

## Urban History Review

**Brennan, J. William, ed. *Regina Before Yesterday: A Visual History, 1882 to 1945*. Regina: The City of Regina, 1978. Pp. vii, 228. Illustrations. \$15.00 Paper**

David R. Richeson

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commercial publishing market. Sometimes, therefore, the only pressure may be simply to finish the job as soon as possible.

As standards decline in the scramble for publication, valuable research and thought is lost because it is not presented in an accessible and authoritative manner. At the same time, the credibility of the academic community as a whole is diminished. Just as journalists everywhere are tarred with the brush of sensationalism, whether they write sensational articles or not, so the reputation of all academics suffers by the distribution of poor quality scholarship. Perhaps it is time for the academic community as a whole--or various institutions within the community--to address seriously the question of how our standards should evolve and how they can be maintained in the face of changing conditions. The difficulties of such an undertaking would be more than justified by the salvaging of the potential which is lost in a volume like New Communities in Canada.

Christopher Leo  
Department of Political Science  
University of Winnipeg

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Brennan, J. William, ed. Regina Before Yesterday: A Visual History, 1882 to 1945. Regina: The City of Regina, 1978. Pp. vii, 228. Illustrations. \$15.00 Paper.

Regina Before Yesterday is not an interpretative visual history. It is a memorial which includes visual images and contemporary quotations related to a great many events prior to 1945. Professor Brennan has attempted to provide some interpretative outline in a brief historical introduction to the volume. Brennan claims that Regina typifies perhaps better than any other Canadian city the process of transformation of an area of barren plain with few natural advantages as a townsite to a large urban centre. According to Brennan, this growth in the face of natural and economic obstacles produced a city character distinct from all others on the prairie--that of a city aspiring only to become "a pleasant city on a boundless plain." Such an interpretation may be suitable for local sales of the book, which in this instance surpassed an amazing 5,000 copies, but it is hardly a basis for comparison with the development history of other similar urban centres.

The book was a committee effort carried out within a limited budget and within a brief time span. Under these limitations perhaps the book is better than one might expect, but it is not a history. The photographs which constitute the main element in the book are generally interesting, but as Saskatchewan Archivist Ian Wilson points out in the 'Forward' they reflect a biased view of the city, stressing the new and the different and emphasizing the downtown core. As with other urban centres, professional and amateur photographers did not generally

immortalize problem areas, the poor, minority groups, or any other aspects of the seamy side of life in early Regina. The three chapter or division titles reflect the same consensus view of the past: "Years of hope," "Canada's city of certainties," and "A pleasant city on a boundless plain." Only a few of the captions indicate that behind the "booster" facade lay serious health problems related to an inadequate water and sewage system; economic problems related to the boom or bust agricultural economy in the surrounding hinterland; and certain stresses in the social fabric of the city as new immigrant groups struggled for recognition and acceptance.

Books such as this have a value in that they encourage the discovery and preservation of photographic documentation of early urban history. Unfortunately, without supporting historical interpretation and statistical data the photographs alone provide little more than a nostalgic view of the past which may be pleasant for the casual reader but which will never increase to any extent the general understanding of the forces which led to the survival of the community. Urban history specialists will find little of interest in Regina Before Yesterday.

David R. Richeson  
History Division  
National Museum of Man

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Cashman, Tony. Edmonton Exhibition: The First Hundred Years. Edmonton: Edmonton Exhibition Association, 1979. Pp. 160. Illustrations. \$9.95.

Cashman's review of the first hundred years of the Edmonton Exhibition is concerned with the activities and physical growth of this event as well as with the people and organizations which were behind its development. These aspects of the fair are developed in chronological fashion using an extensive number of quotations from the Edmonton Bulletin, Edmonton Journal, minutes of the Association, and photographs from various sources such as the Byron-May and E. Brown collections.

From the point of view of an urban historian the value of this book lies in its discussion of the role of the various rural and urban interest groups which were involved in the development of the Exhibition and its role as a forum for boosterism. Between 1879 and 1895 the fair was organized by the Edmonton Agricultural Society which included among its membership residents of St. Albert and Fort Saskatchewan. The activities organized by the society consisted of displays of agricultural commodities which were judged and awarded prizes accordingly. The Society also prepared an exhibit of agricultural produce which was shipped to a fair in Ottawa in September of 1893. Such an exercise served to promote the agriculture resources of the region to eastern sceptics who were reported to have asked "if they were not grown on some experimental farm." The participation of a number of Edmontonians in the operation of this society is noted.