

**Donald Kerr and Deryck W. Holdsworth, eds.,
*Historical Atlas of Canada (Volume 3):
Addressing the Twentieth Century, 1891–1961***

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In his best epigrammatic style, Stephen Leacock once attempted to encapsulate the essence of the Canadian experience: "What the English feel about the Armada and the Scottish about Bannockburn, the Canadian, consciously or not, feels about the vast geography of Canada." Mackenzie King, Northrop Frye, and Margaret Atwood would have approved!

From this perspective, Canadian history may be regarded as a litany of attempts at exploring, domesticating, and integrating this great continental extent. The most fundamental task, however, has been the struggle to comprehend its vastness and complexity and geographers have exercised their skills in interpreting space and place by rendering Canada in accessible and convenient maps and atlases.

Thus, since 1906, five editions of *The National Atlas of Canada* (1906, 1915, 1957, 1974, 1985) have given good service and the three-volume *Historical Atlas of Canada* is the most recent contribution to this genre. Volume 1, entitled *From the Beginning to 1800*, appeared in 1987 and was received with considerable acclaim by scholars and public alike. Volume 2 dealing with the nineteenth century will be the next to appear. It has been preceded by Volume 3, *Addressing the Twentieth Century*, which seeks to apply the "vividness of imagery" to the interpretation of Canada's political, economic and social development in the 1891–1961 period.

An interdisciplinary effort, the atlas calls upon the expertise of a team of some 150 researchers from several disciplines: archaeologists, cartographers, demographers, economists, ethnologists, geographers, geologists, historians and sociologists all contributed to this story of Canada's journey into the twentieth century. The editorial team of Donald Kerr, Deryck Holdsworth, Susan Laskin, and Geoffrey Matthews ensured that this story is well told through the device of maps and that they were

efficient tools of communication as well as aesthetically pleasing.

Some may question the periodization of the study. Does 1891, the closest census year to 1886's symbolic "Last Spike," mark the swing into the twentieth century? Should it have been 1911, the closest census year to the world-changing 1914–18 war? Would 1971 have been a better closure than 1961 to allow reference to harbingers of current issues: the "new" waves of immigrants; the new manifestations of the old problems with Quebec; and new initiatives in national and continental economic arrangements. But such carping aside, the *Atlas* does speak to its own rationale.

Thus, the volume opens with a four-plate introductory "Overview" that establishes the baseline of 1891, describes the territorial evolution of the state, its economic development, and changing demographic composition over the seven decades of the volume's study period. Following this, the volume is then organized into two periods: "The Great Transformation, 1891–1929" and "Crisis and Response, 1929–1961."

The "Great Transformation" advances the thesis that the years 1891–1929 witnessed profound quantitative and qualitative changes in Canadian society. Six plates examine "National Economic Patterns" in terms of primary production, transport, manufacturing, corporate structure, and the emerging urban system. Sixteen plates direct attention to the "Regional Dimensions of the Production System" with detailed treatment of the economy of Canada's several distinct rural and urban component parts. Another 13 plates address dimensions of "Canadian Society During the Great Transformation" by analysing demographic patterns, health and education, religion and recreation, and the world of the workplace.

Part 2, "Crisis and Response," opens with seven plates treating the first crisis, "The Great Depression." The major indicators of the economic collapse are graphically displayed. So are the human dimensions of the experience: relief initiatives, "back-to-the-land" colonization schemes, deportations, strikes and new ideological initiatives are all represented in an

imaginative array of visual devices. The second crisis and response, "The Second World War and the Post-War Period," is treated by 21 plates exploring significant changes in "Canada's relationship with the outside world, in the role of government, in the nature of the economy and society, and in Canadians' sense of themselves."

But what is a *plate* and what is on it? Some 66 themes are addressed by a two-page layout, or plate. While thematic maps dominate and display salient points of information in cartographic form, there are also graphs, diagrams, bar-charts, illustrations, and an accompanying explanatory text. Each plate, therefore, is a collage of devices to render an array of information pertinent to its theme.

For example, in Plate 47, "Military Activity in the Second World War," the dominant element is a map entitled "Canadian Forces in Europe and the North Atlantic" and it is full of information: operational bases along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts; exact locations of U-boat, RCN, and merchant marine losses; allied air coverage; convoy routes; and Canadian military activity in North Africa, Italy, and northern Europe. Other insets address such topics as military mobilization, enlistment of women, and wartime fatalities. There is even a reproduction of a painting, "Ill-fated Trio," which captures the ambience of the North Atlantic theatre of war.

Other plates are equally encyclopedic and imaginative. Prosaic graphs of "Farms with Tractors" are matched by maps of more esoteric topics such as "The Origins of Volunteers in the Spanish Civil War." And it is not all maps and graphs. Vignettes are used to illustrate "Bukovynian," "Galician," and Eaton plan-book prairie house styles, east coast fishing vessels, and Montreal streetscapes.

For students of material culture, perhaps the salient features of this cartographic extravaganza are scale, focus, and interpretation. In each plate, the analysis proceeds from the national scale to the local to relate generalizations to the regional particular. Further, while

several plates provide the fundamental socio-economic warp and woof of this Canadian tapestry, others serve to highlight national and regional perspectives on such fundamental issues as class, gender, ethnicity, and regionalism. Finally, this is not an exercise in single variable mapping: the emphasis is upon the interpretation and imaginative display of the complex expressions of Canadian development during the 1891-1961 period.

But if this explains what is in the volume, perhaps certain recent developments in Canada may serve as prompts to check its value as a rear window on issues of current concern. After the Free Trade Agreement, is there sufficient treatment of Canada's changing views of continentalism versus independence? After Meech Lake, do the plates direct sufficient attention to the all-pervasive conflict between regionalism and centralism? After Oka, is sufficient attention directed to the presence of native peoples within the Canadian polity? After Kuwait, is sufficient attention paid to Canada's changing role in international affairs? And in the light of Canada's new immigration policy, is sufficient attention paid to exploring the complexities of this sensitive process in Canadian society?

The Historical Atlas of Canada is an ambitious project. Indeed, Wm. G. Dean, one of the prime movers, expects much of it:

Through its vivid visual presentation of past events in the lives of ordinary Canadians the Atlas demonstrates new insights into our past while establishing new thinking in Canadian history as well as an abundance of subjects for further research. Our profound hope is that at the same time the Atlas will make a significant contribution to Canadians' understanding of one another and hence to their knowledge about and pride in Canada.

Who could fault such objectives? And if the *Atlas* goes only part way to achieving them, it is a worthwhile enterprise. Indeed, it will be of value to all who are interested in the ongoing saga of Canadian national development.