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Review of Civilizing the West: The Galts and the Development of Western Canada

Henry C. Klassen
University of Calgary

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Civilizing the West: The Galts and the Development of Western Canada. By A. A. den Otter. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1986. Reprint (1982). Table of contents, preface, maps, tables, appendices, notes, bibliography, index. xiv+395 pp. \$16.95.

This book, published five years ago in hardcover, is now available in paperback. A. A. den Otter, a professor of history at Memorial University in Newfoundland who has written extensively on western Canada, deals with Sir Alexander T. Galt, his son Elliott, and Charles A. Magrath and the economic development of the southwest corner of the prairies from the early 1880s to 1906. In systematically examining the origins and growth of the Galt enterprises, the book makes a contribution to our knowledge of the southern Alberta economy and to Alberta-Montana commercial relations.

The book should encourage debate among those studying business and social history of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The author's thesis is that Alexander Galt tried to use the industrial and commercial opportunities in southern Alberta both to

expand his holdings and to extend British and eastern Canadian cultural values to the West. Galt's vision of a civilized West, in which economic expansion and human values were seen as interdependent forces, pervades the book. Den Otter demonstrates that the Galt undertakings often reflected the tension between the need to make a profit and the need to provide service with concern for everyone involved. He concludes that Alexander and Elliott Galt were men of considerable ability if sometimes lacking in humanity. One wishes that a little more attention had been paid to the personality of Charles Magrath.

Through primary documents in Canadian and British archives, newspapers, government records, town council minutes, assessment rolls and church minutes, the author investigates the methods the Galts and their associates employed to build a regional empire that by 1906 embraced coal mines, railways, an irrigation system, agricultural production, the city of Lethbridge, and small towns in the surrounding area. The capital for these developments came mostly from Great Britain, though some also came from eastern Canada, Winnipeg, and the United States. Many historians are familiar with the broad outlines of this story, but those who desire to take a closer look at industrial activity, railway and settlement promotion, and city building will benefit from the rich detail den Otter presents. Students of entrepreneurship will want to read his assessment of the attitudes and behavior of the Galts and other key actors. Although the evidence is too sparse to permit the author to give us a full picture of the credit arrangements and the earnings and losses of the Galt ventures, the tables he includes on coal production and railway capital are helpful.

By emphasizing the support the Galt companies received first from Prime Minister John A. Macdonald and later from Clifford Sifton, the minister of the interior, den Otter makes it clear that the success of the enterprises was in no small part due to federal government assistance. Considered in its en-

tirety, his carefully researched book effectively combines business, social, and political history.

HENRY C. KLASSEN
Department of History
University of Calgary