

**Argersinger, Jo Ann E., *Toward a New Deal in Baltimore: People and Government in the Great Depression*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989. Pp. xix, 284**

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## ***Book Reviews/Comptes rendus***

community. This chapter and those by Godfrey and Jobb effectively illustrates the impact of entrepreneurial ability, influence, connections, and promotion upon economic development and personal status in small towns.

The Arts and their effects are also given prominence in this volume. Carrie MacMillan explores the sense of place and seaward vision in the Maritime novel, while Richard Paul Knowles describes the relationship between the Mulgrave Road Co-op Theatre Company and economic progress in Guysborough, Nova Scotia. Davies' account of the "Song Fisherman" analyzes the evolution of regional poetry and literature as a reflection of rural Nova Scotia during the 1920s and 30s.

The chapter by Baker explores the tensions that can exist between the desire of a reporter to be objective and the demands of social relationships in a small community. He concludes that the prevailing mood in a place often affects what does or doesn't get printed as news or as opinion. The last chapter by Storm and Strike-Schurman probes the problem of the perceptions of responsibility for the elderly in a small town in Atlantic Canada. A sample of women was interviewed and the results were analyzed statistically. In general, children felt that they had a responsibility towards their elders, but were ambiguous about the magnitude and extent of their possible support. Attitudes were less conservative than expected by the authors.

People and Place is well produced, generally readable, and full of interesting information about small-town life in the Maritimes. Because it attempts to deal

with so many diverse topics, it will be of most interest to those with Maritime associations and an historical bent. It is an intimate account of the area, written by a group of authors who know and love their region, and this is both its strength and its weakness. For some, the rich detail of names and events will bring the book to life. For others, several chapters may seem to lapse into a mass of impenetrable detail. On balance, the book makes a useful contribution to our comprehension of the character and economy of Eastern Canada. It is a valuable addition to the literature of the region.

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**Argersinger, Jo Ann E., *Toward a New Deal in Baltimore: People and Government in the Great Depression*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989. Pp. xix, 284.**

Jo Ann Argersinger's excellent case study of a border city describes well the ways in which the New Deal encouraged grassroots organization even as it limited efforts to achieve a permanent restructuring of Baltimore's political, social, and economic order. Her study "documents the partially successful efforts of the New Deal to reach out to new constituencies as it unravels the complex connection between citizen activism and governmental authority."

Baltimore was governed before and after the New Deal by conservative politicians who remained hostile to Federal efforts to confront the massive problems created by the Great Depression. Central to the

collapse of the nation's economy was the issue of unemployment and relief. Baltimore politicians, however, insisted that relief other than private charity was unacceptable. When pressed finally to take further action in the face of a twenty percent unemployment rate, Mayor Howard Jackson created the Baltimore Emergency Relief Commission. Headed by businessmen, BERC signalled the shift from a relief policy based on private voluntarism to one that was municipally sponsored. The basis for decision-making had shifted from social workers to businessmen, the latter charged the former with pampering the jobless. BERC's aim was twofold: to administer relief as efficiently as possible, and to reduce quickly the caseload.

BERC's zeal to ensure that relief did not become a permanent fixture led to numerous cases of discrimination and human suffering, prompting the Federal Emergency Relief Administration to investigate the city's policies in 1933 and 1934. Investigators found a programme based on fierce neighbourhood loyalties that used unprofessional standards in applying relief. They urged the city to create a Welfare Department to deal adequately with the problem of relief. Despite this report, BERC lasted until 1936.

Despite local resistance to providing adequate help for the city's hungry, Federal aid did pour into Baltimore. Politicians, however, continued their fight against outside meddling, and when programs such as the Civil Works Administration and the Works Project Administration were introduced, city officials made sure they retained control over the funds. Thus, the city earned a reputation for having one of the most

conservative relief programs in the country. Mayor Jackson and his cronies demanded that work programs be geared only to projects that they deemed necessary while more innovative programs like the WPA theatre and arts projects received little attention.

Baltimore's stingy approach to aiding its needy led to increased activity on the part of the jobless and hungry. Responding to federal relief initiatives, grassroots organizations emerged to claim decent treatment from city officials. Foremost among these groups was the Peoples' Unemployment League, formed in 1933 by the local Socialist Party to lobby and bargain for the unemployed. Through public demonstrations and personal visits to key New Dealers, PUL succeeded in winning some improvements in relief administration, stopping a number of evictions, publicizing racism and sexism in relief agencies, and often providing food and shelter for those it sought to represent. Perhaps most importantly, PEAL changed some of the ways in which federal administrators viewed the unemployed, and it taught the jobless themselves the virtues of both organization and interracial cooperation. Yet, federal officials never conceded the right of the unemployed to participate in policy formation.

The 1930s in Baltimore also witnessed increased union activity among the city's working people. Spurred by the emergence of the CIO on a national level and by the creation of the National Labour Relations Board, Baltimore unions grew during the depression. Argersinger describes well the conflicts between the local chapters of the CIO and the more conservative AFL, as well

as the cooperation between the CIO and other groups such as the PEAL.

Argersinger concludes that the New Deal could have worked harder to influence city officials. Instead, state and local officials retained their power and were able to limit the extent of reform. Baltimore thus stood out as one of the most conservative cities in the country - certainly it could not register the successes of Frank Murphy of Detroit or Fiorello La Guardia in New York. Argersinger argues, however, that the New Deal did some significant changes by widening the gap between private and public agencies and politicizing change numbers of professional social workers. Further, Baltimore did get new streets, schools, a welfare and recreation department, and other public services. Finally, New Deal measures unleashed citizens' groups and strengthened the more liberal wing of organized labour.

Argersinger's study adds to a growing body of literature that focuses on the New Deal's impact on the local level. A number of recent studies, for example, have described how southern plantation owners and businessmen influenced and controlled federal programs in their region. Baltimore offers an interesting comparison as an urban centre that suffered similar limitations. Argersinger also shows us the contradictory consequences of New Deal measures. While much of the federal legislation in the 1930s was shaped and controlled by local elites, other measures, perhaps unintentionally, empowered portions of the dispossessed.

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McGahan, Peter., *Crime and Policing in Maritime Canada: Chapters from the Urban Records*. Fredericton: Goose Lane Editions Ltd., 1988. Pp. 246. Illustrations. \$14.95, (paper).

Urban history is too often about 'things': housing, architecture, infrastructure, economic activity, urban systems, and so on. Peter McGahan's *Crime and Policing in Maritime Canada* is a book about people, the residents of five 19th and 20th century towns and cities as viewed through police records and the local press. This material was collected with the support of the Solicitor General of Canada and the Atlantic Institute of Criminology. Urban and social historians in Canada have been slow to recognize the value of criminal justice records as urban indicators. Although policing in Canada has been largely an urban phenomenon, municipal police remain almost invisible in historiography because of the exaggerated importance of the North West Mounted/Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Maritime communities were among the first centres in British North America to organize permanent police forces, and by the late 1800s most small towns had their own small town cops. The work of Eric Monkkonen in the United States suggests that the police were the most important urban bureaucracy in the 19th century, and that a good part of their work was of a service nature. Other interpretations, focusing on the founding decades of urban police departments, stress the police role in maintaining class relations. McGahan has produced neither a monograph nor an anthology, but a series of snapshots that reveal the complexity of the police role in Maritime communities. Most of the excerpts deal with Moncton, New Brunswick, and