

Breen, David and Coates, Kenneth. *Vancouver's Fair: An Administrative and Political History of the Pacific National Exhibition*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982. Pp. x, 192. Illustrations. \$24.00 (cloth)

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man controlled Lehndorff group. This group has Canadian real estate assets estimated in the range of close to 1\$ billion, which would make it the largest real estate operation in Canada. Three directors are linked to Trans Canada Pipelines, while the Chairman is also on the board of the American parent Chrysler Corporation. Henry Aubin, *City for Sale*, (Toronto: James Lorimer, l'Étincelle, 1977), 360.

16 Aubin, *op. cit.*, 166.

Breen, David and Coates, Kenneth. *Vancouver's Fair: An Administrative and Political History of the Pacific National Exhibition*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982. Pp. x, 192. Illustrations. \$24.00 (cloth).

David Breen and Kenneth Coates have made a useful contribution to the history of Vancouver and have raised points of general interest for urban historians as they sketch "the dynamics of the relationship between the fair and the city" (p. 5). Their study is much stronger on the fair's side than on the city's, a reflection of their reliance on an excellent collection of seventy-five years' of exhibition records and their unfortunately narrow focus, the political and administrative history of the Pacific National Exhibition and its predecessor, the Vancouver Exhibition Association.

The authors clearly delineate one of the perennial problems facing this urban fair: the conflict between those who favoured an agricultural fair and the "boosters" whose prime consideration was to promote industry and trade. Though claiming to be an agricultural fair, the Vancouver Exhibition Association's choice of a summer date and the construction of an Industrial Building as the fair's first major structure show where priorities lay. Indeed, agriculture appears to have been in the forefront of the fair's rationale only as a means of securing government funds, justifying operations during both wars, or obtaining tax or lottery concessions. By the 1930s, with the construction of such year-round sports facilities as the Forum, an ice hockey rink, the Vancouver Exhibition Association increasingly became involved not only with the management of a fair but with "an integrated year-round sports and entertainment facility" (p. 91). After the Second World War, the Vancouver Exhibition Association admitted that agriculture was not its main purpose, developed a new emphasis on industry and commerce, and changed its name to the Pacific National Exhibition, a title which suggested its provincial and international aspirations (p. 106).

Entertainment, of course, has always been part of the fair. The first Board of Management recognized that a carnival-like "skid road," horse racing and vaudeville acts were essential to draw visitors. The persistence of such entertainments brings into question the authors' observation that the first fair's "curious amalgam of vaudeville, agriculture, industry and hucksterism" illustrate Vancouver's transition from "a frontier settlement" to "a more settled community with metropolitan pretensions" (p. 30). From time to time,

moral reformers complained about these entertainments but apart from a passing mention of the ease with which Sunday opening was adopted in 1968, Breen and Coates do not exploit these moral issues to explore changing mores or the role of reformers in Vancouver.

In their introduction, Breen and Coates complain that in dealing with "boosterism," western Canadian urban historians have, at best, given only passing mention to fairs. In their first two chapters, they present persuasive evidence of the importance of "boosters" in establishing Vancouver's fair. Benefitting from the work of Robert McDonald on Vancouver's business community, their collective biographical sketch of the founding members of the Exhibition Association demonstrates how archetypal boosters, middle-rank businessmen whose personal financial interests were tied to the city, were largely responsible for establishing the fair. Breen and Coates claim that the "booster mentality that marked its origins" persisted in the fair (p. 106) but, apart from a table in the appendix listing subsequent presidents of the Association, they present no evidence to indicate the continuing presence of "boosters." That table does include a contractor, automobile dealers, retail merchants and real estate men who fit the "booster" mould but it also lists two University of British Columbia professors of agriculture and a fishing company executive as presidents. Moreover, the other members of the board are essentially faceless.

Vancouver's Fair includes some provocative comments on the city's relationship with its hinterland. Alas, except for a sketch of the Exhibition Association's views of the rival New Westminster fair, some passing references to smaller Fraser Valley fairs, and mention of co-operation with regional fair associations, the theme is not fully developed. The authors, for example, give little information about agricultural, industrial or commercial exhibitors nor do they indicate very clearly the source of competitors and displays. In contrast, the book provides good illustrations of intra-city developments including the debates of the last three decades on the question of whether major facilities for spectator sports should be downtown or at Exhibition Park. While these debates were going on, East End inhabitants, who had once been among the most enthusiastic supporters of the fair, complained of the commercialization of a residential area. Significantly, in 1973 a Vancouver East NDP Member of the Legislature introduced legislation making the Pacific National Exhibition more a provincial than a civic institution.

The book also offers some insight into federal politics as it argues that board members with Liberal connections had some success in getting federal funds for fair developments. Yet, the Exhibition did not always co-operate with Ottawa. In 1942, when the federal government wanted exhibition facilities as temporary housing for the Japanese who were being evacuated from the coast (not then being "deported" or "interned" as Breen and Coates seem to think), the Exhi-

bition Association rented its grounds to the British Columbia Security Commission only after Ottawa assumed their control under an Order in Council.

Indeed, the authors' suggestion that by the 1950s the Pacific National Exhibition seemed arrogant in its dealing with the city and senior levels of government seems more in the nature of an established trend than a new departure. What was different, of course, was that the post-war "new look" PNE, with its emphasis on entertainment, had widespread public support. In past years it had faced public attack for the alleged immorality of its "Skid Road," for operating during the First World War, and for poor management. The last charge was well-founded for the fair frequently suffered from the hasty construction of ill-designed buildings and, in one instance, experienced a scandal when an accountant embezzled funds. While Breen and Coates are obviously sympathetic to the fair, they have not been afraid to reveal its warts or to pass judgment on them. The Pacific National Exhibition is to be commended for giving historians unrestricted access to its records.

In *Vancouver's Fair* Breen and Coates have effectively hinted how study of an individual fair can be "an attractive perspective from which to view a particular community" (p. 4). Within their self-imposed narrow limit of a political and administrative history they have done well but, by denying their imaginations free reign by concentrating their research in the fair's own records and by relegating the social history of the fair to a companion illustrated history (not provided for review), they have presented what is essentially only a tantalizing "glimpse of how people view themselves and their region" (p. 155).

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Obodiac, Stan. *Maple Leaf Gardens, Fifty Years of History*. Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold Ltd., 1981. Pp. 208. Photographs. \$24.95 (cloth).

In 1968 William Kilbourn suggested that, because it had so often been the site of important hockey games and other ritualistic "tribal" ceremonies observed by English-speaking Canadians, Toronto's Maple Leaf Gardens was "the most important religious building" in the Dominion. Readers of this journal will be given an indication of how disappointed, from a scholarly perspective, they are likely to be with Stan Obodiac's *Maple Leaf Gardens*, if we note that the author cites Kilbourn's stimulating remarks only for the purpose of introducing a chapter chronicling the large number of rallies, services and meetings that have been sponsored in the building by formal religious organizations.

This is a rather antiquarian volume that lacks a sophisticated analysis of the themes that come to mind when one thinks of such an important gathering place as Maple Leaf Gardens. For example, we are given no information on the building's architectural style, although at one point we are told how many bricks, nails and haylite blocks, and how much cement, sand, gravel and lumber went into its construction. Again, although there are relatively long chapters on hockey, wrestling and boxing, and the other sports that have been emphasized in the arena, there are no comments on the significance or meaning of sport to the thousands of Torontonians and other Canadians who "saw" the events either in person or, especially in the case of hockey, through newspapers, radio and television. Finally, despite the fact that there are chapters recording the many occasions on which famous entertainers have "played the Gardens" over the years, there is not a word about either the changes in popular culture their performances may have revealed, or what these changes might indicate about Canadian or North American society. In short, those who might expect a book on such an immensely important Toronto building to contain significant statements about architecture or urban culture will not find them.

Of course, the volume was not written for an academic audience interested in analyses of such things as the "symbolic messages" of a certain architectural design or the "function" of sport. It was written for the general public by the Director of Publicity for Maple Leaf Gardens and the Toronto Maple Leafs, the the purposes were, as the dust-jacket make clear, to tell some of the "interesting" stories associated with the Gardens, and to stimulate feelings of nostalgia in readers who will be reminded of "personalities and events" connected to the building in some way over the years. To a degree the book succeeds in fulfilling its aims. The first two chapters skillfully outline the intriguing, albeit rather familiar, series of events that took place between 1927 and 1931, through which Conn Smythe acquired control of Toronto's troubled N.H.L. team, turned it into a contender, and provided it with the handsomest rink in the world for its home games. At various points in the volume, there are passages and photographs (about two hundred of the latter) that are bound to remind individual readers, as they did me, of past events and associations.

Maple Leaf Gardens does succeed in bringing forth a few smiles, but for \$24.95, surely one is entitled to page after page of text and pictures that delight and entertain, that bring personalities to life, that imaginatively recreate occasions and their contexts. In this, the book is unsuccessful. The photographs of athletes, entertainers, and other famous individuals too often camouflage the strength, the grace, the dynamism that enabled them to draw such immense crowds for their performances, not only in the Gardens, but across the country and around the world (see especially the pictures of Muhammed Ali and George Chuvalo on page 51, of Barbara Ann Scott on page 91, and of Aimee Semple