1918, McGregor, as chair of the EBUC, "called several meetings to explain the bylaws needed to implement the plans and set up the infrastructure for a Border Cities—wide sewage system. To illustrate the need, at one meeting he graphically emphasized the complete lack of any control or treatment in Ford City, where raw sewage from his plant and from his employees' houses flowed directly into the Detroit River" (170). However, Roberts does not discuss the specific proposals put forward by McGregor nor does he describe the reaction of the other members of the commission or indeed, that of the general public. Although this may be due in part to his heavy (and to be fair, involuntary) reliance on the *Evening Record* instead of archival records, it does make for a study heavily biased toward automotive history and, one which urban historians may find frustrating for its lack of detail on the municipal issues to which Roberts refers. Aside from that significant proviso, it is undeniable that David Roberts has made an important and very readable contribution to both Canadian urban and automotive history.

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**Rutherford, Robert, *Hometown Horizons: Local Responses to the Great War*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004. Pp. xxiv, 331, illustrations, index, bibliography. \$29.95 (paper).**

Military historians of the distant past possess the luxury of not having to cope with angry veterans protesting, "But I was there, and it wasn't like that." Living memory is an invaluable thing, but it can also douse objectivity in dewy sentiment. Now that the generation that fought the Great War has passed, historians are reconsidering the war's origins, rethinking its consequences, and refighting its battles. Nonetheless, Canadians possess rather delicate patriotic sensibilities, and some historians still feel compelled to tiptoe around them. It is therefore to his credit that Robert Rutherford says goodbye to all that and offers a serious, unsentimental analysis of the way in which the people of three small towns: Lethbridge, Alberta; Guelph, Ontario; and Trois-Rivières, Quebec, experienced First World War.

On issues of region Canadian historians find themselves amidst rocks and hard places: write a national study and critics will snipe at you for neglecting regional variations, write about regions and they will decry the death of the heroic national narrative. Rutherford sees no contradiction: the national story of the Great War, he argues, *is* a regional story. Soldiers were recruited locally and departed for war with local fanfare; stories of their exploits overseas were carried in local papers; small towns felt the deaths of their young men more acutely than the deaths of other young men; they responded to "enemy aliens" (Canadians of German descent) in ways that var-

ied according to longstanding community relations with them; their voluntary efforts were framed by local concerns and class boundaries, and so forth. Rutherford does not, however, claim that the small town experience of the war undermines the theory that the war contributed to a greater sense of nationhood. Local and national, he writes, are "illusionary dichotomies" (p. 264). While Canadians perceived the war through a regional lens and experienced it in local ways, they understood nonetheless that the war was being fought for larger purposes. But beneath the patriotic veneer of wartime consensus and what he calls the "innocent enthusiasm" (p. 47) of 1914, Rutherford uncovers a sustained argument about the war, what it meant, and how the home front could contribute to winning it. In turn, this formed part of a larger argument about the meaning of empire, nationhood, citizenship, gender, and modernity.

In a sense, none of this should be surprising: Canadians have rarely agreed about anything. What is surprising is the extent and intensity of these arguments as already existing social debates were recast in patriotic terms. While the basic contours of the conscription crisis, for instance, are well known, Rutherford reveals that on the regional level the debate was far more nuanced than the conventional French versus English Canadian dichotomy suggests. As we might expect, newspaper editors in Trois-Rivières appealed to a concept of nationhood that they believed conscription violated. In Lethbridge, however, where both newspapers were staunchly pro-conscription, many farmers protested the potential loss of agricultural labour, while in Guelph police actually raided the St. Stanislaus Jesuit seminary over the noncompliance of its members with conscription. Among the novices was none other than the minister of justice's son.

Such cases illustrate how the federal government's best efforts to produce homogeneity of thought and opinion floundered on local pluralism. Only in the aftermath of the war could a powerful mythology of unanimity and collective sacrifice (at least on the part of English Canadians) emerge.

Rutherford provides no particular justification for his selection of small towns, except to note that they are all quite different, nor is one needed. Why not study Lethbridge? Nevertheless, one wonders how more remote towns, isolated not only geographically but also in terms of communication (and presumably less susceptible to the press that did so much to demonize the enemy, as Rutherford argues) experienced the war. Obviously a great many regional studies are possible.

Some readers may question Rutherford's reliance on local newspapers such as Lethbridge's *Daily Herald* and Guelph's *Evening Mercury*, as in some chapters these constitute a third or more of his sources. But Rutherford is judicious in their use, and makes a case for drawing plausible inferences about social attitudes from them. If only the case he makes were more readily comprehensible. Putting it mildly, Rutherford's book can be hard going. In fairness, those of us