

Weaver, John C. *Hamilton: An Illustrated History*. The History of Canadian Cities Series. Toronto: James Lorimer and Company and the National Museum of Man, 1982. Pp. 224. Tables, maps, index. \$24.95

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Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

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Hamilton: An Illustrated History is the fourth volume to appear in the History of Canadian Cities series, but the first to be concerned with a city in central Canada. Founded in 1816, Hamilton has had a longer urban history than Winnipeg, Calgary or Vancouver, and is also distinctive for the role of heavy industry in its development.

Like other volumes in the series, *Hamilton* is organized by chronological chapters, each subdivided into sections dealing with economic development, population, the urban landscape, society and culture, and local politics. The chapter divisions and titles neatly express successive changes in the urban economic base as well as the widening scope of the city's external relationships. Chapter One presents Hamilton as a frontier boom town from 1816 to 1841, "the first speculative townsite to develop into a major Canadian city." Chapter Two describes the years 1841-1870 as a "complicated pivot" in Hamilton's development, an eventful period of transition from lake shipping and mercantile functions to railways and industry. Between 1870 and 1920, Hamilton was the "industrial city triumphant," the spectacular growth of heavy manufacturing shaping labour-management relations, the quality of urban life and the environment, and its lasting image to outsiders. From 1920, the city functioned increasingly within a national and international setting, being affected more directly by external economic and political forces. Chapter Five features the powerful role of planning and the administrative reorganization which accompanied the continued growth of Hamilton between 1946 and 1980.

Weaver's *Hamilton* achieves an admirable balance — in its treatment of the successive stages in the city's development and of the various aspects of each stage — between text and illustrations, and in satisfying both the general reader and the specialist. Anecdotes and biographical vignettes are aptly used to support generalizations. In his summary interpretations of Hamilton's history, Professor Weaver assesses the influence of both geography (the city's strategic location in relation to external forces) and human agency (the role of ambitious entrepreneurs and other local individuals).

Probably the strongest sections are those on urban economic development. For one example, Weaver most usefully traces the continuity in metal-working between

early foundries making stoves for the agricultural hinterland and the integrated steelworks which have become the symbol of Hamilton. There is also a valuable and distinctive emphasis on the evolution of the working-class culture and on labour relations, befitting the significance of both in Hamilton and the original studies of these subjects by Palmer, Heron, Roberts and other members of the McMaster Labour Studies unit. Urban sports and recreations are fully presented, with many interesting details.

Some themes seem underdeveloped. The role of the civic elite, for example, is shadowy after about 1850. Little substantiating evidence is given for the assertion that "the vigorous promotion of Hamilton evolved from the self-interest of merchants, contractors and property-owners" (p. 69). How and why did Hamilton become known as "the Ambitious City"? There is no reference before 1911 to the Hamilton Board of Trade (formed by 1864). Hamilton's municipal council receives little attention, especially in the period before about 1920 when, Weaver suggests, it had more decision-making power. Greater emphasis, in discussions of local politics, is placed on Hamilton's representatives in the provincial legislature and federal parliament.

Hamilton's physical development is not as clearly portrayed as it might have been. The reader gains only a weak sense of space and of place, both within the city and more generally in Hamilton's hinterland. This aspect of the book might have been helped by more and better maps. There are only ten maps, of which three show boundary extensions. Unfortunately, one map which attempts to depict Hamilton's hinterland is flawed by serious errors, in the routes of the Hamilton and North Western and the northern branch lines of the Great Western system (Map 3, p. 48). The Hamilton and North Western has apparently been confused with the Northern Railway of Canada; its route did not run from Toronto but from Burlington Beach via Milton, Georgetown, Beeton (with a branch via Creemore to Collingwood) to a terminus in Barrie. The Great Western's northern branch line did not run from Dundas and certainly not via Berlin; its route was from Harrisburg to Galt, Preston and Guelph, from which there was connection via the leased Wellington, Grey and Bruce line to Palmerston and Kincardine by the 1870s. Maps might have been used far more effectively to show street railway routes in relation to suburbanization and internal differentiation within the city; such a map for 1912 would have been most interesting. Similarly, the lines of electric interurbans and of improved highways would have helped to explain Hamilton's regional significance in the twentieth century.

Hamilton is a most attractively produced volume. Its photographs are superb in range and clarity of reproduction — the view of the Mt. Hamilton Incline Railway on the front of the jacket is particularly striking. Writing a good city biography is a difficult task, and Professor Weaver has succeeded with a study which should please both the academic and general reader.

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Bailey, T. Melville; Filer, Patricia; Fraser, Robert L.; and Weaver, John C., eds. *Dictionary of Hamilton Biography*. Volume I. Hamilton: Dictionary of Hamilton Biography, 1981. Pp. xii, 244. Maps, illustrations.

Hamilton has long possessed an able and active community of local historians who have given the city's history shape and significance by defining locally important individuals and events and providing a chronology of the city's development and emerging character. The Hamilton Public Library maintains a very impressive set of local historical and biographical reference files, and students of the city's history are blessed with two excellent modern local histories, C.M. Johnston's *The Head of the Lake* (1958) and Marjorie Freeman Campbell's *A Mountain and A City* (1966). The *Dictionary of Hamilton Biography* emerges from this tradition and has its origins in a dictionary projected by one of the doyens of local history, T. Melville Bailey (editor-in-chief of the present volume). Much of the research was done by a team of researchers under a 1978 Young Canada Works grant. To this have been added several editorial stages (overseen by a board consisting of Bailey, Patricia Filer, Robert Fraser, and John Weaver), some thirty-five articles specially commissioned for the volume from specialists (notably the board members themselves), and Ontario Heritage Foundation advice and money. The influence and model of the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* were clearly in mind, and the cooperation of the *D.C.B.* and several of its current and former staff members is fully acknowledged. The present volume is meant to cover individuals whose major role in Hamilton came prior to 1875. Another volume is envisaged to carry the story to 1940, and a third is anticipated to bring the story up to date.

It hardly needs to be said that there are both distinctions and links between the fields of local history and urban history. The essential focus of the former is the character of some particular community, as defined through time. More commonly the domain of the enthusiastic amateur, it has often been eclectic, romantic, and antiquarian, delighting in local legend and anecdote, and frequently over-inclined to stress the uniqueness and special importance of the locality under study. There is, often, a curiously repetitive quality to the books and arti-

cles that make up the corpus of works on a community's local history, each new work being more inclined to retell the old stories than to go back to the original primary sources to rethink the history from the beginning. Urban history, by contrast, has been a product chiefly of professional scholars. Though frequently drawing on the literature produced by local historians, it is more aware of wider and more structural forces, more inclined to ask comparative questions and to see the external context in which a local story is placed, and more likely to look for the typical than the unusual. While the present volume has certainly had the latter concerns in mind and has avoided most of the pitfalls of its genre, it nevertheless remains, in basic conception, local history; as a result, just how it may serve the urban historian needs to be considered.

As the introductory material makes clear, the basis for inclusion in the *D.H.B.* was to have lived at least briefly in the area, to have done something sufficiently notable while there to be remembered, and to have left behind locally accessible documentation. The volume has a commendably broad focus and attempts to cover "Indians, soldiers, explorers, pioneers, clergymen, musicians, criminals, medical people, lawyers, engineers, architects, mayors, newspapermen, bankers, railway builders, shopkeepers, legislators, artists, inventors, authors, actors, educators, and businessmen who shaped the city and region we have today" (p. x). Of these, clergy, physicians, the press, politics, and local business seem best served. In all cases, an attempt has been made to cover the individual's whole career, not just its Hamilton dimensions. In keeping with local tradition, Sir Allan MacNab (ten pages) and Isaac Buchanan (six pages) are given greatest emphasis — it is difficult to quarrel with the former, but the latter emphasis might be questioned. Of the 331 people included, at least thirty-five (including, obviously, many of those best known outside Hamilton) are also covered by already published volumes of the *D.C.B.*, more often than not at greater length in the latter. Some articles are by the same authors in both sources, while others are by equally well qualified professional scholars. In still other cases (e.g., C.J. Brydges, John Rae), the *D.C.B.* offers clearly superior treatment, even for specifically Hamilton material. Surprisingly, at least twenty-five articles cover figures who clearly flourished and were most important in a Hamilton context after 1875. Among these are the two worthies pictured on the book's dust jacket, Alexander W. Aitchison, fire-chief from 1870 to 1905, and Sir John Gibson, whose long political career, culminating in the Lieutenant-Governorship of Ontario, came entirely after 1875.

Some articles on important local figures are disappointingly short (e.g., those on Robert Smiley, founder of the *Hamilton Spectator*, and Andrew Steven, cashier of Hamilton's key financial institution, the Gore Bank,