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The Golden Age of Canadian National Historiography

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Reviews/Revues

The Golden Age of Canadian National Historiography

The generation of English-Canadian historians who began their research and writing in the inter-war years have made a notable contribution to the intellectual life of Canada. Inspired by the achievements of Canadian soldiers in World War I and committed to the movement for Canadian autonomy, these younger historians — most of them educated as undergraduates in Canadian universities in the heady days of a rising Canadian consciousness — were anxious to express their national pride by studying their own nation's history. Collectively their greatest impact was to make Canadian history — prior to World War I usually taught as an adjunct of British imperial history — a respectable subject of study. In many cases, they were the first to teach courses in Canadian history in Canadian universities, although, ironically, they often came to the subject either as a second choice or after having been trained in another discipline. Perhaps their conversion to the subject helps to explain their passion for it. Whatever their motive for entering the field, they affirmed the autonomy and legitimacy of Canadian history in the social sciences.

Yet they were more than Canadian historians. They were Canadian nationalists, obsessed with the desire to make Canadians conscious of themselves as a nation with a legitimate history of their own. A. R. M. Lower, for example, always had as his purpose to make Canadians conscious of their identity. In two interesting articles in *History and Myth: Arthur Lower and the Making of Canadian Nationalism* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1975), edited by Welf H. Heick, Lower recently proclaimed that history is myth, and the historian a myth-maker. A myth is not a false story, but "that which is generally believed to be true" (p. 1). "The myth gives colouring and force to the group's conception of its own destiny [which in turn] is expanded by its consciousness of itself and by its experience. Consciousness of self and experience we call history" (p. 3). Thus good history should enable a people to become aware of themselves in relation to their development in time and place. *Colony to Nation*, first published in 1946, was chiefly an essay in Canadian self-definition and self-revelation and he intended it to be so. Unlike most textbooks in Canadian history, his was evocative, opinionated and didactic in order to teach Canadians about themselves. According to Lower, two problems impeded the development of a national consciousness. The one was the failure of English Canadians and French Canadians to understand and accept one another, a theme Lower first presented in his Canadian Historical Association presidential address in 1943.[1] Canada's other impediment was her colonial mentality. Lower's

1 A. R. M. Lower, "Two Ways of Life: The Primary Antithesis of Canadian History", Canadian Historical Association *Report* (1943), pp. 5 - 18.

desire was to free Canada from its restricting position in the Empire-Commonwealth and thus to allow it to reach full maturity as a nation-state — to evolve from colony to nation. In "The Character and Spirit of an Age: A Study of the Thought of Arthur R. M. Lower", an article in *His Own Man: Essays in Honour of Arthur Reginald Marsden Lower* (Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1974), edited by W. H. Heick and Roger Graham, Welf Heick has argued that these two themes of antithesis (French Canadians and English Canadians) and maturation (colony to nation) are the underlying concerns in Lower's writings.

Lower also believed that since history is self-awareness, the historian must be more than the dispenser of knowledge about the past. Self-awareness is not the idle accumulation of knowledge left to vegetate in one's mind, but the beginning of positive action, and Arthur Lower was as much the political activist and educator as he was the scholarly historian. In her article in Lower's *festschrift,* "A. R. M. Lower: the Professor and 'Relevance'," Professor Margaret Prang has recalled how Lower's history seminars at United College, Winnipeg, exuded "relevance" without any conscious effort on his part; he was "both a good historian and a man thoroughly involved in his times" (p. 13). Lower's *festschrift* examines in various ways his contribution to Canadian history and provides us with a useful list of his publications, but his enormous contribution to civil liberties in Canada is left unexamined. Lower's passion for British liberty was the basis for his study, *This Most Famous Stream: The Liberal Democratic Way of Life* (Toronto, Ryerson Press, 1954), which, though not the finest of his writings, formed the pinnacle of his thought. Lower believed that true freedom is not license but an understanding and acceptance of one's position. Thus self-consciousness is an awareness of one's limitations, a knowledge of the bounds in which freedom can be measured. Lower's studies in Canadian history were an attempt to make Canadians aware of the limitations in their past, so that they might transcend them in the future. In an interview with Ramsay Cook, Lower once remarked: "We're looking into the future almost certainly, and I would imagine that Canadian historians have found their strength in that very exercise".[2]

Frank H. Underhill, a contemporary of Lower's, was strikingly similar in interest and outlook. Underhill was very much the iconoclast or debunker who delighted in challenging his fellow historians to justify their activities. Like Lower, Underhill was a liberal with a deep respect for the freedom of the individual, and a political activist who saw history as a vehicle to an understanding of the present. But Underhill never went beyond the role of debunker or critic to produce a major historical study. He was working

2 Eleanor Cook, ed., *The Craft of History* (Toronto, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1973), p. 38.

sporadically on a biography of the Liberal politician, Edward Blake, but he failed to complete even a first draft. This failure has led some historians to deny that Underhill was an historian at all. Carl Berger describes him as "a political journalist, a popularizer of others' ideas" and concludes that Underhill's involvement in current activities and his journalistic writings "seduced [him] away from more permanent writing."[3] Yet Lower's involvement in current controversies did not prevent him from producing scholarly monographs.

W. L. Morton finds the reason for Underhill's failure in his temperament. A writer requires, according to Morton, "a sense of coherence, a capacity to see, or even devise relationships among at first sight incoherent data." Underhill lacked these qualities; his mind thrived on fragmentation rather than coherence.[4] A more convincing explanation for Underhill's failure lies in his view of history and the role of the historian. Underhill believed that good history should contain irony, the ability to reveal that things turn out differently than expected, that ideals are not necessarily in congruence with reality.[5] A good historian is one who can strip the veneer concealing reality and expose the truth to others. The historian must be a debunker or critic. He must also be able to see the past from the vantage point of the present, because only from the present can one know the consequences of the past. Thus the historian is interested only in the *essence* of the past, and its *relevance* for the present. There is no desire to get into the mind of a previous age or to understand and appreciate its intricacies, richness and complex causal relationships. The historian should *judge* the past rather than *understand* it. It was this view of history which discouraged Underhill from doing scholarly and detailed examinations of past eras.

But to dwell on the negative is to overlook the positive achievements that Underhill made to the study of Canadian history. He was the "watch-dog" of the profession, hectoring and lecturing his colleagues upon what they failed to do (much to their annoyance). More the critic than the creative writer, he gave ideas to other historians to pursue. In his historical essays, a selection of which can be found in *In Search of Canadian Liberalism* (Toronto, 1960), recently republished by Macmillan, Underhill formulated many of the

3 Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing: 1900 - 1970* (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 55, 201. See also Kenneth McNaught, "Frank Underhill: A Personal Interpretation", *Queen's Quarterly,* LXXIX (Summer, 1972), pp. 127 - 35.

4 W. L. Morton, "Some Thoughts on Understanding Canadian History", *Acadiensis,* II (Spring, 1973), p. 101.

5 See, for example, "History as Tragedy", review of *Russia and the West Under Lenin and Stalin* by G. F. Kennan, in the *Canadian Forum,* XLI (February, 1962), pp. 252 - 3.

ideas on imperialism, nationalism, liberalism and conservatism which formed the basis for later studies. While Underhill borrowed most of these ideas uncritically from his wide reading in American and British history, he did assist in keeping Canadian historians aware of new areas of study and new approaches to their material. In particular, he applied the Turner thesis and Charles Beard's economic analysis to Canadian political parties and protest movements.

A detailed discussion of Underhill's contribution to Canadian history is available in my doctoral thesis.[6] Margaret Prang has also done a valuable study, "F.H.U. of *The Canadian Forum*", one of the bright spots in an otherwise disappointing *festschrift, On Canada: Essays in Honour of Frank H. Underhill* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1971), edited by Norman Penlington. The sketch of Underhill's life in the preface is superficial and in spots inaccurate because Underhill's personal papers were unavailable at the time. None of the articles evaluate Underhill's impact as an intellectual gadfly, nor do any attempt to synthesize his ideas. Professor Prang was the only one of Underhill's students to contribute an article, which is regrettable since Underhill was above all the teacher. Even those essays included do not reflect Underhill's personal interest in Canadian politicians, political parties and political ideas. By far the best feature of the book is the extensive bibliography of Underhill's writings which comprises some sixty pages. This alone reflects the breadth of Underhill's interests and the extent of his knowledge and stands as a tribute to his greatness as an educator of the Canadian public conscience, his major contribution as a Canadian historian.

Donald Creighton, laureate professor of Canadian history, has made a very different contribution to Canadian history. In his epic study, *The Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence* (Toronto, Ryerson Press, 1937), Creighton first developed the Laurentian thesis. The theme was not a novel one — the ideas had come from his adviser and friend, Harold A. Innis — but Creighton's presentation was. In his dramatic style, Creighton weaved together geography and history to present an artistic recreation of Canada's formative years in British North America. *The Empire of the St. Lawrence* was followed by Creighton's two-volume study of Macdonald, a seminal work not only in the evolution of Creighton's ideas, but also in the writing of Canadian history. Besides presenting a sympathetic account of its main protagonist, so long abused by whig historians, Creighton's study inspired a new generation of Canadians to write historical biographies. And while many of the new historians may not have taken *John A. Macdonald* (2 vols., Toronto, Macmillan, 1952, 1955) as their model, they did attempt a similar

6 R. Douglas Francis, "Frank Underhill: Canadian Intellectual" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, York University, 1975).

approach to the subject and were concerned with the life of the individual as well as with his ideas, and with his foibles as well as his strengths.

Creighton's approach to history has been a subject of considerable interest to Canadian historians. In his personal reflections in "History and Literature", published in *Towards the Discovery of Canada* (Toronto, Macmillan, 1972), Creighton has argued that good history must have good literary form. Like the novelist, the historian must elucidate characters and recreate circumstances. Such an approach requires a sensitive awareness of time, an immersion into the mind of another era, and a discovery of themes that underlie the material and give design to it. Carl Berger classifies Creighton as a romantic historian and sees the distinguishing feature of his biography of Macdonald as his ability to describe "an entire age and its political history" through Macdonald's own eyes.[7] For Creighton, historical figures took on monumental importance in the same way that characters do in a novel.

Creighton's writings resemble literature in more than just style. His studies can be divided into a three-part play. Part one, the creation of British North America as a distinct entity on the North American continent, was examined in *The Empire of the St. Lawrence.* Part two, the birth of Canada as a great nation state, confident and assertive yet conscious and appreciative of its historical roots in Europe, was described with all its richness and majestic greatness in his biography of Macdonald. The third act, the decline and fall of the Empire of the St Lawrence after the First World War, was told in *Canada's First Century* (Toronto, Macmillan, 1970). Creighton was at his best in recounting acts one and two, where he set the stage, introduced the heroes, and built the plot. He was at home in the era of nation building and he was able to enter the mind of John A. Macdonald. Yet, having so aptly described the rise of Canada, Creighton was compelled, in the twilight of his own career, to describe its decline and fall. The result is bitterness, and a condemnation rather than an understanding of the age. He had no desire to appreciate the opaque and pudgy William Lyon Mackenzie King as he had the lean and stately John A. Macdonald, and thus he could give only a surface history of Canada since 1921.

Creighton's collection of essays, *Towards the Discovery of Canada,* is a convenient catalogue of his themes and opinions. But to read them exclusive of his larger works would give a distorted view of his skill as a writer of Canadian history. These essays do not reveal Creighton's dynamic style — his organizational ability, his crescendoes to climactic events, his sensitivity to character and circumstance, and his microscopic detail set within telescopic themes. Moreover, these essays, many of which were written after 1960, reveal too much of the embittered Creighton. This was the era of

7 Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History,* p. 223.

Creighton's lament for the decline of Canada; it is also the era of French-Canadian nationalism, Americanization and the defeat of conservatism. A more fitting tribute to Creighton is his *festschrift*, appropriately entitled *Character and Circumstance: Essays in Honour of Donald Grant Creighton* (Toronto, Macmillan, 1970). John Gray recalls his long association with Creighton; John Moir, the editor of the *festschrift*, sketches Creighton's life; J. M. S. Careless analyzes Creighton's writings; P. B. Waite offers his own reflections on the historical craft; and the book contains a bibliography of Creighton's academic publications.

Closely associated with Creighton in recent years has been W. L. Morton, whose writings have ranged from the local to the national scene. Morton has argued that the key to good historical writing is experience. To know something well, one has to experience it. Experiences are of two kinds: immediate and intellectual.[8] An immediate experience is physical and sensual, and tends to lack the objectivity necessary for historical truth. An intellectual experience comes from reading about the thoughts and activities of others, and is too impersonal unless incorporated into one's own frame of reference. History is a fusion of the immediate and the intellectual experience.

Morton's immediate experience was Western Canada — more precisely a rural, agricultural West. He had grown up in the countryside and "worked the land". He had tasted, seen, smelt and felt rural prairie life. The land was part of his being which coloured his view of the region and even of the world outside. In a real sense, he never got beyond the immediate experience of his boyhood days, and it was natural that his first study should be of his own immediate and familiar locality of Gladstone, Manitoba, where he grew up as an impressionable youth. But the Gladstone he described was more than a parochial community; it was a canvas upon which wider forces and international currents could be seen in microscopic form. "A great heritage had been brought in and transplanted with singularly little loss", he concluded, "the church sprung from a far different Palestine, local government going back to Robert Baldwin's Ontario, and the New England townships and beyond the seas to Norman and Saxon times; and self-government as the English-speaking people had developed it over the centuries and in new lands".[9] In the particular, the general could be discovered. The immediate contained all; it held the seeds to universal understanding and truth. No study was too small to bear fruit, so long as it was set in a general framework. On this basis, Morton justified his study of local and regional history, claiming

8 W. L. Morton, "Seeing an Unliterary Landscape", *Mosaic*, 111 (Spring, 1970), pp. 1 - 10.

9 Margaret Morton Fahrni and W. L. Morton, *Third Crossing: A History of the First Quarter Century of the Town and District of Gladstone in the Province of Manitoba* (Winnipeg, Advocate Printers Limited, 1946), p. 55.

that it was "defensible in its own right as a study of national, or even world history".[10]

In his study of the West, Morton was chiefly concerned with the image Westerners had of themselves. Did their intellectual landscape bear the noble imprint that their physical landscape implanted on their mind? Regrettably not. Westerners had an inferiority complex, seeing themselves as colonial, subordinate, and peripheral in the history of the nation. Morton believed that "the West was a region of political and material differences sufficiently significant to give it the character of a sub-society", and he wanted to help Westerners to create a new self-image of a region equal to the nation and not merely a part of it. The West had to "free itself, and find itself".[11] Self-discovery was his goal as a Western Canadian historian and his purpose in writing *Manitoba: A History* (2nd ed., Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1967), a "general history of Manitoba for Manitobans" (p. vi), a history that "informs and shapes our minds" (p. viii). *Manitoba* was Morton's finest work, in which he weaved a picture of his native people which is germane, sincere and sensitive. The Manitoba he described was the one he knew so well from personal experience — agricultural and rural — and if any criticism can be levelled at the book, it was Morton's failure to deal adequately with urban Manitoba. A similar criticism could be made of his study, *The Progressive Party in Canada* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1950). Morton saw the Progressive movement as an expression of rural protest against the increasing urban dominance of Canadian society and did a splendid job of discussing the evolution of this rural protest in conjunction with other Western protest movements such as prohibition, female suffrage and the democratization of politics. But he overlooked the impact of the urban centres in Western Canada on the development of Western protest.

These works on the West were stepping stones to Morton's interest in the nation. Consistent with his argument that the region was of national importance, his next ambition was to explain Canadians to themselves. *The Canadian Identity* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1961) and his textbook, *The Kingdom of Canada* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1963), were attempts to help Canada to achieve a "self-definition of greater clarity and more ringing tone than it has yet done". Morton argued that Canadians had a common experience upon which an image of the country could be based. That experience was the land. Morton dismissed the thought of two histories of Canada, or two ways of life: there was but one, "one common response to

10 Morton, "Some Thoughts on Understanding Canadian History", p. 107.

11 W. L. Morton, "The Bias of Prairie Politics", Royal Society of Canada, *Transactions,* Series III, XLIX (June, 1955), p. 66; "Clio in Canada: The Interpretation of Canadian History", *University of Toronto Quarterly,* XV (April, 1946), p. 232.

land and history expressed in many strong variants of the one, it is true, but still one in central substance".[12] Morton's writings on Canada do not yield the insights of his *Manitoba.* This, of course, simply vindicates his view of history: good history comes out of an immediate experience. He could grasp Manitoba, because it was manageable and familiar. The task became too great, almost gargantuan, on a national scale, especially in a nation as divided geographically and ethnically as Canada. To have the intuitive insights, extensive knowledge and immediate experience of the country that he commanded of Manitoba was too much to hope for. The result was an image of Canada which told Canadians more about Morton and his Manitoba than it did about themselves. It was a Canada which was Manitoba writ large: rural, agricultural, and pluralistic.

In Morton's *festschrift, The West and the Nation: Essays in Honour of W. L. Morton* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1976), edited by Carl Berger and Ramsay Cook, Carl Berger systematically discusses each of Morton's major works. But most of the articles deal with topics in Western Canadian history. Frits Pannekoek discusses "social life" in the Red River community, Arthur Silver traces the French-Canadian response to Louis Riel between the first and second rebellions, Richard Allen presents a convincing case for the alliance of agrarian protest and the social gospel, Ramsay Cook offers a fascinating account of the ideas of the Christian social reformer and suffragist, Francis Marion Beynon, and Donald Avery and J. E. Rae have splendid essays on key issues in the social life of Winnipeg. On the whole, the *festschrift* is a fine tribute to Morton. The one disappointment is a decision by the publishers to exclude a bibliography of Morton's writings due to the limitations of space.

While Lower, Underhill, Creighton and Morton tower above the other Canadian historians of their generation, lesser known figures have also begun to receive their proper recognition. There has been a *festschrift* dedicated to Canada's foremost military historian, C. P. Stacey,[13] and L. H. Thomas has produced an intellectual biography of A. L. Burt, *The Renaissance of Canadian History: A Biography of A. L. Burt* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1975). Burt, Thomas notes, "was not the founder of a school of historical interpretation, but he was a key figure in the renaissance period of Canadian historical scholarship which spans the second and third decades of the twentieth century" (p. xiii). Burt's painstaking examination of the archival material on the years after the Conquest of 1760 led to the publication of two scholarly and significant books on the period: *The Old Province of Quebec* in 1933 and *The United States, Great Britain and British*

12 W. L. Morton, *The Canadian Identity,* pp. vii, 89.

13 Michael Cross and Robert Bothwell, eds., *Policy by Other Means: Essays in Honour of C. P. Stacey* (Toronto, Clarke, Irwin and Company, 1972).

North America in 1940. Yet the main focus of Thomas' biography is not on Burt's research and writing but on his personal activities in the Canadian army during World War I, as a teacher at the University of Alberta and the University of Minnesota, and as a commentator on current events. The explanation for this is simple: Thomas' study is based almost exclusively on an extensive collection of letters that Burt wrote faithfully to his family while away from home. These letters offer fascinating insights into certain issues, events, and individuals of interest to Burt in his daily activities. Especially revealing are Burt's description of the founding of a national school of historians at the Public Archives in the 1920s. But while few would dispute the importance of the information in these letters, one might question Professor Thomas' use of them. At times his book becomes a string of lengthy quotations from Burt with little or no analysis. The quotations take over and Thomas jumps from topic to topic according to what Burt happened to be discussing at that particular moment. In his chapter on Burt in London, Thomas manages to slide from a discussion of postwar problems to Christianity to the Paris Peace Treaty within the confines of two pages without any attempt to connect these topics. The shift appears to be simply the result of a few thoughts that Burt had on these random subjects in his correspondence.

Carl Berger has made the most significant contribution to Canadian historiography in *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing, 1900 - 1970* (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1976). Since Berger is particularly interested in historians who "broke the traditional patterns of interpretation" (p. ix), the focus is on the major figures — George Wrong, Adam Shortt, Harold Innis, Frank Underhill, Arthur Lower, Donald Creighton and William Morton — and the book is devoted to an analysis of their ideas in an effort "to explain the attitudes historians brought to the study of the past . . ." (p. ix). Berger places considerable emphasis on the intellectual milieu in which the historian lived and developed his ideas.

Such an approach is both the main strength and the major weakness of the book. Berger has indeed given the reader considerable insight into the lives of these historians and has systematically charted the evolution of their ideas to explain why the historian adopted a particular idea and its significance in the development of Canadian historiography. But while his study is currently unsurpassed as an intensive analysis of the contribution of these major historians to Canadian history, the chief weakness of the book is Berger's obsession with biography. At times, he loses sight of his central purpose, which is the study of historiography. The life of the individual historians is often discussed independently of the impact that events had on the historian's view of history. For example, the chapter on Frank Underhill has a lengthy section on his threatened dismissal from the University of Toronto, which, though interesting, reveals little about Underhill the historian. The same is true of the chapter on Arthur Lower, where considerable space is

devoted to Lower's isolationist views with a meagre attempt to show their relevance to his historical writings.

The biographical approach has another weakness. Too much emphasis is placed on childhood and adolescent experience as derivative influences. The implication, that the historian's ideas were moulded before he came to write and study history, de-emphasizes the impact that the subject itself had upon the historian's approach. Biography alone cannot explain, for example, why Lower was the only English-Canadian historian to write an autobiography, why Underhill never wrote a major study in Canadian history, or why Creighton was so interested in the writing of biography. The answer to these questions must be sought, not merely in the historian's life, but in his views of the subject. While none of these historians wrote major treatises on the philosophy of history, all of them reflected to some degree upon the nature of the historian's craft and these speculative essays are either overlooked or minimized in Berger's analysis. What is also evident is Berger's own bias. He is at his best in his analysis of Harold Innis and Donald Creighton, and, to a degree, William Morton, but disappointing in his discussion of Frank Underhill and Arthur Lower. An explanation for this difference may simply be the failure of the latter two historians (and especially Underhill) to write "pure" history for Berger to analyze. A more plausible explanation is Berger's definite opinions on the role of the historian in society. This is a major theme in his book, and he clearly sides with Innis and Creighton, who claimed that the academic should be a detached and scholarly individual (although they did not always follow their own advice) against Lower and Underhill, who believed that good academics should debate relevant contemporary issues and be involved in current controversies.

The greatest contribution of this generation of historians was the moral lessons that they extracted from their historical studies. History had a purpose beyond telling us about a past age. It was a vehicle to educate Canadians to present problems, be it Americanization, bilingualism, regionalism or modernity. It is significant that many of Canada's major historians had a strong religious background. In some respects, history became for them a secular substitute for religion or at least an extension of religious beliefs into the secular realm. Lower, for example, believed that he was "called of God to be a historian". And he claimed that part of his fascination for the subject derived from "the mystic quality that hangs over time past".[14] Underhill formally denounced institutional religion, but his writings have a moral fervor to them befitting his early Presbyterian education. Innis was raised a devout Baptist, and this clearly gave him conviction and purpose. Creighton used religious terminology to attack the Liberal Interpretation of Canadian history, objecting not so much to the moral nature of this version of Canadian history

14 Lower, "Foreward", to *History and Myth,* pp. xi, xii.

as to the fact that too many Canadian historians had joined the wrong "faith". Morton was a strong practising Anglican whose religious views permeated his writings. These national historians defended their ideas with the fervor of a religious zealot. Their convictions about Canada were elevated to religious truths — to be defended at all cost.

This group saw the struggle for the survival of Canada as a mission and themselves as the missionaries who went forth to teach the ignorant, and to carve out a Canadian "civilization" in the wilderness. History for them had a moral purpose, even a "sense of power". They discovered Canada's greatness in her past. In this respect, they were in the national tradition of Carl Berger's late nineteenth-century Canadian imperialists and it is fitting that his second book should deal with these "new Canadian moralists". What is surprising is that he does not deal with the moral nature of their writings, since their greatest contribution was their moral and spiritual revelations about Canadians. Nonetheless, thanks to Berger's study, these historians will receive even more attention. Hopefully, Lower, Creighton and Morton will be the subjects of full-scale biographies and we will see a synthetic treatment of various historiographical themes such as messianism, idealism, nationalism and liberalism, themes which will help us to understand this golden era in Canadian national historiography.

R. DOUGLAS FRANCIS

The 'New History' Has Arrived

For a decade faculty clubs and graduate lounges have buzzed with talk of the coming renaissance of Canadian historiography, the "new history" which would give the discipline the bite and excitement it has lacked since the golden age of the 1930s. It has been a long decade, as the results of the new history stubbornly refused to materialize. But now, in Michael Katz's book, *The People of Hamilton, Canada West: Family and Class in a Mid-Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1975), the results are here. And they were worth waiting for.

The broad outlines of Katz's interpretation are familiar enough from his articles and from the working papers of the Canadian Social History Project at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, which he headed from 1967 to 1973. Indeed, the first chapter of this book previously appeared in the *Canadian Historical Review* and the fourth in the *Journal of Social History.* Using data from the censuses and from assessment records, he reconstructs the society of Hamilton between 1851 and 1861. He contends that it was shaped largely by two characteristics: transiency and the rigidity of the social structure. Less than a third of those recorded in the 1851 census could still be found in Hamilton ten years later; this was a society in constant movement.