The Historian's Approach to Canada's Urban Past

by Gilbert A. STELTER *

I

"Urban history," according to H. J. Dyos, "is the most newly discovered continent and into the scramble for it goes every kind of explorer." [1] In this sense, anyone who studies the urban past is an urban historian, but this is not to suggest that history as a discipline plays a central part with other disciplines assigned to the role of bit-players. The study of the city, past and present, requires an interdisciplinary approach based on a sound knowledge of what others in the field are doing. The purpose of this discussion is to examine the contributions that various disciplines have made and are making to the study of the urban past in terms of subject matter, conceptualization, and methodology. The aim of this paper is to outline the role of the historian (narrowly defined) in this venture. The question is: what can the historian contribute beyond a rather amateurish approach to the increasingly technical methodology employed today ? In general, the contribution might be described as a special sense of time and place. In the context of other approaches, it falls somewhere between that of the social scientist interested in discovering general patterns and that of the local historian concerned only with the unique and particular. This rather nebulous middle ground perhaps is best defined by describing what historians think they are doing and by a selective look at what they have done.

The study of urban history in Canada and in Britain is still in its infancy, but interest in the field has grown rapidly in recent years. [2] Also growing is the use of American concepts, for the study of urban history is most highly developed in the United States, although it should be noted that the most significant approach to Canadian urban history — the

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[1] "Agenda for Urban Historians," in DYOS, ed., *The Study of Urban History* (London, 1968), 6.

[2] Among the many excellent examples are essays by DYOS, BEDARIDA, and CHECKLAND in DYOS, *The Study of Urban History;* Eric LAMPARD, "American Historians and the Study of Urbanization," *American Historical Review,* 67 (1961), 49-61; Dwight W. HOOVER, "The Divergent Paths of American Urban History," *American Quarterly,* 20 (1968), 296-317; Charles GLAAB, "The Historian and the American City: A Bibliographic Survey," in Philip M. HAUSER and Leo F. SCHNORE, eds., *The Study of Urbanization* (New York, 1965).

metropolitan thesis — is essentially homegrown. Canadian historians of past decades could hardly be accused of having overemphasized the place of the city in Canadian history. In fact, as a group they were probably comparable to those Australian historians John McCarty describes, "who could be removed only forcibly from the Sydney bars they loved so well to the great outback about which they wrote so well." [3] Their neglect may be attributed to a general view that cities have not been a significant feature of Canadian development on the assumption that cities were relatively small and their populations constituted only a tiny proportion of the total Canadian population prior to the twentieth century. [4] But then how does one account for the slow growth of interest in the field in Britain, one of the most highly urbanized countries in the world by the late nineteenth century ? It may have something to do with the fundamental question about what is the legitimate unit of historical inquiry. The positivist tradition — a denial of the possibility of studying anything but individuals, their actions, and relations — has been strong in Britain and Canada, theoretically undercutting the possibility of studying a social whole or collective such as a city. On the other hand, American historians were influenced by the great Chicago school of sociologists of the 1920's and seem to have been less suspicious of the social scientists' attempts to comprehend the human and physical scale of the city by the process of abstraction.

One indication of the recent interest in urban history is the proliferation of newsletters in the field, reflecting in part the demand for up-to-date information about the work of like-minded souls elsewhere. The earliest and also the most successful of these newsletters is the *Urban History Newsletter* (University of Leicester), edited by H. J. Dyos. *The Urban History Group Newsletter* (University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee) provides a useful bibliographic service, but the *Historical Methods Newsletter* (University of Pittsburgh), edited by Jonathan Levine, is a better source for what is going on in the United States, especially among the quantitatively-oriented. A Canadian newsletter, the *Urban History Review* (National Museum of Man), edited by John Taylor and Del Muise, has been published since early in 1972, specializing in brief articles about research projects, bibliographical surveys, and descriptions of source collections.

In the past decade, several conferences have been organized around urban history and are a type of barometer of the changing emphasis within the field. The published proceedings of the 1961 Conference on the City in

[3] "Australian Capital Cities in the Nineteenth Century," *Australian Economic History Review*, 10 (1970), 107.

[4] I have argued against the validity of the assumption in "From Colonial Outposts to Cities: Some General Characteristics of Canadian Urban History Before 1850," paper presented at Historical Urbanization in North America Conference (HUNAC), York University, January, 1973.

History sponsored by Harvard and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology indicated an interest in theoretical speculation about where urban history should go; but most of the articles seem remarkably dated now. The results of a conference of the British History Group held in 1966 showed an emphasis on the physical and aesthetic, perhaps because urban history in Britain has developed in closer cooperation with geography than is the case in the United States where sociology has had the greater effect. An example of this is the 1968 Yale conference on nineteenth century cities whose published report was interestingly subtitled *Essays in the New Urban History.* What was new in this "sociological history" was an emphasis on social structure and mobility studies, on quantifiable sources rather than the traditional archival sources, and a concern for the lower classes and minority groups. [5] An attempt at an interdisciplinary approach to the urban past brought geographers and historians together at the Historical Urbanization in North America Conference at York University early in 1973. The conference, if nothing else, seemed to illustrate the fact that geographers and historians have some common interests and methods, read some of the same material, and sometimes even understand each other (that is, they now use the same jargon). [6] Sessions on urban history at annual meetings of major historical associations have been another vehicle for presenting the results of recent research. For example, the Canadian Urban History Committee, a standing committee of the Canadian Historical Association, has been sponsoring sessions at the Association's annual meetings since 1971. [7]

In spite of the interest and activity in the field of urban history, a succession of commentators have found little reason to rejoice. Many decry the lack of any apparent direction in the field for no generally accepted conceptual framework has emerged. [8] The assumption seems to be that such a framework is both possible and desireable. At any rate, most students who have suffered through an urban history course would agree with Sam Bass Warner that "except to the most imaginative reader, the usual shelf of urban history books looks like a line of disconnected local

[5] Proceedings of the conferences were published as: Oscar HANDLIN and John BURCHARD, eds., *The Historian and the City* (Cambridge, 1963); DYOS, ed., *The Study of Urban History;* Stephan THERNSTROM and Richard SENNET, eds., *Nineteenth-Century Cities, Essays in the New Urban History* (New Haven, 1969).

[6] The proceedings of the conference, in the form of lengthy abstracts, will appear in the York University Discussion Paper Series.

[7] The 1971 session at Memorial University was reported in the *Urban History Review*, No. 1 (1972), 19-23; for a report of the 1972 session at McGill University, see the *Urban History Newsletter* (Leicester), No. 18 (1972), 13-15.

[8] The most devastating critic has been Eric LAMPARD, especially in his "American Historians and the Study of Urbanization," but see also Roy LUBOVE, "The Urbanization Process: An Approach to Historical Research," reprinted in Alexander CALLOW, *American Urban History* (New York, 1969).

histories."[9] The situation, however, can hardly be attributed only to the perversity and stupidity of historians but is partly due to the nature of the historical discipline itself. Present in any branch of history are questions of description versus analysis, thematic versus wholistic approaches, or the extent to which models, concepts, and techniques should be borrowed from other disciplines. In addition, urban history presents some special questions. Perhaps the most vigorously debated issue recently is whether urban history should be concerned with the history of cities, as has generally been the case, or whether it should deal with the process of urbanization — the social processes that create cities. The case for the more traditional approach has been effectively argued by Oscar Handlin who has called for

> . . . fewer studies of the city in history than the history of cities. However useful a general theory of the city may be, only the detailed tracing of an immense range of variables, in context, will illuminate the dynamics of the processes . . . We can readily enough associate such gross phenomena as the growth of population and the rise of the centralized state, as technological change and the development of modern industry, as the disruption of the traditional household and the decline of corporate life. But *how* these developments unfolded, what was the causal nexus among them, we shall only learn when we make out the interplay among them by focussing upon *a* city specifically in all its uniqueness. [10]

Eric Lampard has championed the cause of the macro-analytical approach by calling for historians to use two related paths to urban history; first, an emphasis on the process of urbanization as a phenomenon of population concentration resulting in an increase in the number and size of cities, and second, the comparative study of communities in a framework of human ecology, focusing on the changing structures and organization of communities in four specific and quantifiable references — population and environment mediated by technology and organization. [11] Lampard has not been without influence, yet many historians reject his proposals partly because they do not have the methodological capability of dealing with the processes he suggests and also because Lampard's approach is of only marginal value in dealing with the kinds of questions in which most historians are really interested — the nature of individual cities within special cultural contexts at specified times.[12]

[9] "If all the World Were Philadelphia: A Scaffolding For Urban History, 1774-1930," *American Historical Review*, 74 (1968), 27.

[10] "The Modern City as a Field of Historical Study," in HANDLIN and BURCHARD, eds., *The Historian and the City*, 26.

[11] For a more detailed explanation of this approach, see LAMPARD'S "American Historians and the Study of Urbanization," and "The Dimensions of Urban History: A Footnote to the 'Urban Crisis'," *Pacific Historical Review*, 39 (1970), 261-79.

[12] See, for example, Michael FRISCH, *Town Into City: Springfield, Massachusetts, and the Meaning of Community, 1840-1880* (Cambridge, 1972), 3-4.

Even if there were agreement on what should be studied, the problem remains of defining elusive terms such as "city" and "urban." So does the question of the role of the city in society. Is the city itself the source of social change as Arthur Schlesinger and others have argued in an attempt to replace the Turnerian frontier thesis with an urban interpretation of history? Or is the city only the result of larger forces in society?[13] A series of related questions concerns the purpose of studying urban history. Should the urban past be studied for its own sake or with a view to illuminating national history? Should the purpose of urban history be to help formulate historical social theory, that is, to shed light on the larger question of how society is put together and how it changes?[14] Or is the historical dimension studied in order to achieve a better understanding of the present? Sam Warner seems to think so. In the introduction to his study of suburbanization in Boston, Warner claims that "if the city is ever to become susceptible to rational planning there must be a common understanding of how the city is built."[15]

In retrospect, the apparent chaotic state of urban history is hardly surprising when one considers the complexity of the subject matter. Rather than decrying the fact that so many different approaches are being used, historians should instead regard this as a positive sign, for urban history has become one of the most exciting branches of the historical discipline with its practitioners in the vanguard of rethinking the nature of history as a field of study.

II

A discussion of the various approaches of urban historians, especially in the field of Canadian history, is best divided into two principal categories.[16] The first consists of those studies which deal with historical

[13] Arthur M. SCHLESINGER, "The City in American Civilization," in *Paths to the Present* (New York, 1949); William DIAMOND, "On the Dangers of an Urban Interpretation of History," in Eric F. GOLDMAN, ed., *Historiography and Urbanization* (Baltimore, 1941).

[14] Samuel P. HAYS, "Social Structure in the New Urban History," paper presented at HUNAC, York University, 1973.

[15] *Streetcar Suburbs, The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900* (Cambridge, 1962), viii. The purpose of having the past illuminate the present is even more obvious in his recent *The Urban Wilderness: A History of the American City* (New York, 1972).

[16] Bibliographical essays on the literature in Canadian urban history include two by Frederick H. ARMSTRONG: "Urban History in Canada," *Urban History Group Newsletter*, No. 28 (1969), 1-10; and "Urban History in Canada: Present State and Future Prospects," *Urban History Review*, No. 1 (1972), 11-14. For Quebec, see: Yves MARTIN, "Urban Studies in French Canada," in Marcel RIOUX and MARTIN, eds., *French Canadian Society* (Toronto, 1964); and Paul André LINTEAU, "L'histoire urbaine au Québec: bilan et tendances," *Urban History Review*, No. 1 (1972), 7-10. For general bibliographies, see Gilbert A. STELTER, *Canadian Urban History: A Selected Bibliography* (Sudbury, 1972), and M. A. LESSARD, "Bibliographie des villes du Québec," *Recherches sociographiques*, 9 (January-August, 1968), 143-209. Several bibliographies are now available listing the detailed material on individual cities. The best example is Paul-André LINTEAU, Jean THIVIERGE *et al. Montréal au 19e siècle, bibliographie* (Montréal, 1972). Now somewhat dated but still useful is Lucien BRAULT, "Bibliographie d'Ottawa," *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa* (1954), 345-75.

processes or events in an urban setting — anything that has happened in cities — without too much worry for what is "urban" in the subject. The second category includes work in which the author has concerned himself with what is generically "urban" in his subject. The city is usually considered as a special kind of environment with unique patterns of social organization. These categories are somewhat similar to those Harvey Lithwick uses in distinguishing between problems *in* the city such as poverty, problems which are not necessarily unique to urban environments, and problems *of* the city such as scarce urban space, problems which are generated by the process of urbanization. [17]

The bulk of what is generally considered to be urban history in Canada (or elsewhere for that matter) fits into the first category, made up primarily of urban biographies and theme studies. The criticism which has been levelled at most of the work in this category is similar to recent criticisms of social history in general, of which urban history is often regarded as a spin-off. [18] Social history for too long has simply been that area of history that is left over; that is, the study of that which is neglected after the more traditional areas of history have staked out their claims. In the same sense, some historians have dealt with neglected events in history which happened to take place in cities and thus are urban historians. They do not, however, question what it is that is urban in their study.

The often maligned urban biography, however, sometimes has qualities which are missing in supposedly more sophisticated approaches to urban history. A distinguishing character of good urban biography is an attempt to relate the complex facets of a modern city and this concern for the totality of the urban experience is usually not present in thematic studies. Among the most successful American biographical examples are Blake McKelvey's Rochester, Bessie Pierce's Chicago, and Constance Green's Washington. In this same tradition, although much less detailed, is John Cooper's *Montreal* (1969), in which the relationship between various aspects of urban life are explored — transportation, municipal government, physical expansion, the nature of society, and social organization. A host of other biographies are less successful as urban history in that they tend to be narratives of virtually anything of interest that went on within a city's boundaries. Yet these often represent the tradition of local history at its best with carefully assembled masses of information about economic development, politics, and cultural activities. [19]

[17] *Urban Canada, Problems and Prospects* (Ottawa, 1970), 13-16.

[18] Samuel P. HAYS, "A Systematic Social History," in G. A. BILLIAS and G. N. GROB, eds., *American History, Retrospect and Prospect* (New York, 1971).

[19] In this category I would rank: G. P. DE T. GLAZEBROOK, *The Story of Toronto* (Toronto, 1971); Robert RUMILLY, *Histoire de Montréal*, 3 vols. (Montréal, 1970-72); Kathleen JENKINS, *Montreal, Island City of the St. Lawrence* (New York, 1966); Marjorie

Of the older biographies, several warrant mention in that they have become classics and have influenced all subsequent accounts. The chief of these is the 17th century account by Dollier de Casson, *History of Montreal, 1640-1672*, and for early 19th century Montreal, Newton Bosworth's *Hochelaga Depicta* (1839). For Toronto, Henry Scadding's *Toronto of Old* (1873) is still one of the most important sources on the early city. [20]

A second group of publications within the first category deals with a variety of themes — economic, social, political, and physical history in the context of cities. In the absence of any adequate theory of the modern city, it is hardly surprising that single — factor investigations would be the usual form of urban history.

The economic development of Canadian cities has received considerable attention with some of the best work emphasizing the role of the business élite in a city's commercial expansion. Conceptually, this is more than business history in an urban setting, valuable as that may be; in the research of J. M. S. Careless and his students, city growth is generally seen as the interaction of the decision-making of dynamic individuals or groups and technological and population change. [21] The rivalry between aspiring towns and cities for trade and transportation has not captured the imagination of Canadian historians to the degree that the subject has been examined in the United States, but studies of Montreal versus Toronto, Quebec versus Montreal, and Vancouver versus Seattle are examples of some of the most volatile rivalries. [22] The way in which cities promoted themselves, usually through a Board of Trade, in order to attract invest-

CAMPBELL, *A Mountain and a City, The Story of Hamilton* (Toronto, 1966); Lucien BRAULT, *Ottawa*, (Ottawa, 1946). More popularly written but useful are: Thomas RADDALL, *Halifax, Warden of the North* (London, 1950); J. A. ROY, *Kingston, The King's Town* (Toronto, 1966); Leslie ROBERTS, *Montreal, From Mission City to World City* (Toronto, 1969); Wilfred EGGLESTON, *The Queen's Choice* (Ottawa, 1961).

[20] DOLLIER DE CASSON, *History of Montreal, 1640-72*, translated by Ralph Flenley (New York, 1928); Newton BOSWORTH, *Hochelaga Depicta. The Early History and Present State of the City and Island of Montreal* (Montreal, 1839); Henry SCADDING, *Toronto of Old.* Abridged and edited by F. H. ARMSTRONG (Toronto, 1966).

[21] "The Business Community in the Early Development of Victoria, British Columbia," in David S. MACMILLAN, ed., *Canadian Business History. Selected Studies, 1497-1971* (Toronto, 1972); "The Development of the Winnipeg Business Community, 1870-1890," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, Ser. 4, 8 (1970), 239-54. See also Gerald TULCHINSKY, "The Montreal Business Community, 1837-1863," in MACMILLAN, *Canadian Business History*; Frederick H. ARMSTRONG, "George J. Goodhue, Pioneer Merchant of London, Upper Canada," *Ontario History*, 63 (1971), 217-32. Henry C. KLASSEN, "L. H. Holton, Montreal Businessman and Politician, 1817-1867" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1970); T. W. ACHESON, "The Nature and Structure of York Commerce in the 1820's," *Canadian Historical Review* (hereafter *CHR*), 50 (1969), 406-28.

[22] D. C. MASTERS, "Toronto vs. Montreal, The Struggle for Financial Hegemony," *CHR*, 22 (June, 1941), 133-46; Fernand OUELLET, "Papineau et la rivalité Québec-Montréal, 1820-1840", *Revue d'Histoire de l'Amérique française*, 13 (December, 1959), 311-37; Norbert MACDONALD, "Seattle, Vancouver and the Klondike," *CHR*, 49 (1968), 234-46.

ment and immigration, has also been studied. [23] To a very great extent, Canadian urban development has been tied to the changing forms of transportation, from the sailing ships of the colonial period to the canals and railroads of the 19th century, but, surprisingly, the subject is only beginning to be examined thoroughly. [24] Another aspect of economic development — industrialization — has received only slight scrutiny; among the exceptions are a general analysis of manufacturing in late 19th century central Canada and studies of shipbuilding in Saint John and Quebec. [25]

The study of urban society until recently was confined to an interest in the "impact" or "problems" approach to life in cities or to rather pedestrian accounts of cultural institutions such as the church or school. As in the United States, however, a systematic social history has become the rage, inspired by the publication of Stephan Thernstrom's *Poverty and Progress* (1964), and receiving a sort of *ex cathedra* status with the appearance of Thernstrom and Richard Sennett's *Nineteenth Century Cities* (1969). Some critics of this new approach have pointed to the "over-reliance on unrefined demographic data, the tedium imposed by the jargon of much of this writing, and its characteristic failure to deal with the human side of society — with, in a word, *soul*." [26] Also relevant is the criticism of Sam Warner; in a recent review of *Nineteenth Century Cities*, he pointed out : "These essays are the new *social* history . . . Many are not urban history because the urban dimensions of the subjects investigated were not a major concern for their authors." By "urban dimensions,"

[23] Fernand OUELLET, *Histoire de la Chambre de commerce de Québec* (Québec, 1959); Alan ARTIBISE, "Advertising Winnipeg: The Campaign for Immigrants and Industry, 1874-1914," *Manitoba Historical Society Transactions*, Ser. 3, No. 27 (1970-71); Douglas McCALLA, "The Commercial Politics of the Toronto Board of Trade, 1850-1860," *CHR*, 50 (1969), 51-67.

[24] A general evaluation of the role of transportation in the development of western cities is in J. M. S. CARELESS, "Aspects of Urban Life in the West, 1870-1914," in A. W. RASPORICH and H. C. KLASSEN, eds., *Prairie Perspectives* 2 (Toronto, 1972). Much of the material on individual cities is still in unpublished form. Examples are: Brian YOUNG, "Railway Politics in Montreal, 1869-1878," paper presented at Canadian Historical Association annual meeting (hereafter CHA), McGill University, June, 1972; Paul-André LINTEAU, "Le Développement du port de Montréal au début du XX[e] siècle," paper presented at CHA, McGill University, June, 1972; Patricia ROY, "Railways, Politicians and the Development of the City of Vancouver as a Metropolitan Center, 1886-1929" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Toronto, 1963).

[25] E. J. CHAMBERS and G. W. BERTRAM, "Urbanization and Manufacturing in Central Canada, 1870-1890," in Sylvia OSTRY and T. K. RYMES, eds., *Papers on Regional Statistical Studies* (Toronto, 1966); Richard RICE, "The Wrights of Saint John: A Study of Shipbuilding and Shipowning in the Maritimes, 1839-1855," in MACMILLAN. *Canadian Business History:* Albert FAUCHER, "The Decline of Shipbuilding at Quebec in the Nineteenth Century," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, 23, (1957) 195-215.

[26] Dana F. WHITE, "The Underdeveloped Discipline: Interdisciplinary Directions in American Urban History," *American Studies*, 9 (Spring, 1971), 10.

Warner meant the inclusion of "the time, place and role of . . . cities and towns in the larger context of the shifting national network of cities." [27] On the other hand, it must be noted that this group has made a significant contribution to our understanding of urban society, even though much of their work is as yet preliminary. Then too, they have made a great effort to develop a common methodology and in particular to use common terms and a common manner of presentation to allow a systematic comparison of results from place to place.

The major Canadian example of this approach is the large-scale "Canadian Social History Project" directed by Michael Katz in which mid-19th century Hamilton is used as a case study. [28] A feature of this project is that information is coded on every individual rather than on merely a sampling. In Katz's view, the most significant early findings are that transiency and social inequality were present to a greater extent in mid-19th century cities than has been imagined. The project has received considerable attention because of the sophisticated quantitative methodology which has been developed. Equally important is the fact that the project is the first major historical examination of the class structure of Canadian society, a subject that has been largely ignored by Canadian historians. [29] The few previous studies, such as John Cooper's description of the social structure of Montreal in the 1850s, lack the methodological and conceptual rigor which characterizes the Hamilton study. [30] On the other hand, one misses Cooper's strong sense of time and place and humanistic concern for personality in Katz's analysis. Because of the understandable impact that the Hamilton study is making in Canadian urban history, it may be necessary to point out the danger of assuming that the findings for Hamilton typify the Canadian urban experience. It should be kept in mind that Hamilton was a very young and small city (only 14,000 in 1851), located on the western frontier, and hardly out of the frontier stage of development at a time when Montreal, for example, had a population of over 50,000 and had been in existence for two hundred years.

The demographic tradition in the study of urban population based on Adna Weber's great *The Growth of Cities in the Nineteenth Century* (1899) has had few exponents among Canadian historians. For example, not one of the important general surveys of the size and composition of the Cana-

[27] *Journal of American History*, 57 (1970), 737-38.

[28] Preliminary results from the continuing project are available in four interim reports published by OISIE (1969-1973) and in several articles including "Social Structure in Hamilton, Ontario," in THERNSTROM and SENNETT, *Nineteenth Century Cities*, and "The People of a Canadian City, 1851-52," *CHR*, 53 (1972), 402-26.

[29] As an example, see S. R. MEALING, "The Concept of Social Class and the Interpretation of Canadian History," *CHR*, 46 (1965), 201-18.

[30] "The Social Structure of Montreal in the 1850's," *CHA Report* (1956), 63-73.

dian urban population is by an historian. [31] Some of the studies of the population of individual cities warrant mention, however. Norbert MacDonald's comparison of the population of Vancouver and Seattle indicates, among other things, the effect of a national boundary on immigration policy and thus on the character of the population. Louise Dechêne's work on early Montreal has shown that Montreal was far smaller than census estimates have indicated and that it played a less significant role (in relation to Quebec City) in 18th century French Canada than has usually been assumed. [32]

Other aspects of urban society which have been examined include topics we have traditionally associated with the field of social history. Among these are the "immigrant adjustment" studies, usually dealing with the post-famine Irish immigration, [33] the institutional reaction to poverty and other social problems, and the larger questions of reform and social welfare. [34] Surprisingly, there has been little historical research on the relations between French and English language groups in Canadian cities, even though the topic has elicited a good deal of interest at the national level.

In comparison with the literature available on other aspects of Canadian urban development, that on urban politics and government is relatively sparse. The standard political science studies such as K. G. Crawford's *Canadian Municipal Government* (1954) usually have one chapter on historical development, but emphasize the formal powers and structure of municipal administration and not the question of who governs and why. The historical field is not entirely barren, however, with the role of the élite being a particular subject of interest. Guy Bourassa's study of the composition of the political élite in Montreal after 1840 shows how the basis of their power changed from that of wealth in business to

[31] Leroy STONE, *Urban Development in Canada* (1961 Census monograph, Ottawa, 1967); Leo F. SCHNORE and G. B. PETERSEN, "Urban and Metropolitan Development in the United States and Canada," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, 316 (March 1958), 60-68; David SLATER, "The Urbanization of People and Activities in Canada including an Analysis of Components of the Growth of Urban Population" (unpublished essay, Dept. of Economics, Queen's University, 1960).

[32] "Population Growth and Change in Seattle and Vancouver, 1880-1960," *Pacific Historical Review*, 39 (1970), 297-321; "La croissance de Montréal au XVIII[e] siècle," *Revue d'Histoire de l'Amérique française*, 27 (1973), 163-179.

[33] Derwyn S. SHEA, "The Irish Immigrant Adjustment to Toronto, 1840-1860," *Canadian Catholic Historical Association Study Sessions*, 39 (1972); G. R. C. KEEP, "The Irish Adjustment in Montreal," *CHR*, 31 (1950), 39-46; D. J. CROSS, "The Irish in Montreal, 1867-1896" (unpublished M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1969).

[34] J. I. COOPER, "The Quebec Ship Labourer's Benevolent Society," *CHR*, 30 (1949), 336-43; G. E. HART, "The Halifax Poorman's Friend Society, 1820-27; An Early Social Experiment," *CHR*, 34 (1953), 109-23; Tamara K. HAREVEN, "An Ambiguous Alliance: Some Aspects of American Influence on Canadian Social Welfare," *Social History*, 3 (April, 1969), 82-98; Paul RUTHERFORD, "Tomorrow's Metropolis: The Urban Reform Movement in Canada, 1880-1920," *CHA Historical Papers* (1971), 203-24.

support from either of the two major ethnic groups. [35] The struggle in early 19th century Halifax between the old merchant oligarchy and an economically rising reform group has been examined by David Sutherland. [36] In early Calgary, according to Max Foran, the business and professional interests dominated the municipal government but apparently embodied the community's aspirations by enthusiastically promoting local development and defending the community's interests against outside forces. [37]

Canadian urban government appears to have escaped some of the worst excesses of their late 19th century American counterparts. Why this should have been the case has intrigued a number of political scientists, chief among whom was Morley Wickett. Writing in 1906, Wickett argued that differences were due to the slower growth rate of Canadian cities, the relative homogeneity of the Canadian urban population (he wrote from Toronto), the simplicity of local government structures based on the British model, the greater respect for authority, non-partisan politics, and especially the relatively restricted municipal franchise. [38] On the other hand, another commentator, W. B. Munro, claimed that by 1929 Canadian cities were moving away from their English origins toward the American model in the form and spirit of the governments. [39] A recent study of the non-partisan tradition in Canadian urban politics suggests that the tradition developed not as a matter of principle but because the relatively small scale and homogeneity of Canadian cities did not create a large enough area of disagreement over goals to maintain party interest. [40] Unfortunately, historians have not yet documented or refuted these generalizations.

A final theme which warrants some mention is that of the physical city. Several topics within this general theme, such as the history of architecture, town planning and housing, hold particular promise for the study of the urban past. Historians appear to agree that changing tastes in architectural building styles tell us a great deal about the character and aspirations of the people of a community. Generalizations in the field,

[35] Guy BOURASSA, "The Political Elite of Montreal: From Aristocracy to Democracy," in L. D. FELDMAN and M. D. GOLDRICK, eds., *Politics and Government of Urban Canada* (Toronto, 1969).

[36] David SUTHERLAND, "Gentlemen vs. Shopkeepers: Urban Reform in early 19th century Halifax," paper presented at CHA, McGill University, June 1972.

[37] M. L. FORAN, "Calgary Town Council, 1884-1895" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Calgary, 1970) and his "Urban Calgary 1884-1895," *Histoire sociale-Social History* 5, (1972), 61-76.

[38] *City Government in Canada* (Toronto, 1906).

[39] *American Influences on Canadian Government* (Toronto, 1929).

[40] James D. ANDERSON, "Nonpartisan Urban Politics in Canadian Cities," in Jack MASSON and James ANDERSON, eds., *Emerging Party Politics in Urban Canada* (Toronto, 1972).

however, must be regarded as tentative, for architectural historians are a notoriously individualistic lot, devastatingly critical of each other's judgements about individual buildings or the aesthetic qualities of certain architectural styles. What is "light, fanciful and imaginative" to one is "ostentatious and imitative" to another. Most reliable for the novice is the broad perspective of Alan Gowans. An example of his approach is his description of the changing building styles in 19th century Toronto. He distinguishes between the early 19th century Georgians who thought of architecture as the art of building well and the Victorians who subordinated simplicity and functional convenience to an architecture thought of as a kind of symbolic language with styles borrowed from other ages. [41]

The architectural history of individual Canadian cities is still in the pioneering stage, but studies such as Eric Arthur's delightful *Toronto, No Mean City* (1964) are useful commentaries on the changing physical qualities of a city. From the urban historian's point of view, however, most surveys of a city's architectural history read like the defensive briefs of architectural preservation committees. Even Eric Arthur tends to emphasize the monumental public buildings to the exclusion of the ordinary structures of a period. When homes are discussed, they are the mansions of the wealthy, not the great majority of middle and lower income homes which more truly characterized the city. Then, too, most of these studies deal with individual buildings and not with the streetscapes which gave a particularly urban flavor to the Georgian and Victorian periods of city development. [42]

The colonial nature of the 19th century Canadian urban society (and probably much of 20th century society as well) is evident in the absence of indigenous building forms and in the continued reliance on architectural styles from the outside. The same situation apparently held true for the development of town planning, for the earliest layout and later planning of Canadian communities was determined by ideas from abroad. Several historians have suggested that the differences in original design of the towns reflected the particular character of the Imperial power. In *Town*

[41] GOWANS, "Introduction" to Ralph GREENHILL, *The Face of Toronto* (Toronto, 1960), and especially *Building Canada, An Architectural History of Canadian Life* (Toronto, 1966). Another useful architectural history is Marion MACRAE and Anthony ADAMSON, *The Ancestral Roof, Domestic Architecture of Upper Canada* (Toronto, 1963).

[42] Among the best studies of individual cities are: Margaret ANGUS, *The Old Stones of Kingston* (Toronto, 1966), and A. J. H. RICHARDSON, "The Old City of Quebec and Our Heritage in Architecture," *CHA Report* (1963), 31-41. Basically concerned with preservation, the following are nevertheless useful: A. G. MCKAY, *Victorian Architecture in Hamilton* (Hamilton, 1967); HERITAGE TRUST OF NOVA SCOTIA, *Founded Upon a Rock: Historical Buildings of Halifax and Vicinity Standing in 1967* (Halifax, 1967); L. B. JENSEN, *Vanishing Halifax* (Halifax, 1968); John W. GRAHAM, *A Guide to the Architecture of Greater Winnipeg, 1831-1960 (Winnipeg, 1960).* For an excellent example of what can be done with the architectural and social history of a single building, see *St. Lawrence Hall* (Toronto, 1969), especially the chapters by Eric ARTHUR.

Planning in Frontier America (1969) John Reps describes the origins of the towns of Nouvelle-France as typically French, for the choice of site and the layout of the towns was left entirely to the individuals who had been granted trading or settlement rights. The result was actually the absence of planning, with Quebec developing as a compact non-linear town and Montreal as a linear town because of topography. He ignores Louisbourg, which more resembled the British garrison towns like Halifax and Toronto, which were set up with a gridiron plan directly on the orders of colonial authorities.[43] An explanation of why the British used the gridiron plan in particular is given by Peter Oberlander in his description of Col. Richard Moody's role as site selector and townplanner in British Columbia in the 1850s. Moody relentlessly used the gridiron despite the rough terrain partly because of his cultural baggage — regular and geometric patterns were fashionable in England — but also because it was easier to divide and sell land in this way and because the crudity of surveying at that time made schemes taking topography into account very difficult.[44]

In the early 20th century, a town planning craze imported the City Beautiful and Garden City movements to Canada. The intellectual basis of this interest has been well described in an important article on the larger question of urban reform by Paul Rutherford.[45] The most important import during this period undoubtedly was the British planner, Thomas Adams, who became the Town Planning Advisor to the Commission of Conservation in Ottawa for seven years. Very little has been written about his role in Canadian planning except for Alan Armstrong's article outlining Adams's success in establishing a legal framework for planning in most of the provinces.[46] For an appreciation of his planning philosophy, which included the idea that urban and rural plannings go hand in hand, one is forced to go back to his *Rural Planning and Development* (1917), *Outline of Town and City Planning* (1935), and his numerous articles and reports.[47]

The study of the physical city raises the question of sources, for most historians tend to rely on the written record to the virtual exclusion of

[43] Michael HUGO-BRUNT, "The Origins of Colonial Settlements in the Maritimes," *Plan Canada*, 1, (1960), 78-114.

[44] "The 'Patron Saint' of Town Planning in British Columbia," in L. O. GERTLER, ed., *Planning the Canadian Environment* (Montreal, 1968).

[45] "Tomorrow's Metropolis: The Urban Reform Movement in Canada," *CHA Historical Papers* (1971), 208-10.

[46] Thomas Adams and the Commission of Conservation," in GERTLER, *Planning the Canadian Environment*. Adams was not the only well-known planner brought in. In the 1870's, for example, Frederick Law Olmstead planned Mount Royal park in Montreal. A. L. MURRAY, "Frederick Law Olmstead and the Design of Mount Royal Park, Montreal," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 26 (1967), 163-71.

[47] In the magazine *Conservation of Life*, issued by the Commission, and in annual *Proceedings of the National Conference on City Planning* (Boston, 1912-1914).

visual records except for illustrative purposes. Canadian historians may find the geographer M. R. G. Conzen's guide to the use of town plans in urban history a bit esoteric (he uses British medieval town plans as an example),[48] but sources of this sort abound for the study of Canadian cities. For example, the National Map Collection of the Public Archives in Ottawa houses hundreds of historical maps and plans for each major city. Yet the demand for urban maps from this collection from interior decorators has probably exceeded that from historians.[49] Visual evidence such as drawings, prints, and photographs have been used even less often, although notable exceptions exist such as Gustave Lanctôt's beautiful "Images et figures de Montréal sous la France, 1642-1763" (1943).[50]

III

The literature discussed above dealt with cities or life in cities, but rarely with urban history as distinguished from social, economic, political or architectural history in the context of cities. A second group of publications provides a rough sort of second category in which the city is regarded as a special kind of social environment with unique internal and external patterns of organization. Two elements within this larger group merit attention, one of which emphasizes the metropolitan concept and the other the city building process. Both have been influenced by the tradition of the ecological sociologists and accept the necessity of studying the so-called "ecological complex" — the key variables of population, environment, technology, and organization — but both reject the determinism of the ecological school which omits elements of value. While the ecologists take the aggregate as their frame of reference, these historians emphasize the human and accidental, the contingencies of events and personalities.

The concept of metropolitanism has been popular in Canada presumably because the role of a few cities has been more apparent than in the United States where the frontier thesis of Frederick Jackson Turner held sway for such a long time. In a sense the framework for the use of the concept in Canada was laid by the Laurentian school of historians — Innis, Creighton, Lower, and others — although their emphasis was on staples, not cities. The direct intellectual basis for the concept, however, was the work of the Canadian-born and educated economic historian, Norman S. B. Gras, who, in his *Introduction to Economic History* (1922),

[48] "The Use of Town Plans in Urban History," in DYOS, *The Study of Urban History*.

[49] See the special issue of the *Urban History Review*, No. 2 (1972), entitled "Resources for the Study of Urban History in the Public Archives of Canada." Included are the following brief articles: Edward DAHL, "The National Map Collection"; A. J. BIRRELL, "Photographic Resources"; M. BELL, "Paintings, Drawings and Prints Section."

[50] *Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Society of Canada* (1943), 53-78, with 22 plates.

foreshadowed some of the main ideas of the ecologists. Gras emphasized the mutual dependence of the metropolis and hinterland and outlined four economic stages of metropolitan growth: a city began its growth as a marketing center, developed a manufacturing complex, became the hub of a communications network, and finally emerged as the focus of a financial system. The Gras model was rather rigidly applied by Donald C. Masters in his *The Rise of Toronto, 1850-1890* (1947), in which he traced the growth of Toronto's domination of Ontario and its competition with Montreal for hegemony over the broader Canadian hinterland. Not only was Masters' work a pioneering study in that a city's development was examined in the light of a major theoretical concept, but by attempting to relate social and cultural development to the city's stages of economic development, he recognized an important principle — that economic changes in a city directly affect the nature of life in that city.[51]

The theoretical development of the metropolitan concept, especially the metropolis-hinterland relationship, is usually associated with J. M. S. Careless who first suggested the significance of the metropolitan interpretation for Canadian history in a seminal article in 1954.[52] Careless described the metropolitan relationship between cities as a feudal-like chain of vassalage, with Winnipeg, for example, tributary to Montreal but serving as the metropolis of a large region of its own in the prairie west. Montreal, in turn, was dependent on London, the major metropolis. This sort of interpretation, of course, is remarkably similar in outline to that of various theories about the way cities are connected to each other in a hierarchical system. The difference lies in what factors are emphasized in explaining the location and growth of cities. Historians like Careless have generally been critical of deterministic, mechanical doctrines of objective necessity, preferring instead a humanistic explanation in which the subjective traits of individuals or groups and the contingencies of time and place are not overlooked.

Careless has also considered the nature of the relationship between the metropolis and its hinterland. He has suggested that what is often described as regionalism could be better expressed in terms of metropolitanism, for "regions usually center on metropolitan communities, which largely organize them, focus their views, and deal with outside metropolitan forces on their behalf."[53] This point has been il-

[51] The manner in which Masters applied the Gras model to Toronto has been questioned by Frederick H. Armstrong. In a re-examination of the validity of the concept for Toronto, Armstrong concluded that the date for the emergence of Toronto as an important economic centre should be pushed back from after the 1850's to the 1830's. "Metropolitanism and Toronto Re-examined, 1825-1850," *CHA Report* (1966), 29-40.

[52] "Frontierism, Metropolitanism, and Canadian History," *CHR*, 35 (1954), 1-21.

[53] "Aspects of Metropolitanism in Atlantic Canada," in Mason WADE, ed., *Regionalism in the Canadian Community, 1867-1967* (Toronto, 1969), 117.

lustrated in his description of the role of Saint John, Halifax, and St. John's in the development of Atlantic Canada in the latter half of the 19th century. While he shows how the metropolitan communities dominated their hinterlands, Careless argues that the two are mutually dependent. By implication at least, this raises the question of whether urban historians can legitimately study cities or life in cities without placing cities in their regional context or seeing them as part of a unit with their hinterland.

In addition to the work of Careless, the metropolitan concept has been applied to some cities and to some of the larger questions of Canadian history by a number of scholars. A good example of the former is Ruben Bellan's thesis on the rise of Winnipeg in which the author showed how objective factors such as strategic location and the development of western agriculture were combined with subjective factors such as the dynamic local leadership which secured the transcontinental railroad, won discriminatory freight rates, and saw to it that Winnipeg became the headquarters of the grain trade.[54] More generally, A. R. M. Lower recently has returned to the metropolitan theme which had been implied in his earlier works. In several rather poetic articles, he looks at some of the universal aspects of what he regards as two separate ways of life, that of the metropolitan and that of the provincial.[55] What Lower is suggesting is really something similar to the approach of the ecologist Robert Park who saw the city as a state of mind and a body of customs and traditions.[56]

The other significant approach in the second category is an emphasis upon the city-building process. In comparison with the influential metropolitan approach, the amount of work of this type done on Canadian cities is still slight but will probably increase substantially in the future. In general, this approach could be described as an attempt, in the tradition of Patrick Geddes and Louis Mumford, to relate environmental and social change. The city is regarded as an artifact or physical container within which complex human and institutional relationships are established. In the work of one of the leading exponents of this approach, Sam Warner, a major concern has been to place social differentiation and its relationship to spatial distribution in the context of changing technology, especially improved mass public transportation: *Streetcar Suburbs* (1962); *The Private City* (1968).

[54] "The Rise of Winnipeg as a Metropolitan Center" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1958).

[55] "The Metropolitan and the Provincial," *Queen's Quarterly*, 76 (Winter, 1969), 577-90; "Townsman and Countryman: Two Ways of Life," *Dalhousie Review*, 50 (1970), 180-87; "Metropolis and Hinterland," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 70 (1971), 386-403.

[56] "The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behaviour in the Urban Environment" (1916), reprinted in PARK, *Human Communities: The City and Human Ecology* (New York, 1952).

The most important published study of a Canadian city in this tradition is Peter Goheen's *Victorian Toronto, 1850 to 1900; Pattern and Process of Growth* (1970). Goheen, an urban geographer, has attempted to apply some of the research techniques being used by students of contemporary cities to an historical subject. Unfortunately, too often he subordinates the subject under study to his interest in methodology. Goheen follows Warner's general thesis that the social geography of the city of 1860 was almost the reverse of the late 19th and early 20th century city. Thus he finds that the social landscape of Toronto before the 1850s was a jumble of confusion. Commercial, industrial, and residential districts were tightly intermixed. Class distinctions were clearly drawn, but rich and poor lived in close proximity. All of this was changed after the 1860s in a period of rapid growth, industrialization, and improved public transportation. It was now possible to separate place of residence from place of work. Social differences slowly became translated into spatial segregation by economic rank.

While Goheen's work is valuable to the urban historian, some questions must be raised about his findings. It might well be that differentiation was more apparent in late 19th century Toronto than in the early city. But what constitutes differentiation is surely a relative matter, depending on the size of the community and on attitudes. Obviously people cannot live as far apart in a small town, but they can still feel they are living apart. Whether attitudes about this sort of social segregation changed during the 19th century has not been examined. At any rate, some studies of the spatial arrangements of other Canadian cities suggest that differentiation by function and residentially by class and ethnicity existed long before the middle of the 19th century.[57]

The only detailed study of a Canadian city by an historian in which the Warner model is used is Alan Artibise's thesis on early Winnipeg.[58] Like other work in this tradition, this is not a definitive biography for many important events in Winnipeg's early history are not dealt with. But it is biographical in a specialized sense, for an attempt is made to relate the various factors that went into the process of creating Winnipeg's social and physical structure. As such, it is a useful complement to Bellan's work on Winnipeg's economic development. In general terms, Artibise's findings are similar to those Goheen describes for Toronto except that by 1914 Winnipeg was a more highly differentiated community — physically and socially — than Toronto where the population was relatively homogeneous.

[57] For example, see W. H. PARKER, "The Towns of Lower Canada in the 1830's," in R. P. BECKINSALE and J. M. HOUSTON, eds., *Urbanization and its Problems* (Oxford, 1968).

[58] "The Urban Development of Winnipeg, 1874-1914" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of British Columbia, 1971). An aspect of the thesis was presented as a paper, "An Urban Environment: The Process of Growth in Winnipeg, 1874-1914," at the CHA annual meeting, McGill University, June, 1972.

The methodological differences apparent in the Goheen and Artibise studies are illustrative of the different emphasis of the disciplines of geography and history in their approach to the urban past. Goheen is primarily concerned with the population in aggregate terms in the ecological tradition. The result is a series of sophisticated tables and maps showing the changing location of various groupings based on occupations, religion, value of property, and so on. Artibise, by comparison, tends to stress the role of individual and group decisions, such as those of the commercial élite who controlled the municipal corporation, in determining the character of the city. The result is a more distinct image of a people and a city.

IV

It would not be difficult to conclude this discussion of the nature and state of urban history — and of Canadian urban history in particular — on a negative note. There is, for instance, a marked absence of a conceptual framework or of comparative work. Many obvious topics have been ignored, while too many cities have yet to find their biographers. Still the growing activity in the field, the increased sophistication in methodology, and the genuine interest in interdisciplinary communication should lead instead to optimism about the place of the historical dimension in urban studies, and of the historian's role in studying the urban past.

Probably the approach which offers the greatest scope for the urban historian, in addition to theme studies and general analyses of the process of urbanization, is the study of the individual community. Based on the assumption that a community's life has meaning not discernible by a study of fragmentary portions only, this involves seeing a community as a whole and relating the parts to the larger context. This further necessitates combining local and universal interests. The urban historian, with his feet in the twin camps of history and urban studies, is grounded in local history, seeing a community in its particularity and uniqueness and at the same time aware of the general and comparative aspects of his subject matter. Finally this involves an appreciation of the way in which such human factors of personality and decision-making combine with large-scale, faceless social forces in the development of a community.