

reviews

ATLAS REVIEW

*Historical Atlas of Canada.
Volume II. The Land Transformed,
1800-1891*

R. Louis Gentilcore, Editor.
Toronto: University of Toronto
Press, 1993. 184 + xxii pp., 265
maps, 197 graphs, 48 illustrations,
22 population pyramids, 14 tables,
5 lists. \$95.00.
(ISBN 0-8020-3447-0)

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The first thing one notices about this atlas is its folio size; the pages measure fourteen and one-half inches tall by ten and one-half inches wide, and it weighs about three and one-half pounds. The numbers of maps, graphs, etc. (listed above) come from a count of items in the table of contents, which identifies everything except the three or four dozen inset maps. The heart of the atlas is the fifty-eight plates, each one a two-page spread densely packed with information on a single subject. The plates are organized into eight thematic sets, each introduced by a brief text. There is the usual front matter and at the back of the book a set of "Notes" that specifies sources and, sometimes, gives information about the making of the plate. There is no index. In the edition under review, the text, place names, and map features are in English; a French language version is also available.

The *Historical Atlas of Canada* is a work of three volumes. This volume, although standing second in organizational order, is the third to be published. It presents the results of research by fifty-six

Canadian scholars – mostly geographers and historians – who, as the authors of the plates, gave their time, knowledge, and expertise without remuneration. Scores of others helped by checking sources, editing, drawing maps, and much else. This tremendous undertaking (the full project) was conceived in the early 1970s and, in this volume, it has reached its ultimate fruition.

In the foreword, William G. Dean, overall director of the atlas project, says its purpose "is to present a clear interpretive insight" into Canadian history "with a major emphasis on the changing socioeconomic patterns over time in the lives and livelihood of ordinary people" (p. [xvii]). The plates and maps are true to this vision in their subject matter and presentation. The atlas also is supposed to serve as "an indispensable reference work as well as a major research quarry reflecting contemporary views in historical geography, history, and cartography" (p. [xvii]).

Open the atlas at random, as most readers are likely to do, and one is immediately struck by the attractiveness, not to say beauty, of whichever plate is revealed. The various elements of every plate are arranged both functionally and artistically: the principal map (or maps) usually occupies the center, is surrounded by graphs, smaller maps, illustrations, and like materials on supplementary topics, and is accompanied by two or three blocks of text to help the reader interpret the maps and other graphics. Colors not only are very attractive but also are remarkably clear and distinctive. There is no standard map scale or set of scales for this atlas; instead, the size and extent of every map appear to be customized not only to accommodate the data but also to fit harmoniously with other elements on the plate. The projection is not identified. The scale of

each map is indicated by a representative fraction, but only the one or two more important maps on a plate are likely also to carry a graphic scale of miles and kilometers. The artistry is especially evident in the arrangement of shapes, the choices of colors, the line weights, the choice of symbols, and the manner in which patterns are presented. The paper is opaque without being too heavy and has a matte finish that keeps the type and line work crisp and easy to read. The printer has done a superb job of keeping the colors precisely in register.

Whereas the graphs, tables, and other supplementary materials are usually enclosed in rectangular borders that double as scales of time and quantity, most maps float free on the plate, unencumbered by borders, by lines of longitude and latitude, or by north arrows or other indicators of orientation (the implicit orientation is to the north). Where the edge of a map does not naturally make a clean break (as along a shoreline), it is airbrushed to give a feathered effect to the transition from subject area on the map to white space on the plate. This is the style in all three volumes of the atlas, and it dates back to the initial planning of the project. The overall effect gives every plate thematic and visual coherence while leaving the various elements so loosely structured as to encourage (if not require) browsing or a kind of visual free association.

Unfortunately, there are serious problems that affect the utility of the atlas and some have to do with the cartography. On plate 40, for example, inconsistent treatment of symbols is demonstrated on a trio of nearly identical maps that use graduated circles to symbolize quantities of farm products. The first map lets both rivers and boundaries show through the circles, the second map's circles are transparent to rivers but not to

boundaries, and circles on the third map obliterate everything beneath them. In the center of plate 56, there is a multi-part, two-color graph of social welfare institutions that lacks a key to the colors; it is not hard to infer the meaning of the graph but that does not excuse the lack of a legend. At the top of plate 17, a map of fur production displays a network of heavy black lines (district bounds, perhaps) that are not identified in the legend or the text. The map of "Cleared Land, 1842" on plate 14 is a dot map on which the dots appear in interesting patterns within townships. As in all maps of this type, the number of dots (communicating quantity) and their positions (communicating pattern of distribution) are the key elements. How frustrating to learn from the back notes that the dots have been plotted according to a randomizing program, implying that the positioning of the dots is completely artificial and is not related to any characteristic of the data. However, the most frequent and frustrating experience is encountering maps that feature a spectacular but confusing mass of overlapping graduated circles (the quantitative symbol used most often). Inevitably, the reader is left wondering what can be inferred from such a display, other than an abundance of the particular phenomenon. No atlas as large, as complicated, and as densely packed with data as this one is can be entirely free of glitches and small errors in design and execution, but the problems described above are neither isolated nor unusual; they are representative samples of what too often confronts the map reader who examines the details of the plates and tries to grasp their message.

On a number of plates, the base maps employed to show distributions are colored to distinguish between "settled area" and presumably empty land. The term

"settled area" is never defined. It could mean population density above some minimum level. A comparison with the dot maps of population distribution reveals a very close correlation between the distribution of people recorded in the censuses and the settled areas, although the 1851 "settled area" south of Dalhousie and Chaleur Bay is much larger than it is for later censuses and is larger than appears warranted by the population distribution map for 1851. Plate 5 implies that all land used by Indians in 1891 lies outside the settled areas, and that "settled area" means territory occupied by people of European background. The Indian reserves fall in the non-settled area. Perhaps by 1891 there no longer were any Indian settlements, and perhaps the key really is population density, but whatever the standard is, it should be made clear to the reader. This is more than a matter of vogueish political correctness, for it speaks the editors' fundamental conceptions of the nature of Indian culture and of the subject matter of the atlas. It may be one of the issues of interpretation that later researchers will dig out of this "research quarry reflecting contemporary views."

How easy or difficult is it for a reader to find the information and insights that the authors and editors have poured into this book? That is a question that must be asked of every reference work. For example, can a reader quickly and easily find a long lost fur trading post or military garrison in this atlas? Trading posts and garrisons are mapped here, but, without an index, the answer is: no, it will require time and effort. Of course, anyone trying to compile an index would be frustrated by the floating maps and text because they bear no coordinate system with which to make references. What about plain topical research into a subject

like population? Even though several plates are explicitly concerned with demography, information about population is also presented on a number of plates concerned with other subjects. The table of contents is a good one, but it is not meant to function as anything except a table of contents, and having to search it for the titles of maps and graphs on population is an unattractive chore. By the standard of accessibility, this atlas fails, and that may discourage readership.

Hundreds of talented, accomplished, and dedicated people, some of whom labored at this project for nearly two decades, did a marvelous job of gathering a treasure of historical knowledge and insight, and then they put it almost out of reach by casting it in a barely accessible form. Had more attention been paid to making the information highly accessible and to assuring clarity in the maps and text, this second volume of the *Historical Atlas of Canada* would have been the exemplary contribution its makers strove to achieve. □

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Atlas of the Pacific Northwest, 8th ed.
Philip L. Jackson and A. Jon Kimerling, editors. Corvallis, Oregon: Oregon State University Press, 1993. 152 pp., maps, diagrams, tables, photographs. \$32.95 cloth (ISBN 0-87071-416-3). \$19.95 paper (ISBN 0-87071-415-5).

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This regional atlas of the Pacific Northwest was first produced in 1953 and new editions have been published every four to eight years