

## Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW  
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

McCann, Larry ed., *People and Place: Studies of Small Town Life in the Maritimes*. Fredericton, New Brunswick: Acadiensis Press, 1987. Pp. 263. Maps, black and white photographs, graphs. \$10.95 (paper)

Fred Dahms

Volume 18, numéro 3, february 1990

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1017723ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1017723ar>

[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

Dahms, F. (1990). Compte rendu de [McCann, Larry ed., *People and Place: Studies of Small Town Life in the Maritimes*. Fredericton, New Brunswick: Acadiensis Press, 1987. Pp. 263. Maps, black and white photographs, graphs. \$10.95 (paper)]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 18(3), 257–258. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1017723ar>

## ***Book Reviews/Comptes rendus***

is as jarring as the Victorians' labelling of the poor. In general, though, her sensitivity to the subjectivity of the "underclass" and her commitment to document their struggles is evident and well conveyed in her engaging prose.

Carolyn Strange  
Department of History  
Rutgers, State University of New Jersey

**McCann, Larry ed., *People and Place: Studies of Small Town Life in the Maritimes*. Fredericton, New Brunswick: Acadiensis Press, 1987. Pp. 263. Maps, black and white photographs, graphs. \$10.95 (paper)**

This eclectic volume considers a selection of varied and interesting facets of life in the Maritime Provinces, primarily from an historical perspective. In addition to providing an objective evaluation of processes there, it attempts to capture the feel and "flavour" of the people and places in the Maritimes. Most of its authors have been intimately acquainted with the study area during their careers, and this is clearly reflected in many of the chapters.

Part one describes the background of settlement by examining the politics of a country, the promotion of a railway, social mobility in New Glasgow, and the Maritime novel from 1880 to 1920. Part two concentrates upon the transition from a traditional way of life to more modern times throughout the Maritimes. The role of philanthropic foundations in the region, the temperance movement in Amherst, regional poetry, and the rise and fall of Pictou Island are discussed here. A photo essay is used to examine the legacy of rural gas stations, and to

evoke a genuine sense of a past that has all but disappeared.

In contrast to the historical emphasis of the first two sections, the concluding papers move into the present and recent past. They treat population growth and industrial structure in small Maritime towns, the association between social relations and newspaper reporting in New Brunswick communities, and the evolution of the Mulgrave Road Theatre Company. The volume concludes with an analysis of attitudes about the provision of care for the elderly in a small Maritime town.

Because of the diversity of topics covered, the book is difficult to categorize, but parts will appeal to many. It attempts to provide a "snapshot" of life, history, geography and literature in a number of Maritime towns from the 1700s to the present. Many of the chapters are detailed, almost personal accounts of small-scale places and activities in the region. The detailed historical analyses will undoubtedly appeal to many readers of this journal.

My historical-geographical bias caused me to select "The Rise and Fall of Pictou Island" by Eric Ross as a favourite chapter. It traces settlement on the island from 1814, graphically describes the lives of the inhabitants, and then takes us through the transition to the present. In addition to supplying useful factual information, the author manages to evoke the character of the people, the look of the land, and the nature of life upon a typical Maritime Island. One can almost re-live the events described through the account in this chapter.

The study by Bendetti and Price focuses on the role of industrial structure as an indicator of potential urban growth or decline. A sample of 156 towns in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island was used to test for a series of relationships between population growth and industrial characteristics. The application of standard statistical techniques led to the conclusion that places which were dependent on the service sector grew, whereas towns which were highly dependent on 'smokestack' and primary industries suffered decline. The authors suggested that additional insights would result from research into individual towns; an excellent challenge for the urban historian!

Much of the book does indeed look at individual towns, or at specific aspects of the behaviour of individuals in these communities. W. G. Godfrey traces the career of the politician James Glenie in Sunbury County during the Loyalist era in New Brunswick. He carefully illustrates the way in which a master politician retained the loyalties of his constituents through both good times and adversity. Jobb's account of the promotion of the railway to Sackville stresses the role of influential individuals in acquiring railway service. This account will appeal to those interested in the impact of the entrepreneur in urban growth.

McCann and Burnett use an analysis of the social mobility of ironmasters in New Glasgow during the late nineteenth century to illuminate the effects of social class and immigration upon the town's economy. Their carefully documented study also demonstrates the effect of social class and connections upon social advancement in a pre-industrial

## ***Book Reviews/Comptes rendus***

community. This chapter and those by Godfrey and Jobb effectively illustrates the impact of entrepreneurial ability, influence, connections, and promotion upon economic development and personal status in small towns.

The Arts and their effects are also given prominence in this volume. Carrie MacMillan explores the sense of place and seaward vision in the Maritime novel, while Richard Paul Knowles describes the relationship between the Mulgrave Road Co-op Theatre Company and economic progress in Guysborough, Nova Scotia. Davies' account of the "Song Fisherman" analyzes the evolution of regional poetry and literature as a reflection of rural Nova Scotia during the 1920s and 30s.

The chapter by Baker explores the tensions that can exist between the desire of a reporter to be objective and the demands of social relationships in a small community. He concludes that the prevailing mood in a place often affects what does or doesn't get printed as news or as opinion. The last chapter by Storm and Strike-Schurman probes the problem of the perceptions of responsibility for the elderly in a small town in Atlantic Canada. A sample of women was interviewed and the results were analyzed statistically. In general, children felt that they had a responsibility towards their elders, but were ambiguous about the magnitude and extent of their possible support. Attitudes were less conservative than expected by the authors.

People and Place is well produced, generally readable, and full of interesting information about small-town life in the Maritimes. Because it attempts to deal

with so many diverse topics, it will be of most interest to those with Maritime associations and an historical bent. It is an intimate account of the area, written by a group of authors who know and love their region, and this is both its strength and its weakness. For some, the rich detail of names and events will bring the book to life. For others, several chapters may seem to lapse into a mass of impenetrable detail. On balance, the book makes a useful contribution to our comprehension of the character and economy of Eastern Canada. It is a valuable addition to the literature of the region.

Fred Dahms  
Department of Geography  
University of Guelph

**Argersinger, Jo Ann E., *Toward a New Deal in Baltimore: People and Government in the Great Depression*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989. Pp. xix, 284.**

Jo Ann Argersinger's excellent case study of a border city describes well the ways in which the New Deal encouraged grassroots organization even as it limited efforts to achieve a permanent restructuring of Baltimore's political, social, and economic order. Her study "documents the partially successful efforts of the New Deal to reach out to new constituencies as it unravels the complex connection between citizen activism and governmental authority."

Baltimore was governed before and after the New Deal by conservative politicians who remained hostile to Federal efforts to confront the massive problems created by the Great Depression. Central to the

collapse of the nation's economy was the issue of unemployment and relief. Baltimore politicians, however, insisted that relief other than private charity was unacceptable. When pressed finally to take further action in the face of a twenty percent unemployment rate, Mayor Howard Jackson created the Baltimore Emergency Relief Commission. Headed by businessmen, BERC signalled the shift from a relief policy based on private voluntarism to one that was municipally sponsored. The basis for decision-making had shifted from social workers to businessmen, the latter charged the former with pampering the jobless. BERC's aim was twofold: to administer relief as efficiently as possible, and to reduce quickly the caseload.

BERC's zeal to ensure that relief did not become a permanent fixture led to numerous cases of discrimination and human suffering, prompting the Federal Emergency Relief Administration to investigate the city's policies in 1933 and 1934. Investigators found a programme based on fierce neighbourhood loyalties that used unprofessional standards in applying relief. They urged the city to create a Welfare Department to deal adequately with the problem of relief. Despite this report, BERC lasted until 1936.

Despite local resistance to providing adequate help for the city's hungry, Federal aid did pour into Baltimore. Politicians, however, continued their fight against outside meddling, and when programs such as the Civil Works Administration and the Works Project Administration were introduced, city officials made sure they retained control over the funds. Thus, the city earned a reputation for having one of the most