

The River Barons: Montreal Businessmen and the Growth of Industry and Transportation, 1837-53. GERALD J.J. TULCHINSKY. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, c1977. xiv, 310 p. ISBN 0 8020 5339 4 \$20.00.

Professor Tulchinsky has produced an important book but one which does not quite reach the level of a new synthesis on the role of Montreal as the metropolis of the commercial empire of the St. Lawrence. This is unfortunate since the author has broken much new ground, delving deeply into a wide variety of public and private archival sources. The extent of this detailed work is indicated in a long and comprehensive bibliography which reflects Tulchinsky's intelligent use of business papers, public records, newspaper files and a host of published sources.

Such research has enabled the author to investigate in great detail the Montreal business community—its ethnic composition, some of its investment patterns and the various other factors which contributed to its successful adaptation to new economic conditions. Concentrating on the years 1837 to 1853, a period of "gradual changes in the economic life of Montreal," Professor Tulchinsky analyzes the efforts of that city's businessmen to expand its traditional commercial base and develop a dynamic industrial sector. He emphasizes the ability of Montreal merchants and entrepreneurs to use new mechanical technologies and to secure generous government assistance to accomplish these goals. As examples the author investigates various improvements in transportation facilities — the building of canals, the development of St. Lawrence steamboats and later trans-Atlantic steamers, and the establishment of rail links with the Atlantic seaboard as well as the systematic exploitation after 1846 of hydraulic power along the Lachine Canal. In all these endeavours not only did Montreal's businessmen themselves invest but they also sought and received substantial subsidies from government sources.

After analyzing these various enterprises, Tulchinsky concludes that the patriotism espoused by many Montreal businessmen was no more than a reflection of their economic self-interest. Always continentalist at heart, they had an enduring commitment to winning the trade of the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes and mid-continental axis. Their entrepreneurial efforts were merely designed to avoid domination by American trade centres. They wanted Montreal to become the main entrepôt for the heart of North America, attached to this heartland by an inexpensive and efficient transportation system. Tulchinsky claims that the Montrealers' switch to an annexationist stance was predictable because they were continentalist and not afraid of continental integration into an American trading system as long as this brought substantial benefits to Montreal. Indeed, in their successful attempts to establish rail links southeast to an American ice-free port, these businessmen wished to use the American rail system to best Boston in the battle for hinterlands and to insure their own independence in trade. In fact, Montreal businessmen hoped to lure American capital to finance their city's economic expansion.

Much of what Professor Tulchinsky has to say is not new, but his extensive research, which clearly focusses on the Montreal entrepreneurs, buttresses his conclusions and makes the book an excellent complementary and corrective volume to the earlier works of Donald Creighton. The monograph's great strength is that it paints a realistic picture of the dynamic Montreal businessmen, who, though far from united in outlook and intention, were able to create a fairly vibrant economy under less than ideal circumstances. While this is one of the important contributions of the book it, coincidentally, is also one of its basic weaknesses. The community as a whole is described well but individuals remain rather lifeless, cardboard figures. Even men like John Young and Hugh Allan do not emerge as recognizable characters, leaving the reader with little by which to judge their abilities.

This fault may in fact be the result of a more general flaw in the book. Tulchinsky appears to have pulled back from his manuscript too soon. The book is episodic and still reads like the thesis from which it was drawn. Too many questions, such as that of the role of French Canadians in business life and the political activities of various businessmen, remain unanswered. The latter shortcoming is, I think, fairly crucial to the interpretation set out in the book. The author indicates that substantial government aid was given to develop transportation links and industrial sites but fails to examine the necessary political arrangements which made such aid possible. These unanswered questions give the impression that the book was rushed to press before sufficient reflection upon several important points raised in the original text had occurred. Nevertheless, while Tuchinsky's volume falls short of a new general synthesis, it is still a tremendously important book which deserves reading by all scholars interested in Canadian urban, economic and business history.

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Urban Research and Information Catalogue. 1973- Winnipeg: Manitoba
Department of Urban Affairs. \$7.50.

Background Papers on Winnipeg Government and Politics. Vol. 1 **The Development of Urban Government in the Winnipeg Area: A Collection of Materials From Government Reports and Student Research Papers**; Vol. 2 **Studies in Winnipeg Politics: A Collection of Research Papers on Various Aspects of Local Politics in the Winnipeg Area Prior to Unicity.** Edited by P.H. WICHERN, JR. [Winnipeg]: Department of Urban Affairs, Province of Manitoba, with the co-operation of the Department of Political Studies, University of Manitoba, 1973- maps. \$1.75 per volume.

Parties and Power: An Analysis of Winnipeg City Council, 1919-1975. J.E. REA. Appendix IV, *Report and Recommendations*, Committee of Review, City of Winnipeg Act. [Winnipeg]: Department of Urban Affairs, Province of Manitoba, 1976. 165, [8] p. \$4.00.

Urban history is a relatively new area of study for scholars in Canada. In 1968, in his presidential address to the Canadian Historical Association, Professor J.M.S. Careless noted that, "aside from a few books or articles, the writing of anything that may broadly be termed Canadian urban history has been left to authors of 'popular' accounts of the glory that was Montreal or the grandeur that is Toronto. . . . The usual product is still that of the journalist or chronicler: worthy people for their purposes, but not generally held as substantial scholars in other fields of history."¹ Since then, the publication of books and articles on the Canadian city has been remarkable. Moreover, several new journals devoted to urban studies have been begun, a number of conferences on Canadian urban development have been held, and urban history courses have been added to university and college programmes. Yet, for all this activity, there remains one extremely important area where there has been little progress. The development of urban archives in Canada has not been encouraging. While some cities have well-organized, well-staffed, and well-funded archives (Toronto, Montreal, Quebec, and Vancouver), and others are rapidly moving in the right direction

1 J.M.S. Careless, "Somewhat Narrow Horizons," in Canadian Historical Association, *Historical Papers 1968*, p. 2.