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Review of *Edmonton: The Life of a City* Edited by Bob Hesketh and Frances Swyripa

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Edmonton: The Life of a City. Edited by Bob Hesketh and Frances Swyripa. Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1995. Photographs, notes. 366 pp. \$39.99.

The essays in *Edmonton: The Life of a City* were first presented at a conference at the University of Alberta in May of 1995. They have

been brought together here to celebrate the past in the bicentennial life of what the editors call (but do not fully investigate) a "great northern city." Offered up by both professional and amateur scholars alike, including—among others—historians and geographers, architects and archivists, literature specialists and political scientists, this diversified collection comprises over thirty well-written chapters. Taken as a whole, they offer a multidisciplinary interpretation of the evolving history of Alberta's largest populated city, now approaching the one million mark.

The essays range across a great deal of time, from the city's early fur trading and short-lived coal mining days to the more recent past and questions about its economic, political, and cultural fortunes. They also cover considerable terrain. For example, the chapter by Peter Smith on the physical expansion of Edmonton's post-war residential areas is a reasoned synthesis of the many planning issues that confronted urban planners when the city, immediately following the discovery of oil nearby at Leduc in 1947, grew by explosive leaps and bounds. This macro approach to the urban landscape is nicely balanced by concern for individuals—architects, politicians, and other community leaders—who actually designed, built, and governed the city. We learn, for example, in well-contextualized studies, of "Les Girls," the architectural team of Jean Wallbridge and Mary Imrie, as well as Harry Evans, the "Squire of Sylvanecroft," and Elmer Roper, socialist, businessman, and mayor.

The book also provides a strong sense of the multicultural dimensions of Edmonton's varied population (Cree, Chinese, English, and Ukrainian among others), but here one wishes for a contextual chapter assessing the changing demographic and ethnic composition of the city's population. This would have offered further help to the reader considering the several chapters on various aspects of the city's religious life. Nonetheless, most chapters—whether dealing with youth, Native issues, returning war veterans, the theater,

regulating urban markets, or nursing the sick—are handled deftly and support the growing trend of blending a comprehensive range of topics with the more obvious economic and political tales when writing the general urban history of Canada.

But if the larger context is at times shunned, this is more than compensated for in two principal ways. First, the book is framed by a thoughtful, personal introduction by Gilbert Stelter and a suggestive, summary statement by Paul Voisey, two of Canada's most provocative urban historians. The richness of their chapters and the carefully considered multidisciplinary case studies give the reader a wide range of topics, themes, and disciplinary perspectives to ponder and consider. And second, to support the task of pondering and considering, the book is thoroughly illustrated with carefully chosen and well-captioned photographs and maps that add depth, clarity, and interest to the interpretation of Edmonton's multi-faceted growth and change.

Edmonton: The Life of a City provides reasoned arguments about many strands of the evolving economic, social, and cultural history of this important western Canadian city. While not a complete history—and it makes no claim to be comprehensive—the multidisciplinary approach, focusing on urban history, is certainly the book's principal strength. That the volume is generally successful is the result of the sharp editing and dedicated sense of purpose that editors Bob Hesketh and Frances Swyripa, as well as their contributors, brought both to the conference and to this collection.

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