

In the Shadow of Detroit: Gordon M. McGregor, Ford of Canada and Motoropolis By David Roberts

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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Canada as a whole, and partly due to his previous research, published as *A History of Agricultural Societies and Fairs in Ontario, 1792-1992*. About six hundred fairs were thriving in Canada in 2003. Ontario had 230, while Alberta was a distant second with seventy-four. Quebec was sixth with just thirty-four. Fairs are still living entities in Canada, not elements of olden times consigned to a history book.

Stylistically, Scott's short sentences beget a staccato tempo that could have been modified by linking them via prepositions. Surprisingly, many quotations are unattributed, anecdotes related without source, and images undated. Whoever thought to photograph the pyramids of E.B. Eddy Company toilet paper rolls, and where? (p. 124) Would I be correct in guessing it was in the 1890s? Some facts are contradictory, even on the same page. We read that the world's biggest pumpkin weighed 1,385 lb., or maybe 1,018 lb. (p. 140) Most egregiously, the endnotes have several omissions and mistakes. The bibliography is good, but Scott fails to cite the archives and old newspapers he mentions

in his acknowledgements, making many points difficult to pursue for further research. I would love to know which fair's archives hold entries for an essay contest entitled "Requirements of a good farmer's wife." Curiously, Scott does not seem to have explored settlers' accounts for references to fairs. As usual the index is merely adequate: many photographs are not cited, for instance, which is a shame because they are the true gold of this handsome book.

In his conclusion, Scott apologizes for not doing his topic justice, but his self-effacement is unnecessary. *Country Fairs in Canada* is a lively and evocative meander through a snippet of Canadiana.

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In the Shadow of Detroit:

Gordon M. McGregor, Ford of Canada and Motoropolis

By David Roberts. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006. 326 pages. Illustrations. \$US 34.95 hardcover. ISBN 0-8143-3284-6

More than any other single vehicle, the Model T Ford (1908-27) had a pivotal role in putting Canada on wheels. By the end of 1921, over 300,000 of these vehicles had been built in Canada, one third of them exported. Beginning in a small and failing wagon works on the edge of Walkerville and protected by a

thirty-five per cent duty on finished vehicles, the Ford Motor Company of Canada Ltd. had become the largest enterprise in the Border Cities and one of the largest motor works outside the United States. Nearly forty per cent of the local workforce was employed in the plant which could manufacture 60,000 vehicles annually. The gleaming reinforced concrete buildings on the riverside were a testimony to the success of contemporary Ford methods: a standardized product, volume production, a well-disciplined labour

force, and extensive marketing, supported by widespread distribution and service facilities.

Gordon M. McGregor (1873-1922) had initiated this organization with an early type of franchise agreement in 1904, which gave the independent company full rights to Ford patents and vehicles, not only in Canada but also throughout the British Empire. Rights to the British Isles were waived in 1909. The anomalous relationship of Ford Canada to the

US corporation lasted until 1995, when the remaining minority shareholders were bought out. McGregor's role as secretary and general manager gave him ample scope to promote the company and to develop a network of branches and dealers across Canada and overseas. Although clearly one of Henry Ford's important and loyal lieutenants, he has never been properly recognized in the multitude of books on the Ford company.

David Roberts, an editor with the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, has now rectified this omission in the Ford historiography. He presents a very effective portrait of McGregor and his relationships with the enigmatic and erratic Henry Ford, as well as with other key figures such as Chatham-born James Couzens and the Englishman Percival Perry who



developed the Ford subsidiary in Britain.

With deep family roots in the Windsor area, McGregor was an active participant in the rapid growth of Motoropolis (a term coined in 1918). As an industrialist and business promoter, he contributed to the urban real estate boom which expanded the existing City of Windsor and Town of Walkerville and resulted in a new wave of suburban incorporations: Ford City (1912), Ojibway

(1913) and Riverside (1921). Unprecedented and unplanned growth quickly led to problems with the supporting infrastructure, and McGregor served as the first chairman of the Essex Border Utilities Commission from its formation in 1916.

This is an important book, covering a key period in the transformation of southwestern Ontario. It is well written, carefully researched, and a model of documentation. While recognizing the editorial biases, Roberts uses the columns of the *Evening Record/Border Cities Star* very effectively to create a lively picture of Gordon McGregor in the contexts of the early automotive industry and the Windsor region.

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