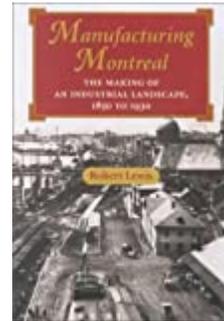




Robert Lewis. *Manufacturing Montreal: The Making of an Industrial Landscape, 1850 to 1930.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000. xvii + 336 pp. \$45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-6349-3.



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In this important work, Robert Lewis seeks to demolish three simplistic conclusions reached by many urbanists about the development of the United States and Canada in the industrial era. The first is that industrial decentralization dates – at the earliest – from the 1920's, when truck transport encouraged firms needing large tracts for huge one-storey plants to move to the suburbs. The second is that small, labour-intensive companies serving local markets characterized downtown manufacturing, while large, capital-intensive ones, exploiting economies of scale and national markets, dominated the suburbs. The third is that, apart from company towns like Pullman, most pre-1945 suburbs were middle class. Moving beyond these central issues, Lewis also discusses the environmental quality experienced by suburban working-class populations.

The author's case rests on a detailed study of the industrialization of the Montreal region between 1850 and 1930. He has combed a wide variety of sources: industrial journals, newspapers, government reports, city directories, and so on. But most important – in the absence of adequate Census data – are the annual water-tax rolls of Montreal and nearby suburbs, which provide the location and annual rental value of every business. The varying rental values suggest the geographical distribution of small, medium, and large factories, and he has used the

rolls for 1861, 1890, and 1929 to indicate the evolution of average factory-size and of the relative importance of older and newer factory districts. A number of maps, showing the location of factories in specified sectors for each industrial district, prove most helpful.

To the extent that the Montreal region did typify North America in these years, Lewis makes his case. The suburbanization of industry did not take off in the 1920's, but in the 1850's when, for instance, distant Saint Marie Ward, on the eastern edge of the City, welcomed the big new Canadian Rubber Company plant. The neighbouring suburb of Hochelaga, a place noted mainly for peaceful waterfront estates in 1870, had some of the largest factories on the Island of Montreal by 1880. And Hochelaga, like most later industrial suburbs, had small factories as well as large ones. The "central manufacturing districts" (that is, the small original city, once enclosed by a defensive wall and known as "Old Montreal", plus the adjacent wards of Saint Antoine, Saint Laurent and Saint Jacques) didn't house only small, low capital shops, but as early as 1861 boasted many factories which, for that era, were large and heavily mechanized. Yes, by 1929, new office-buildings had displaced some of Old Montreal's factories, but in the adjacent wards, housing was demolished to make way for six- to ten-story loft-buildings for the garment industry. Yes, by 1929 some industry had deserted

the old industrial area (developed in the 1850's) along the Lachine Canal (just to the southwest of Old Montreal), but other companies in the Canal district bought the land so vacated in order to expand and modernize on their original sites. In short, Lewis does demonstrate that, in the Montreal region, suburbanization of industry became important long before the 1920's, and that the contrast between big-plants-in-the-suburbs and little-shops-downtown has been overdrawn.

He also demonstrates that large-scale migration to new suburbs by the working class occurred much earlier than many urban geographers have suggested. The industrial suburbs of Saint Henri and adjacent Saint Cune-gonde, for instance, had only 600 people between them in 1852, but 32,000 in 1901. The author stresses the actions of suburban governments to attract industry, such as bonussing and granting tax-exemptions. Lacking affordable mass transit, many thousands of Montreal-area workers moved close to new suburban factories before the end of the nineteenth century.

The author is somewhat less successful, though, in supporting his contention that most of the new industrial suburbs permitted shoddy residential construction and that the cost of providing incentives and infrastructure to factories led to "infrastructure neglect" of workers' residential areas (p. 123). This is plausible, but needs fuller demonstration. How lax were the building codes of such suburbs as Saint Henri? What proportion of households had water and sewer connections? How did the ratio of park acreage to population compare with that in elite suburbs? And if the proletarian suburb of Verdun attracted virtually no industry that siphoned off municipal funding, did this mean that servicing residential lots there was better than in Saint Henri? This important

facet of the book needed more development.

So did the question of residential class segregation within industrial suburbs. He notes that Ville Saint-Pierre, unlike older industrial suburbs, had "a mixed class structure". (p. 246) True, but this statement masks residential class segregation inside that town: the eastern edge of it is geographically separate from the low-lying bulk of the place, raised above it by a steep hill. Secluded on top of that hill was a superior residential area quite distinct in class composition from most of the town. The industrial suburb of Maisonneuve was indeed largely working-class, but its easternmost streets by 1914 had become the more exclusive "Viauville" district, the superior quality of whose homes was enforced by restrictive covenants. It may be, then, that the actual experience of class-based, residential segregation was even greater than the author's statistics of suburbs' class composition suggest.

As well, when Dr. Lewis ventures beyond his own primary research, he sometimes goes astray. For example, on p. 27 we read that in the 1840's, the development of a reliable British market for wheat integrated Quebec agriculture into world trade lines. Well, by the mid-1840's, Quebec's wheat production had collapsed! And there was no "Lower Canada government in 1850" (p. 39): in 1841, Lower Canada (now southern Quebec) had been united with Upper Canada (now southern Ontario) to form the Province of Canada.

These reservations pale, however, beside the richness of the contribution Professor Lewis has made to our understanding of Montreal's development, and the challenge that this book poses to the teaching of the urban history of industrial North America.

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