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Horwood, Harold. *Corner Brook: A Social History of a Paper Town*. Newfoundland History Series No. 3. St. John's: Breakwater Books, 1986. Pp. 182. Illustrations. \$24.95 cloth; \$14.95 paper

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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Corner Brook is the largest municipality in Western Newfoundland, and the second largest in the province. The city was incorporated only in 1956 following an amalgamation of several close but distinct communities. However, the settlement history of the region can be traced back to the late 18th century. For decades, population growth was extremely slow, partly because of the area's remoteness from the Avalon Peninsula, which for centuries has been the focus of Newfoundland's economic, political, and social development. It was also, however, a consequence of the fact that between 1783 and 1904 Western Newfoundland was part of the so-called French Shore, where France had important fishing rights; these rights inhibited local political, economic, and demographic development. Nevertheless, the region's wealth of forests, fish, and agricultural potential attracted both commercial outposts and, in consequence, settlers. A number of communities took root in the Humber Arm, including Birchy Cove (Curling) and Humbermouth. But it was with the construction of a paper mill in 1924 at a point where a small stream called Corner Brook flowed into the Humber Arm that the modern history of the city began. The mill shifted the economic centre of the region from Curling to the new mill-town, for years known simply as Townsite. Beyond the perimeter of Townsite sprang up the unregulated communities of Corner Brook West and Corner Brook East. The appearance of the new industry and communities completely transformed the local economy and society from an essentially rural, subsistence character into a 20th century urban, industrial one, and did so more rapidly and more completely than any other part of Newfoundland had yet experienced. It was a dramatic and profound change which was all the more significant because the society which experienced it was so uncharacteristic of the outports usually associated with Newfoundland. This dramatic transformation should have permitted a fascinating study. Yet, with the possible exception of the local audience for whom almost any sort of local history would serve, this book is a constant disappointment.

Disappointment begins with the absence of any footnotes, bibliography, or index, such as the publisher included with other books in this series. There are no maps to assist in identifying locations or diagrams to depict growth and change. There are no introductory or concluding chapters, although in the absence of any clearly-articulated thesis, such lapses are understandable if not excusable. The proof-reading is sloppy. So is Horwood's attention to factual accuracy and precision of language. Thus, the pirate Eric Cobham is erroneously named Edward Cobham (p. 13); snowcats used in winter woods operations in the 1950s become snowmobiles (p. 129); Newfoundland's West Coast is identified as part of the French Shore in the 1770s (p. 10); the regional

campus of Memorial University of Newfoundland is identified as a community college (p. 163).

Horwood's casual attention to detail is matched by his indifference to analysis. No effort is made to examine the relationship between economic or political conditions and social development, such as the inhibiting effect which the region's status as part of the French Shore had on economic or social growth before 1904. The completion in 1938 of Corner Brook's first major road link with another town is trivialized as the first opportunity which residents had "to open up a car at full throttle and 'find out what she'd do'" (p. 65). The effect which such road development would eventually have in transforming the woodworkers from a seasonal force of fishermen-loggers operating out of company-controlled camps into a year-round force of professional loggers commuting to work from the city, is never considered. While Horwood makes clear that the four communities which amalgamated in 1956 to form the City of Corner Brook had quite distinctive characters, there is no attempt to determine whether this resulted in the perpetuation of local identities at the expense of a common city identity. Tuberculosis is mentioned by Horwood only in passing; as he chronicles the history of Corner Brook's hospitals (pp. 89-90, 161), he casually observes that "The demand for TB treatment almost disappeared." This is our first indication that such a demand had existed in the first place. One would never learn from this book that tuberculosis had been one of the single greatest public health problems and social tragedies in Newfoundland during this century. No attention is given to the impact of the Commission of Government (1934-1949, when self-government was suspended in Newfoundland) on political consciousness in Newfoundland generally, and on the West Coast in particular. What effect this suspension might have had on the quality of civic politics in Corner Brook, particularly when combined with the mill owners' paternalistic control over Townsite, is never considered. Did this contribute to the problems encountered in municipal government in the late 1950s and early 1960s which climaxed in the suspension of elective municipal government between 1963 and 1967? Horwood makes few attempts to answer these or other questions which his material raises.

Indeed, it is his unwillingness to interpret his material which is the book's greatest failure; Horwood rarely meets the historian's fundamental challenge of explaining the past. Instead, he has written little more than a descriptive chronicle of growth and change. Horwood shows more interest in the corporate history of the paper mill than in the "social history of a paper town." Every one of the mill's management committees from 1938 on (the year Bowaters took over the mill) is identified in the main body of the book rather than in an Appendix, assuming of course that such identification is even necessary. The relationship between the mill owners and managers and the town is defined in terms of corporate gifts and planning, but the word "paternalistic"

appears only once, and no attempt is made to evaluate the attitude or response of the people themselves to that paternalism.

The tragedy of this poorly-executed study is not just that a proper analysis of the social history of Corner Brook still remains to be written. The book is also a dubious contribution to what had promised to be a welcome new publishing initiative in the field of Newfoundland history. For years, the quality of the literature has been poor as a flood of local publications of questionable value or significance poured onto the market. Breakwater's "Newfoundland History Series," which seemed designed to break away from this pattern, has instead taken a regressive step with Horwood's *Corner Brook*.

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Flood, Brian. *Saint John: A Sporting Tradition 1785-1985*. Saint John: Neptune Publishing Company Ltd., 1985. Pp. 256. Illustrations. \$29.95.

Kearney, Jim. *Champions: A British Columbia Sports Album*. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre; and Sport B.C., 1985. Pp. 160. Illustrations. \$19.95.

Donald Creighton said that the "historian's first task is the elucidation of character," and his second the "re-creation of the circumstances" in which those characters acted. He suggested that thorough research is wasted unless it is used by someone who can vividly portray encounters "between character and circumstance."<sup>1</sup> Recently P.B. Waite has stated that the ability to write well is the first requirement of historians who want people to pay attention to their work.<sup>2</sup> The validity of these observations is borne out by two new publications on the history of sports.

One of these is a book outlining the two hundred year history of sports in Saint John. It seems likely that Brian Flood, the author of the volume, knows more about sports in his city than anyone else does about sports in any other urban centre. He has done an immense amount of research in the relevant primary sources. Moreover, he has tried to answer some important questions, such as which sports were popular in different neighbourhoods or among different classes. However, his efforts have not produced an interesting or enlightening book.

Partly this is because he does not have a thesis. Primarily it is because he just doesn't write well. Only occasionally, as in the section in chapter four on late-nineteenth century boxing, do the words create vivid impressions of people, times

and places. Generally they produce drowsiness, as in the following paragraph:

The first annual meeting of the St. Andrews Curling Club was held at the Scammell's Hotel on November 6, 1856. The following skips for the year were selected: A. Jardine, James MacFarlane, Andrew Scott, Alexander McLelland, James Milligan, and Joseph Arton. The club held its annual New Year's Day bonspiel on Lily Lake in 1857. Sixteen married men and sixteen single men contested for the championship. The team that had the most points was declared the winner. On this occasion, the "benedicts" trounced the youngsters by a margin of eleven shots (p. 29).

In fairness, it should be mentioned that Flood's volume is very handsomely produced, and that it contains excellent photographs, which frequently suggest the evolution of equipment and styles of play. However, the prose is just too listless to engage even those most interested in sports or in Saint John.

Journalist Jim Kearney, author of the second volume considered here, admits that in *Champions: A British Columbia Sports Album*, he has made "no attempt" to write a definitive history (p. 9). Yet he tells us a good deal about what life in general and sports in particular have been like in his province. The reason is that he intuitively understands Creighton's views on historical writing.

His book is full of interesting characters acting in intelligible ways, given their recognizable circumstances. There is Percy Williams, the sprinter who won two gold medals at the 1928 Olympic Games, who later became a bitter, aggressively private man and who, one "grim, grey day" in the fall of 1982, "took his shotgun out of its case" and "blew his head off" (pp. 64-70). There is the clubfooted 1953 world champion weightlifter, Doug Hepburn, who longed for respect from a Canada that, in its attitude toward the handicapped, seems not three decades but light years removed from the one through which Rick Hansen just travelled (pp. 96-97). There is Charles Ramsbottom Fobster, the kind of sportswriter who felt the only thing "worthy of mention" was the game. One day in 1940 he covered a soccer match at which a fire broke out among the spectators. Kearney tells us that Fobster's report "started with the opening kick-off, followed by a play-by-play, description that went on for perhaps a dozen paragraphs before he wrote: 'In the 36th minute an unfortunate incident occurred. The stands burned down. Upon resumption of play . . .'" (pp. 32-33).

Kearney has not written a masterpiece by any means. His book is based upon superficial research. It possesses whole sentences lifted from Wise and Fisher's *Canada's Sporting Heroes* (see the discussions of Hepburn and of Elaine Tanner in the two volumes). It contains few passages in which developments in sports are explicitly connected with developments in the wider world. However, like Trent Frayne,