

**Bellan, Ruben. *Winnipeg, First Century: An Economic History*.  
Winnipeg: Queenston House, 1978. Pp. iv. 270. \$12.95 Cloth,  
\$5.95 Paper**

W. J. C. Cherwinski

Volume 8, numéro 1, june 1979

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019397ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019397ar>

[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

Cherwinski, W. J. C. (1979). Compte rendu de [Bellan, Ruben. *Winnipeg, First Century: An Economic History*. Winnipeg: Queenston House, 1978. Pp. iv. 270. \$12.95 Cloth, \$5.95 Paper]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 8(1), 134–135. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019397ar>

before the First World War. The lumber industry in the interior which Roger Hayter suggests had originally developed only to "a limited extent" to serve prairie agriculture (p. 97), had in fact expanded in the Kootenays between 1900 and 1914 "primarily" in response to the prairie market; he also notes that "By the 1940s Vancouver was clearly the single most important centre in the forest product industries of British Columbia" (p. 97), a position it had attained some thirty years earlier. The carelessness of R. W. Collier is inexcusable. He has the C.P.R. making a land settlement with the B.C. government "subsequent" to the rail company's location "along the waterfront adjacent to Gastown" (p. 160); surely he means "prior to"! We are also told that Woodward's department store was constructed in 1911 (the first part was completed in 1903) (p. 162); that the Hudson's Bay building was constructed in 1939 (actually begun in 1912) (p. 162); and that Gerry McGeer was Vancouver's mayor "in the late 1930s and early 1940s" (p. 171) (he was mayor from 1935 to 1936). Perhaps foremost among the contributions this volume makes toward the further study of Vancouver is the clear impression it leaves that a solidly researched history of the city would be of invaluable service to historians and social scientists alike in their ongoing examination of the city's development.

Robert A. J. McDonald  
 Department of History  
 University of British Columbia

\* \* \*

Bellan, Ruben. Winnipeg, First Century: An Economic History. Winnipeg: Queenston House, 1978. Pp. iv. 270. \$12.95 Cloth, \$5.95 Paper.

When confronted with the observation that Winnipeg is the most written-about city in the country, one historian resident in the city concluded that the reason for the notoriety in print was simple--cities, like politicians, receive significant attention only after they are dead. While not yet buried, recent observations indicate that the city appears to be dying. Once the centre of frenzied economic activity, the real "Queen City of the Prairies" now sports streets which resemble a hag's mouth with numerous buildings vacated or replaced by parking lots interspersed with pawn shops, karate studios and pin-ball machine arcades. Winnipeg's present has been amply confirmed by John Paskievich's empathetic photo study A Place Not Our Own: North End Winnipeg and her doubtful future assessed in David Young's Development Review Plan. The opposite of such a doom-and-gloom image emerges from Ruben Bellan's Winnipeg, First Century, which, while purporting to be a simple historical study of the city's development, leaves the reader with the impression that despite temporary setbacks, the future of the windy city is ever onward and upward.

The table of contents reveals the ambitious nature of Bellan's project. It is to take the reader from the "Origins of the City" in the

mid-nineteenth century to its "Modernization and Renewal" after the Second World War. Unfortunately what appears in these chapters and the ones in between is in fact simply a commercial chronicle devoted to the major and the minute accomplishments of the city's business elite in their never-ending desire to capitalize on their geographic and well nurtured political advantages to retain hegemony over the prairie hinterland. When they did fail, as was often the case after 1920, Bellan almost bemoans this development as something approaching heresy. Yet he still continues to record the beginnings of almost every enterprise, the letting of nearly every contract, the construction of almost every building and the hiring of every significant group of employees and embellishes these accounts with such suitable phrases as "tremendous upsurge," "spectacular rise" and "dramatic transformation."

Like all such chronicles, Winnipeg, First Century is almost totally devoid of interpretation. The only thing resembling a pattern appears in the chapter titles which chart the yo-yoesque economy of both Winnipeg and the Prairies: Rapid Expansion, 1896-1906, Recession 1907-08, The Building Boom, 1909-12, Recession, 1913-14. The readers first response; is to say, "So what?" Economic history and urban studies have progressed far beyond such unsophisticated presentations. Moreover, it is not even a careful chronicle since it contains obvious errors in fact (eg. "The Progressive Party . . . held the balance of power in Parliament after the federal election of 1926 . . ." p. 168) and there are doubtlessly others less obvious but they are hard to check since the book is virtually devoid of documentation. One suspects that most of the evidence had been gleaned from the press. In short, Winnipeg, First Century is really just a coffee table book which is long on captions and short on pictures. It is the product of a local writer discussing local matters for local readers (The extensive use of the word "here" gives it away). Yet, as such this "booster book" serves a purpose in that a Board of Trade member can point to it with assurance and say "That is truth" and be reasonably certain of being correct.

W.J.C. Cherwinski  
 Department of History  
 Memorial University of Newfoundland

\* \* \*

Boyer, Paul. Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920.  
 Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978. Pp. xvi, 387.  
 \$18.50.

Paul Boyer has skillfully turned his furrow in a richly documented field, producing something more than a survey history of moral crusades and social reform. Incorporating familiar topics--temperance, Sunday Schools, the Children's Aid Society, the YMCA, City Beautiful--he avoids both whig praise and reflex criticism of associations or movements which sought to enforce standards of proper conduct. One suspects that