

Despite the assiduous search for material carried out by its author and the high technical qualities of its production, as ethnic history this work is disappointing. It is discursive and anecdotal rather than analytical, presenting a parade of individuals and organizations linked by little more than the fact that they are Swiss. There is little synthesis. Early chapters constitute brief biographical sketches with some no more than two pages in length. Individuals are examined not only in isolation from each other, but from their Swiss heritage. There is no attempt to examine the Swiss context from which they came and hence no study of the process of acculturation.

The latter half of the book moves away from biography to some basic demographic work and institutional studies. There are chapters on Swiss clubs in Canada, consular and diplomatic relations, economic interchange and cultural contacts. Again, despite the promise of their subject matter, these chapters are disappointing recitations of names and dates. Chapters on demography provide only basic data on numbers and geographic location of the Swiss-born. It is indicative of the failings of this book that it lacks a general conclusion.

The study of a small and diverse group like the Swiss within the fabric of the Canadian nation would undoubtedly present problems of synthesis and continuity for the most skilled of researchers. The scattered nature and multiplicity of sources further complicates the problem. Still, such a study also offers great possibilities for the examination of the role of minorities within the Canadian community and of the adaptation of the citizens of a small and highly specialized nation to life in a vast and resource-based country like Canada.

Bruce Wilson  
Public Archives of Canada

**The Halifax Explosion December 6, 1917.** Compiled and edited by GRAHAM METSON. Toronto: McGraw Hill Ryerson, 1978. 174 p. ill. ISBN 0 07 082797 2 bd. \$14.95; ISBN 0 07 082798 2 pa. \$8.95.

Graham Metson has put together an engrossing and readable account of probably the greatest disaster ever to strike Canada. His book grew out of an exhibit of photographs and documents prepared to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the tragedy. A substantial portion is given over to Archibald MacMechan's complete text of "The Halifax Disaster" which has a sharp and authoritative text and, though moving in places, does not sink into maudlin commentary. MacMechan was the Provincial Recorder of the event and as director of the record office set up to chronicle the disaster he was able to make good use of the official records.

Excellent photographs, both locally based and from the remarkable James Collection at the City of Toronto Archives, enhance the narrative. Oddly, contemporary documents reproduced in some quantity by Metson do not have quite the attraction of MacMechan's gripping account, even though they include eye witness observations, relief work telegrams, medical reports and newspaper columns. The archivist too might wish for further explanation of the work of MacMechan, more notes on the official records, the nature of the James connection for instance or greater detail on people and episodes entwined in the documents. Nevertheless, this is an appealing coverage of a disaster which so unappealingly scarred the psyche of one of Canada's major cities.

Marion Beyea  
Provincial Archives of New Brunswick