

## Compte rendu

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### Ouvrage recensé :

*Histoire des sciences au Québec*, Luc Chartrand, Raymond Duchesne et Yves Gingras, Montréal, Les Éditions Boréal, 1989. Pp 487, ill. Paper, ISBN 2-89052-205-9.

par Peter J. Bowler

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*Canadensis : revue canadienne d'histoire des sciences, des techniques et de la médecine* , vol. 13, n° 1, (36) 1989, p. 63-64.

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## BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTES RENDUS

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*Histoire des sciences au Québec*, Luc Chartrand, Raymond Duchesne et Yves Gingras, Montréal, Les Editions Boréal, 1989. Pp 487, ill. Paper, ISBN 2-89052-205-9.

The history of Canadian science is an active field of research, but if the subject is to gain its rightful place in the public consciousness some effort must be made to promote the results in a format accessible to the nonspecialist. Anyone who has taught course in the field (and it is unfortunately some time since I did this myself) knows how frustrating it is to have no adequate textbook that will help new students gain access to what can all too easily become a bewildering array of individual topics. A good introductory survey or textbook must be comprehensive, yet must approach its material through a series of coherent themes. The reader should be able to see how detailed studies of individual points are illuminated by consideration of broader underlying themes. The book must be written in language that nonspecialists can understand and should be presented in an attractive format. No such book exists for the history of Canadian science as a whole, but *Histoire des sciences au Québec* shows how the job should be tackled by anyone wishing to take on this valuable task for other provinces of for Canada as a whole.

The book is well written, clearly laid out and profusely illustrated. It covers the whole field from the scientific studies of the earliest explorers of New France through to the emergence of 'Big Science' in the twentieth century. Some of the chapters explore particular areas of science (natural history, geology, medicine, physics), while others deal with the more general problems of education, organization and government support. It is particularly important to get this balance right in an introductory survey, and the authors have succeeded admirably. The sensitive question of the relationship between anglophone and francophone science is dealt with in a way that is both unobtrusive and illuminating. In the particular areas where I feel competent to judge the authors' comments (geology, natural history, organization of science), I think they have done an excellent job of conveying a fairly detailed outline of the material at a level suitable for nonspecialists.

If there is one criticism I would be prepared to make, it centres on the lack of an introductory survey outlining the general themes that the reader will encounter throughout the book. Teachers in particular would have found such an analytical introduction useful as a means of warning stu-

dents that the history of science is not just a recital of great discoveries. But this is a relatively small quibble with what is otherwise a magnificent achievement. Specialist historians of Canadian science should salute the authors for providing them not only with a good survey of Québec science, but also with a model that will hopefully serve as an inspiration and as a guide to those who will produce surveys on parallel themes in the future. A history of Canadian science that was as well-written and well-produced as this would be very welcome indeed.

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