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Book Review: Concise Historical Atlas of Canada

Jason Gilliland

McGill University

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predicted by Lewis is uncertain. What is not uncertain is that those future explo-
rations will be grounded in the very solid work of the present, as represented by
this intriguing and valuable collection of essays.

—John L. Allen
University of Connecticut

Concise Historical Atlas of Canada. By WILLIAM G. DEAN, CONRAD HEIDENREICH,
THOMAS F. McILWRAITH, and JOHN WARKENTIN, editors, GEOFFREY J. MATTHEWS
and BYRON MOLDOFSKY, cartographers. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press,

The most impressive achievement to date in Canadian historical geogra-
phy, the award-winning three-volume Historical Atlas of Canada (1987-1993),
was recently rated one of the 100 most important English-language Canadian
books of all time (University of Toronto Bookstore Review, April 1999). Such an
accolade is evidence of the widespread impact of this best-selling publication.
With the recent release of a concise one-volume edition, the atlas is bound to
reach an even larger audience.

The purpose of the Concise Historical Atlas of Canada is to summarize Ca-
nadian history from prehistoric times through the latter part of the twentieth
century. To accomplish this goal, the editors selected sixty-seven plates from the
193 found in the complete three-volume set. The plates are unmodified from
their original form, each one a double-paged spread of maps, graphs, illustra-
tions and text on a single subject or theme. The atlas is effectively organized into
three major sections, each introduced with a short, but cogent essay. Part one,
entitled “National Perspectives,” provides a sweeping overview of the land and
the process of nation building. This section includes thirty-three plates covering
prehistoric and Native Canada, exploration, territorial extent, population,
transportation and urbanization, the economy, and society. Part two, “Defining
Episodes,” contains nine plates which focus on historical events of national im-
portance, such as war, depression and dramatic migrations. Part three, entitled
“Regional Patterns,” offers case studies dealing with specific events and develop-
ments in greater detail over limited periods. Sixteen plates focus on “The East”
and another nine relate to “The West and the North.” Almost all of the plates in
this section deal with economic themes or settlement patterns, and emphasis
is placed on early history.

The great value of this concise edition is that it brings together many schol-
arily and cartographically brilliant plates illustrating the most important aspects
of the historical geography of Canada, in a single, accessible volume. The most
remarkable plates are those which use a variety of visual techniques and work at
multiple scales to not only illustrate the nationwide impact of a specific subject,
but also to draw attention to the commonly shared experiences of individual
citizens. Plate 41, for example, is extraordinary in the way it uses a combination
of graphs, lists, diagrams, maps, and photographic material to effectively illus-
three chapters, all written by Malcolm Lewis, that describe three very different processes: the field contact between natives and European/American explorers from 1511 to 1925 that provided the raw material for investigation; the work of scholars who, between 1782 and 1911, attempted to interpret evidence of native maps and mapping based on stored materials from the field contacts; and the long hiatus between the conclusion of this archival phase with the publication of a Russian global compendium of traditional mapping and its English abridgement in 1911, and the renewal of interest in mapping in traditional societies that began with the landmark publication, in 1970, of John Warkentin’s and Richard Ruggles’ Manitoba Historical Atlas that contained facsimiles of Indian maps. These three chapters are intentionally epistemological, and tell the reader how we know what we know about traditional mapping in North America more than describing what we know. That is reserved for Part 2.

In the second section of the book, opened with a chapter by Lewis that is, again, largely epistemological, the co-authors (Elizabeth Hill Boone, Barbara Belyea, Margaret Wickens Pearce, Morris S. Arnold, Gregory A. Waselkov, Patricia Galloway, and Peter Nabokov) get their chance to discuss what we know about native mapping, albeit in a selective and idiosyncratic manner rather than a systematic and comprehensive one. Spanning topics as diverse as maps as collective memory in Aztec Mexico and native maps as sources for colonial land deeds, these seven chapters are the heart of the book, Lewis’ excellent essays notwithstanding. It is expected of multi-authored books that the contributions will be somewhat uneven and this work is no exception. But the editor has done an excellent job of coordinating the styles and themes of his co-authors and whatever unevenness appears to the reader will probably be more the consequence of personal preference for the subject matter, rather than the strength of the research and writing. Each contribution is lively and the reproductions of both native maps and the European or American derivatives of them are crisp and readable. There is a temptation, in this day and age of “postmodernism” and “deconstruction,” to write in jargon accessible only to the initiated, to ascribe to earlier peoples the attitudes of the present, to make vast and sweeping assertions based on the flimsiest evidence. The authors have, for the most part, avoided such traps and pitfalls and the results are productive for all scholars interested in mapping in traditional societies.

Part 3 of the book contains one chapter: Lewis’ conclusion in which he discusses the possible directions for future investigations in North American traditional cartography, where the future of the field lies. While Lewis was not particularly inhibited in presenting his own views in Part 1, he becomes even less so in Part 3 (almost to the point of preaching). The future course of encounters with native American mapping will, he asserts, take place in five contexts: the legal, in which historical and traditional maps become legal documents; the linguistic, expanding a small literature on the linkages between natural language and cartography; the psychological, in which cognitive science debates the relationship between spatial cognition, the ability to make maps, and actual map production; the social, in which geographers and others study the social structuring of space as evidenced by native American maps; and the performative, in which native maps become fully recognized as a part of the artistic and literary tradition of their makers. Whether future explorations take the directions
Despite a few limitations, the Concise Historical Atlas of Canada, like its predecessors, is an invaluable resource for students and teachers of history and geography. This new format makes the atlas much more accessible for students who cannot afford the full set. The volume would be much easier to use, however, if it included an index of place names and subjects. Likewise, its utility as a teaching tool would be greatly increased if slides and posters of individual plates were available for purchase. News that a “Historical Atlas of Canada Online Learning Project” is currently under construction (http://www.geog.utoronto.ca/hacddp/hacpage.html) is particularly exciting to educators. Hopefully one of the first tasks of this project will be to incorporate a downloadable keyword index to all four volumes. With the exploding popularity of academic initiatives “online,” and the ever-increasing importance placed on computer-assisted cartography and GIS skills in most geography departments, it is not unrealistic to believe that the team at the University of Toronto could, with the collaboration of junior and senior researchers across the country, keep the project alive and continue to fill gaps in our knowledge of Canada’s historical geography, with the periodic addition of new plates. Until then, the Concise Historical Atlas of Canada remains the best single-volume tribute to Canadian historical geography, and one of the most important contributions to our understanding of Canada’s past.

—Jason Gilliland
McGill University


To survey the development of housing in any nation over three centuries is ambitious. To survey a nation as geographically extensive as Canada is more so. Even the simplification of the streams of cultural influence that reached Canada, notably British, American, and French, does not reduce the task much. The authors simplify their own task and impose order on relative chaos by first a temporal division into the mercantile and industrial capitalist eras of Canadian development, then a fourfold division of house styles derived largely from the work of R. W. Brunskill. As usual with geographers, the book is as much about the diverse cultural histories of the builders as it is about the houses.

The authors’ first style is the elite, “polite” (chapter 2), or “self-conscious” (chapter 6) house. A few such houses had a massive and enduring impact. In the era of mercantile capitalism, elite houses were built in largely British styles. Such styles did not disappear in the era of industrial capitalism but were subordinated to the overwhelming influence of the 800 pound gorilla to the south. Ennals and Holdsworth take pains to remind us of the self-conscious attempts of the Canadian elite after Confederation to develop a Canadian identity in their housing but that effort was almost entirely a failure. By focusing on Canadianness the authors miss the pervasive anglophilia of late nineteenth and early twentieth century American culture which shows up so heavily in American styles of