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**Review of *Alberta's Petroleum Industry and the Conservation Board* By David H. Breen**

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*Alberta's Petroleum Industry and the Conservation Board.* By David H. Breen. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1993. Forewords, preface, introduction, appendices, maps, figures, tables, photographs. lxii + 800 pp. \$39.95.

Commissioned studies often fall short of scholarly standards, but this certainly cannot be said of David Breen's latest publication. The end result of a massive research project conducted by members of the Alberta Energy Resources Conservation Board staff, this book commemorates the agency's predecessor during the two decades of its existence. Breen claims that the Petroleum and Natural Gas Conservation Board (PNGCB), established in 1938, created the foundations of Alberta's oil and natural gas industry regulation while production was focused on the single reservoir at Turner Valley near Calgary. The Social Credit governments' legislation consistently shored up the exceptional technical and administrative skills of the board members. Consequently, the PNGCB was equipped to cope with the industry's expansion throughout the province in the decade following the 1947 oil strike at Leduc.

In assessing the Alberta Conservation Board's record over the first twenty years, Breen adopts a comparative approach that draws on the range of North American solutions used to tackle the regulatory problems that the industry posed. Although Breen concludes that the Alberta agency performed better than its American counterparts, the ability to learn from the United States experience and to establish a comprehensive regulatory agency before the industry expanded beyond the limits of Turner Valley accounted for much of that success.

Anyone wanting to learn the fundamentals of how the oil and natural gas industry actually operated should read this book. Nevertheless, in some places the amount of detail exceeds the analysis provided to justify its inclusion. And in arguing that the PNGCB members maintained an effective balance

among the demands of large integrated and small independent companies for attractive profit margins, government desire for economic growth, and scientific conservation measures designed to protect the public interest, Breen minimizes evidence that suggests a less laudatory evaluation. Moreover, the role of the board in the interplay among the Alberta, Canadian, and American governments begs for more emphasis in the conclusion. The board apparently stemmed the influence of American parent companies operating through their Alberta subsidiaries. Nevertheless, attempts by the Canadian and American governments to manipulate the Alberta industry toward ends incompatible with board policy proved more difficult to check.

These criticisms should not detract from the importance of this study. David Breen weaves a wide range of complicated administrative, engineering, and geological data into a clear and logically organized book. The wealth of useful evidence in both the text and the extensive appendices will inform scholars in the field for many years to come.

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