

*Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development*, edited by Alan F. J. Artibise. Canadian Plains Studies, 10. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 1981.

This is a book of historical essays about urban development in western Canada. Its compass is broad enough to include British Columbia as well as the Prairies, and to cover the social as well as the economic and political aspects of urban growth. Unfortunately, this breadth of coverage is more apparent than real. Ten of the fifteen articles are about the development of towns and cities on the Prairies from the acquisition of Rupert's Land by the Dominion of Canada to the outbreak of the First World War. This concentration of attention would have been justifiable if the editor had integrated his material into a coherent analysis of urban development on the Prairies in the region's formative period. He has eschewed that task, however, and attempted to broaden the book by including a smattering of articles on other subjects. Whatever the value of these pieces individually, they detract from the thematic unity of the book. The reader is left with bits and pieces of an account of urban development in Western Canada and without even a coherent analysis of the one aspect of that development which is dealt with thoroughly.

The book begins with two articles on "The Economic Framework" which are apparently designed to explain the context in which particular towns and cities developed in the Canadian West. Paul Phillips discusses Winnipeg's gradual decline after 1913 as the Prairie metropolis, and Robert McDonald explains how Vancouver displaced Victoria as the dominant coastal city. These are interesting articles, but they hardly provide a framework for the following ten case studies on Prairie urban development before World War I. Winnipeg is not discussed in these articles, and of course there is nothing on British Columbia. It is true that there are three more essays in the book: a brief and highly descriptive account of the evolution of Victoria's economy by Charles Forward; a well-researched but incredibly ingenuous analysis of the Calgary Children's Aid Society (1909-1920) by Henry Klassen (who would do well writing for *The Islander*); and a very good essay by Patricia Roy on Vancouver's municipal relief policies between 1907 and 1929. I suppose these pieces are supposed to round out the picture of urban development in western Canada, but how they do so remains obscure.

If there is a theme to this book, it is "boosterism," which Alan Artibise discusses in relation to the major Prairie cities, in his own contribution to the collection. His analysis here is really an extension of one he has de-

veloped elsewhere, but he adds interesting detail on the uses of incorporation, annexation and fiscal policy to "boost" cities economically. His perspective is more critical than that of many of his contributors, who have little to say about the general issues their analyses raise. John Selwood and Evelyn Baril discuss the Hudson's Bay Company's early, unsuccessful efforts to take advantage of its land-holdings on the Prairies to promote new townsites, and William Brennan reviews the experience in Regina and Moose Jaw, where the federal government entered into a hardly more successful development consortium with the CPR. No real effort is made here or elsewhere to generalize about the relationship between government and big business or the role of the two actors in urban development.

One point which does emerge is that there was vigorous competition for the favours of business and government among local communities, and "boosterism" was as much a phenomenon of the small town as the city. Barry Potyondi offers a case study of boosting in Minnedosa, Manitoba, and Paul Voisey provides a broader and more illuminating account of similar activities in a set of towns in southern Alberta. Voisey's analysis stands out because it makes clear what boosting meant for the people involved, and it sheds light on the whole social history of the Prairies. As such, it makes the kind of general contribution which few of the other authors attempt. Max Foran's article on Wesley Fletcher Orr, the first mayor of the city of Calgary, is a rather sketchy case study of a booster, which tells us more about the man than the phenomenon. Lewis Thomas and A. A. den Otter offer more general accounts of the development of Saskatoon and Lethbridge, respectively. Both focus on economic development and the efforts to secure it. John Gilpin's study of the city of Strathcona is a complement and a contrast, because he explains why the city was unable to divert development from Edmonton, immediately across the river. Carl Betke's piece on Edmonton touches on municipal efforts to boost the city, but it is mostly concerned with the town's social organization. Betke deals, as few of the others do, with some of the conflicts arising from class divisions.

There is certainly the material here for some generalizations about boosterism on the Prairies before World War I, but the authors, for the most part, prefer to avoid the risks of interpretation. All the articles are well documented, and researchers will be glad to have them available as sources of information. However, a student looking for some way to interpret the development of the Prairie West will be hard pressed to find it. Boosterism was evidently a pervasive phenomenon on the Prairies,

and it had some effect on the urban structure of the region. However, it seems mainly to have worked to the advantage of the CPR and a variety of lesser entrepreneurs. One is left with the impression that the booster mentality was more an effect than a cause of the pattern of economic development in western Canada. This does not make it any less interesting a phenomenon, but one would have expected the authors to make more of an effort to explain how and why it arose. To do this, they would have had to bring a broader perspective to bear on their work and to consider more than the documents in front of them.

Once again this book illustrates that British Columbia and the Prairies are not part of the same region of Canada. It is obvious that one of the central features of Prairie urban development — that the flatness of the terrain made the choice of location for settlements rather arbitrary — is inapplicable to most of British Columbia. Moreover, differences in the economic base were bound to create a different pattern of urban development. Robert McDonald's article provides some insight into this, and Patricia Roy offers a side light on the use of Vancouver as a winter refuge by workers from the interior. However, there are no studies in this book of the B.C. resource towns, so that the picture is incomplete. Since Lethbridge was a mining town, an obvious opportunity for comparison with the Prairies was missed.

This book leaves the field open for a proper comparative study of urban development in the Canadian West. One hopes that British Columbia will receive greater attention in the next round, that a stronger analytical perspective will be brought to bear, and that an effort will be made to comprehend the development of the West after 1914. One tires of the anachronistic identification of the West with the Prairie farmer and his urban *confrères*, and this book does little to dispel the image.

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