

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

Winter 1983

Review of *Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development* Edited by Alan F. J. Artibise

John C. Hudson
Northwestern University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Hudson, John C., "Review of *Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development* Edited by Alan F. J. Artibise" (1983). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 1728.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/1728>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

BOOK REVIEWS

Town and City: Aspects of Western Canadian Urban Development. Edited by Alan F. J. Artibise. Canadian Plains Studies no. 10. Regina, Saskatchewan: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1981. Index. xix + 455 pp. \$15.00

Western Canada's settlement is neatly divided at the Rocky Mountain front. West of there, the population is urban and the scattered clusters of people are separated from one another by miles of wilderness; on the prairies to the east there is a network of farms, small towns, and cities dominated, in turn, by a handful of metropolises. This valuable collection of papers by sixteen Canadian urban historians and geographers treats urbanization in both of these western Canadian realms, providing a balanced geographical coverage and giving the reader a consistent view of town formation, ranging from the smallest of places to the largest.

The prairies (Canada's counterpart for the American term "Great Plains") were settled from east to west with the construction of railway lines and with the assistance of public lands disposal acts. As in the United States, a network of railroad-created service-center towns grew up to handle the trade brought by the ethnically diverse farm population. The prairies were agricultural, and the center of wholesaling, transportation, and grain marketing was Winnipeg, which, by 1911, was Canada's third largest city and unquestionably the primate city of the vast, agricultural prairie region. In an interesting essay Paul Phillips traces the recent decline of Winnipeg's dominance while Calgary and Edmonton have emerged as leaders in a new regional economy now based more on energy than on agriculture.

For the far-western half, three papers on Vancouver and Victoria (by Robert McDonald, C. N. Forward, and Patricia Roy) detail the

remarkable role reversal that occurred after the Canadian Pacific's 1886 founding of Vancouver. Victoria, the long-time regional capital of the British northwest coast, was soon replaced by Vancouver, and although the latter was a mecca for the unemployed western drifter who could drift no farther west, the city soon established itself as Canada's link to the Orient as well as to the growing cities of the U.S. Pacific borderland.

John Selwood and Evelyn Baril give a fascinating account of the Hudson's Bay Company's attempts to make cities in the Canadian West. Although the company owned major portions of the townsite at both Winnipeg and Edmonton, the HBC had next to no impact on stimulating urban growth in the region where it once virtually determined the location of trading centers. Individual essays on Regina and Moose Jaw (J. William Brennan), Strathcona, which later became part of Edmonton (John Gilpin), Lethbridge (A. A. den Otter), Calgary (separate essays by Max Foran and Henry Klassen), Edmonton (Carl Betke), and Saskatoon (Lewis H. Thomas) show that urban promotion was much the same from one city to another. In most cases the booming of prairie townsites involved free-wheeling entrepreneurial ethics and cozy partnerships between government and railroads much like those that occurred in the United States. In his own essay, editor Alan Artibise makes clear the role that individual boosters had in promoting their cities, and he observes that, without their leaders, Canada's prairie cities would have amounted to much less—a conclusion he also balances against economic theories of urban location and growth.

Studies of urban growth have been plagued too long by their confinement to places where urbanism flourished, ignoring those where it did not. Two papers in this collection (by Barry

Potyondi and Paul Voisey) offer a fresh view of the boosterism that prevailed in small towns. Potyondi's essay ought to convince the reader that Minnedosa became Manitoba's twenty-second largest city via a process that differed remarkably little from that in larger cities. Voisey's excellent account of hopes raised and dreams shattered in the small towns of the high wheat country between Calgary and Lethbridge shows that unrestrained boosterism was extended even to the smallest of towns, and that it remained there in a class of public-spirited citizens until nearly three decades of hard times put out the last spark of hope for future success.

Although several authors in this volume suggest that the study of Canadian urbanism has lagged behind that in the United States, with this collection of essays the balance has been reversed, at least for the prairie-plains section of the continent. Scholars of urbanism in the American West will do well to emulate this example from north of the border.

JOHN C. HUDSON
Department of Geography
Northwestern University