

## Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW  
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Kloppenborg, Anne; Niwinski, Alice; Johnson, Eve; and Gruetter, Robert, eds. *Vancouver's First Century: A City Album 1860-1960*. Vancouver: J.J. Douglas, 1977. Pp. xx, 154. Illustrations. \$19.95

Patricia E. Roy

Number 1-78, June 1978

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019446ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019446ar>

[See table of contents](#)

### Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

### ISSN

0703-0428 (print)

1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Cite this review

Roy, P. E. (1978). Review of [Kloppenborg, Anne; Niwinski, Alice; Johnson, Eve; and Gruetter, Robert, eds. *Vancouver's First Century: A City Album 1860-1960*. Vancouver: J.J. Douglas, 1977. Pp. xx, 154. Illustrations. \$19.95]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, (1-78), 123–125.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1019446ar>

St. Paul's Anglican Cathedral, St. Peter's Roman Catholic Basilica, First-St. Andrew's Presbyterian (United), Cronyn Memorial Anglican, and Metropolitan Methodist (United); and, finally, the fine Talbot residential district which stands on the bluff above the north branch of the Thames River and includes "Eldon House," the oldest mansion in the city, dating from 1834. Each of the major surviving buildings of these sections is given an historical and architectural description.

In view of the difficulty of obtaining much of the information provided, and the great number of legends, or semi-legends, that are inevitably found when working with local history, the study is remarkably accurate. The photographs have been judiciously selected, although it is to be wished that some of the buildings had been rephotographed, as certain of the older pictures do not reproduce too well. The same cannot be said of the maps drawn by Rob Turner, which are clearly delineated. These maps serve to support one of the most important features of the work, for it is the intention of the author that it be used as a hand-book by those taking walking tours of the four areas under study. These tours are especially adapted for teachers and students, through the mapping out of clearly defined routes and the posing of appropriate questions that further one's knowledge of the architectural merits of many of the older structures of the district, as well as their functional changes over time.

As well as breaking new ground by providing hitherto unknown facts on the history of these areas, and giving us a discussion of their salient architectural features and streetscapes, Lutman very successfully captures the spirit of the times in which the buildings of central London were erected and the vicissitudes through which they have passed as the central core declined. This booklet is a useful addition to both our literature on the history of London and the growing bibliography on historical preservation; it promises well for the future studies of the city, and the Local Conservation Committee is to be encouraged in its work.

Daniel J. Brock  
London, Ontario.

\* \* \*

Kloppenborg, Anne; Niwinski, Alice; Johnson, Eve; and Gruetter, Robert, eds. Vancouver's First Century: A City Album 1860-1960. Vancouver: J.J. Douglas, 1977. Pp. xx, 154. Illustrations. \$19.95.

Vancouver's First Century is essentially an expanded version of five historical issues of the Urban Reader, a magazine produced by the city's Social Planning Department. Although the subtitle, A City Album, is not inappropriate, "A City Scrapbook" would be slightly more accurate since this volume is more than just a collection of five snapshots. The scrapbook model is immediately evident. Apart from dividing their sections chronologically, the editors made little effort to organize

their presentation systematically. The eclectic nature of the arrangement is set off with a rambling introduction by David Brock, a self-proclaimed professional in the "nostalgia trade." In the course of recounting his Vancouver youth, Brock digresses into such subjects as the price of food at the time of Henry VIII and the presence of ravens in Prince Rupert. He is justifiably fearful of "being elected Gassy Jack the Second" (p. xix).

The redeeming qualities of this book are its numerous, usually well-identified, photographs and a lively miscellany of extracts from contemporary descriptions and pioneer recollections. Vancouver's photogenic nature attracted a number of first class photographers and an amazing variety of their work has survived. Some of the pictures are so well known they are trite. Examples include the arrival of the first train in 1887, the broken windows of a Japanese store after the anti-Asiatic riot of 1907, and the small boy running down New Westminster's Eighth Street to say good-bye to his soldier father in 1940. A few of the photographs (and most of the advertisements which decorate some pages) might have been taken almost anywhere. There is little to distinguish an 1890 wedding party, assorted picnics and the interior of a butcher shop as specifically belonging to Vancouver but they do reveal that Vancouver was, in many ways, very much like any other North American city. Many of the illustrations, however, are not well-known and give a fresh and vivid picture of aspects of Vancouver's history. Many photographs (proportionately, too many) clearly demonstrate how long Vancouver was a city on the edge of the wilderness. It is unfortunate that the editors chose to begin their century with 1860 rather than 1870. The 1860s were of little consequence for Burrard Inlet; in the 1960s, the face of downtown Vancouver and the West End changed greatly.

This volume presents a colourful and generally attractive image of the social history of Vancouver. It is not, however, a comprehensive or balanced portrait. There are many illustrations of Vancouverites swimming, boating, hiking, picnicing and watching parades but there is no evidence of other popular outdoor activities such as tennis, golf and skiing. Apart from one photograph each of a lacrosse game and a cricket match there is no suggestion of team sports and none of professional sports. If the Vancouver Canucks ever win the Stanley Cup, they will be the second Vancouver team to do so; the Vancouver Millionaires won it in 1915! A more serious deficiency is the impression conveyed by the City Album that Vancouverites were interested in play, not work. Except for photographs of early logging operations and lumber mills and of the war time industries of shipbuilding and aircraft production, there is little indication of people earning a living by any means other than by providing each other with stores and other services or building commercial structures. There are, for example, no broad overviews of the harbour after the railway came or of such industrial areas as False Creek and the Fraser River. Similarly, the people shown are not really representative. There are good picture of the ostentatious homes of the wealthy; there are dramatic photographs of the unemployed in the 1930s; and there are snippets of written descriptions of the sordid lives of

law breakers such as book makers and drug addicts. But, after 1900 or so, there is little to illustrate the homes of the majority who obeyed the law and who lived modestly but comfortably. There is scant indication of the frenetic real estate boom before World War I or of the rapid filling-in of the city and its nearby suburbs after World War II. Well-selected photographs of South Vancouver about 1912 and again in the mid-1950s would have covered this point nicely and, at the same time, shown the living conditions of many very ordinary Vancouverites and their families.

In selecting these snap shots and vignettes, the editors were clearly conscious of contemporary interest in ethnic groups. Several pictures vividly depict the antipathy Vancouverites, as well as other British Columbians, felt towards Asians; other show that the native Indians were once prominent in the local landscape. From the displays of Union Jacks at celebrations and the crowds who came to see royal visitors (incidentally, the 1939 Royal Tour occurred more than "a few days before the outbreak of World War II") [p. 119], it is possible to deduce that Vancouverites were loyal to Britain. Apart from the Asians and the British, however, there is little indication that other immigrants resided in Vancouver. By including only one photograph of a church, and that from the 1880s, the volume misleadingly suggests that religion played no part in Vancouver life.

Vancouver's First Century, however, was not designed as a comprehensive study for historians but a scrapbook to satisfy nostalgia. In the latter role it succeeds moderately well and will undoubtedly revive many memories among old-timers. With more careful and systematic selection of material, including a judicious pruning of the pre-1900 material and more attention to the post-1945 period, this volume would have had an even greater attractiveness for nostalgia buffs and might have been of some use to urban historians. As it is, a historian who already knows something of Vancouver may find a picture or anecdote to illustrate a point but Vancouver's First Century, by itself, will not help anyone to understand the city better.

Patricia E. Roy  
Department of History  
University of Victoria.

\* \* \*

Hayward, Robert J. Fire Insurance Plans in the National Map Collection/ Plan d'Assurance-Incendie de la Collection Nationale de Cartes et Plans. Ottawa: National Map Collection, Public Archives of Canada, 1977/Ottawa: Collection Nationale de Cartes et Plans, Archives Publiques Canada, 1977. Pp. xxvi, 171. Free.

The National Map Collection has produced another valuable catalogue to a very important cartographic collection. Anyone interested in any aspect