

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

**Morris Mott**

Volume 12, numéro 2, octobre 1983

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1018966ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018966ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Mott, M. (1983). Compte rendu de [Obodiac, Stan. *Maple Leaf Gardens, Fifty Years of History.* Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold Ltd., 1981. Pp. 208. Photographs. \$24.95 (cloth)]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 12(2), 143–144. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018966ar>

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).

Patricia E. Roy  
Department of History  
University of Victoria

---

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

McPherson on page 148). The prose is too often inert, even apathetic (I particularly dislike Chapters 4 and 6, on "More Sports: Lacrosse to Basketball" and "Rock and Roll" respectively). There are many bright spots, but *Maple Leaf Gardens* is just too uneven in quality to justify the price that the publishers are asking for it.

To summarize, this volume will be of little scholarly value to academics, but they and others may well find it entertaining and even heart-warming — especially if they wait and manage to purchase remaindered copies.

Morris Mott  
Department of History  
University of Manitoba

---

Kaplan, Harold. *Reform, Planning, and City Politics: Montreal, Winnipeg, Toronto*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982. Pp. xi, 775. \$47.50 (cloth).

Deciding where to begin is the first problem facing the reader of this gigantic book. Fortunately, the author provides some advice in his mercifully brief preface: "Readers more interested in the substance of city politics than in systems theory . . . may wish to begin with chapter 7, on Montreal, and later refer back to the three city context spelled out in earlier chapters" (p. xi). This was all the encouragement I needed to turn immediately to page 312.

Frustration set in on page 313. Referring to the period in mid-nineteenth century after francophones regained their majority status in Montreal, Kaplan writes: "To restore an English majority in the city, Anglophones pressed for annexation of west-lying suburbs . . ." Which anglophones? Which suburbs? Perhaps the footnotes will help. Where are they?

All that is to be found is a brief "Essay on Sources" on pages 747-53. In the middle of page 748 is this weak excuse for the absence of more detailed documentation: "The findings on the three cities are presented in highly condensed form emphasizing what is pertinent to my theoretical concerns. Because the text is more a theoretical analysis and summary than a detailed account, the citation of all the primary sources on which this analysis is based would take as many pages as the text itself." For Montreal, we are given two pages of books, articles, reports, and library collections. The result: I still have no idea on what basis Kaplan made his claim about the proposed annexation of anglophone suburbs.

Having adjusted one's academic sensibilities to the absence of proper documentation, the reading of much of the material on "The Montreal Tradition" is quite fascinat-

ing. Kaplan's writing is full of valuable insights and provocative assertions. His characterization of pre-Drapeau Montreal politics — "a noisy, meaningless spectacle, a ruthless battle of ins vs. outs, with 'the issues' serving as mere camouflage" (p. 325) — is a characteristic example.

As one reads on, however, the problems resulting from the lack of footnotes simply cannot be ignored. On page 338 Kaplan discusses the complexities of the municipal franchise and ends up claiming that it was not until 1944 that tenants in Montreal received the vote. Where did this information come from? Certainly not from section 2, chapter 72 of the 1860 Statutes of the Province of Canada in which Montreal tenants renting a dwelling with an assessed value of \$300 or a yearly rental value of \$30 appear to have been granted the franchise. Anyway, if tenants did not vote until 1944, how did a populist mayor such as Médéric Martin ever get elected?

Subsequent pages are littered with inaccuracies. The name of Roland Chagnon (first chairman of the Montreal Metropolitan Corporation) comes out as 'Gagnon' (p. 395); the claim that 1965 provincial legislation exempted suburbs from contributing to the capital cost of the subway system is wrong (p. 438); Saraguay is mistakenly located in east-end Montreal (p. 433); the discussion of Montreal's annexations in the 1960s omits the most important case, that of Saint-Michel (p. 433); the creation of the Montreal Urban Community is described without a single mention of the decisive city police strike in October 1969 (p. 443); and the description of the voting arrangements within the M.U.C. council refers to the need to obtain one-third city and suburban votes for a motion to pass instead of the correct figure which is one-half (p. 444).

There are still more inaccuracies concerning Montreal. How much faith, then, can we have in Kaplan's treatment of Winnipeg and Toronto? When he tells us that Toronto was incorporated in 1817 (pp. 65 and 613) we have cause to worry. In fact, of course, the date was 1834.

Another puzzling feature of the book is that the description of events stops dead at the end of 1970. Nowhere in this book, published in 1982, is there any explanation for this arbitrary cut-off point. For Winnipeg, there is nothing about Unicity. For Toronto, we get a hint of what Kaplan calls 'neoreform' but no mention of David Crombie or John Sewell. Not only does the narrative end in 1970, there is not even any attempt to use knowledge of subsequent events in the 1970s to add a sense of perspective to the discussion of the 1960s.

This bizarre book contains a seven-page conclusion (pp. 740-46). The final chapter, entitled 'Systemic Thinking', points out that "The problem we all face is one of doing justice to the complexity of our specific situations without being overwhelmed by and immobilized by the details" (p.