

**Marvin McInnis, *Kingston in the Canadian Economy of the Late Nineteenth Century*, Institute for Economic Research, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Discussion Paper 132**

Numéro 1-74, juin 1974

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019668ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019668ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

(1974). Compte rendu de [Marvin McInnis, *Kingston in the Canadian Economy of the Late Nineteenth Century*, Institute for Economic Research, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Discussion Paper 132]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, (1-74), 23–25. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019668ar>

collections, not only in Vancouver, but elsewhere in Canada. Significant, serious urban studies can and should be undertaken. And, if Vancouver City Archives is a sample, the prognosis for urban historiography in the next few years is very good indeed.

R. Lynn Ogden

. . . . .

Marvin McInnis, *Kingston in the Canadian Economy of the Late Nineteenth Century*, Institute for Economic Research, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Discussion Paper 132.

This recent study of Kingston will be of interest to urban historians in Canada. "The main intent of the paper is to survey census data on occupations and on output and employment in industry with an eye to what conclusions they may suggest about the relatively retarded development of Kingston in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Attention is directed mostly to the period 1850-1881, for which the census data are most abundant.

"The leading concern in the history of Kingston in the later nineteenth century has to be its slow development relative to other urban centers in Canada. While Kingston was the largest and most important urban center of Upper Canada in the early years of the nineteenth century, it was surpassed in size and economic importance by Toronto in the 1830's and by Hamilton at mid-century.<sup>1</sup> In 1851, Kingston still played a prominent role in the economy of Upper Canada and was vying with Hamilton for the position of second-city. The succeeding half-century witnessed industrialization and rapid growth elsewhere while Kingston fell back into a position of lesser significance."

Professor McInnis, in explaining the retarded growth of Kingston, concludes that, in all, the Ontario city "...was one of the weakest locations one could find for manufacturing industry in all of central Canada. This showed up with special severity at the end of the century.

At that time, locational disadvantage was accentuated by the movement to fewer, much larger industrial establishments then underway. As late as the 1880's, manufacturing industry still had a strong local orientation. The emergence of large scale enterprise characteristic of modern industrial economies, along with the consolidation of large numbers of small firms into more highly concentrated, monopolized industry, was hitting a peak at this same time. Consolidation often involved concentrations of production at fewer, more widely separated locations."

"Around the end of the nineteenth century, the Canadian economy recovered from its depressed state and entered into a long period of rapid and vigorous development that lasted up until World War I. Urban development picked up markedly. Cities expanded rapidly. Kingston, however, more than at any other time, fell behind. Its locational disadvantages were particularly acute, given the main basis of development--the boom associated with rapid settlement of the Canadian west. Kingston had been a weak location with regard to the Ontario market. It was even further distant from the area of most vigorous market expansion. Wheat exports became the dynamic of the economy and shortly thereafter wood pulp and base metals. Kingston was poorly situated to participate even directly in their exploitation. Preston recounts how a last-ditch attempt was made by Kingston to capitalize on its historically important situation in the transport system. That came to nothing. New York shippers and Buffalo flour mills were able to capture the lion's share of the grain trade. The Canadian flour mills expanded at Port Colborne and Montreal. The major part of the greatly increased grain trade was able to bypass Kingston. The leading grain merchants of Kingston moved their base of operations westward to Winnipeg--where the action was. When the period of great opportunity came, Kingston was peculiarly ill-suited to seize upon it. Cities flourished elsewhere in Canada and Kingston languished."

"The main argument of this paper has been that the development that shaped Kingston's very modest destiny and brought about first its loss of position as the pre-eminent urban center of Ontario, and eventually its being overshadowed by many other secondary urban centers, occurred either rather earlier or rather later than has usually been supposed.

Kingston's subsidiary position in relation to Toronto had been firmly determined by the middle of the nineteenth century and was in little doubt at least a decade earlier. Yet Kingston's economic base remained satisfactory and even showed signs of vitality in the second half of the nineteenth century in spite of its being undermined by transport improvements and the westward shift of the center of gravity of Canadian economic activity. Political and administrative decisions may have been of greater consequence than economic disadvantages for the relatively modest expansion of Kingston in the latter half of the nineteenth century."

"It was at the very end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries that Kingston's economic fate was sealed. Its weak location as a center of economic activity was acutely revealed in an era that was marked by two major developments. The westward orientation of the Canadian economy in the great boom of 1896-1913, and the move towards consolidated, large-scale enterprise that became pronounced after 1890 both operated greatly to Kingston's disadvantage. It was in that period more than at any other juncture of its history that Kingston was unable to harness the economic dynamics that transform stagnating towns into prospering cities."

#### FOOTNOTE

1. It may be pertinent that urban development in Upper Canada was generally retarded. More than half a century after the beginning of settlement only about 57,000 or no more than ten per cent of the area's population lived in the three urban centers that had more than 10,000 inhabitants. One implication of this is that Kingston may never have gained the advantages that early dominance might have conferred.