

Robert F. Harney, ed. *Gathering Place: Peoples and Neighbourhoods of Toronto, 1834-1945*. Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1985. Pp. 304. 22 black and white plates. \$9.95

Michael J. Doucet

Volume 14, numéro 3, february 1986

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1018092ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018092ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Doucet, M. J. (1986). Compte rendu de [Robert F. Harney, ed. *Gathering Place: Peoples and Neighbourhoods of Toronto, 1834-1945*. Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1985. Pp. 304. 22 black and white plates. \$9.95]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 14(3), 290–292. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018092ar>

Hardly. But the existence of such a provision is interesting in itself.

Masson argues that local government will survive if there is a commitment to grass-roots democracy and this in turn will depend on the level of commitment of a community's citizenry. Is this then another old friend "access/participation" under the guise of grass-roots politics? Participation is usually twinned analytically with the idea of efficiency and in this volume that approach is used to analyze municipal reorganization in Alberta especially as it pertains to those two eternally feuding (we do it differently) metropoli — Calgary and Edmonton.

The other noticeable provocative chapter is the last in the book where the author takes his courage into his hands and based on the analysis in previous chapters makes his predictions about the future of Alberta local politics. One of Masson's predictions is the continued expansion of shopping malls. The question which arises naturally is how large can the West Edmonton Mall grow?

To this reviewer one of the most interesting chapters is that on Municipal Civil Servants as Policy Makers. Without doubt the data included in the chapter will add fuel to the continuing debate as to who really runs city hall — the elected politicians or the appointed public servants. Yet the ultimate results of the surveys do not surprise. Councils usually adopt the recommendations of their appointed advisors. The role of the businessman and his relationship with the local council also comes in for some scrutiny.

It is difficult to criticize a book that has so many admirable points. Nonetheless the reviewer can always fall back to criticisms which indicate what the reviewer feels should be part of the book either in terms of data or framework. This reviewer feels strongly that there should be a separate chapter on provincial-municipal relations. Certainly several of Masson's chapters (such as the one on Municipal Reorganization) do contain sections that cover this topic. But the relationship is a very important aspect of local government politics especially in terms of finances and power and needs separate treatment.

The other quibble refers to the term "grass-roots democracy." As indicated previously, the question is whether this term is not just another name for access/participation. The latter term seems to be dominant in the Canadian literature.

On the whole the book is a welcome addition to the literature in the field of local government. As such the book complements the general approach of Higgins' *Urban Canada: Its Government and Politics*, and the more specific approach of T. J. Plunkett and G. M. Betts' *The Management of Canadian Urban Government*.

One final thought, perhaps this book might just be that added incentive needed to publish all those other manuscripts on local governments in the other provinces.

S. Drabek
Department of Political Science
The University of Calgary

Robert F. Harney, ed. *Gathering Place: Peoples and Neighbourhoods of Toronto, 1834-1945*. Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1985. Pp. 304. 22 black and white plates. \$9.95.

The year 1984 marked the sesquicentennial of the incorporation of the City of Toronto. Many might dispute the significance of this event, since the incorporation represented not the founding of the community (the Town of York had been founded almost four decades earlier), but a mere shift from town to city status. Nonetheless, the Sesquicentennial celebrations provided a good excuse to paint some streetcars in vibrant colours, to illuminate the Old City Hall so that it resembled a wedding cake, to throw all sorts of parties, and, more to our purposes here, to prepare and publish books on Toronto's past and present.

Supported by a grant from the Toronto Sesquicentennial Board and bearing the official logo of the Sesquicentennial, *Gathering Place*, in the words of its editor, is an attempt to "deal with . . . the most salient feature of Toronto in its one hundred and fiftieth year, its role as a target of migration . . . , its polyethnic character and its reputation for tolerance of human variety" (p. 1). Rather than presenting a comprehensive treatment of the experience of Torontonians from different ethnic backgrounds, the volume deals with the pre-1945 period and just eleven of its ethnic groups. In defense, editor Robert Harney suggests that at this juncture in Canadian ethnic history "it seems useful to learn more about Toronto's ethnic and immigrant past, to examine the city's actual record, in terms of inter-ethnic encounter, tolerance and attitudes toward pluralism" (p. 1). These are noble and worthwhile goals for any study of Toronto's multicultural roots; but, unfortunately, the firm editorial control required to achieve these ends is absent, for the most part, from this volume.

What the reader encounters in *Gathering Place* is a very loose collection of essays. Each paper deals with a few or many of the elements in the experience of some or most members of a particular ethnic group for some period between 1834 and 1945 or thereabouts. Many of the individual essays are fresh, interesting, insightful, and soundly grounded through the use of a combination of the more traditional urban history sources (city directories, church and

organizational records, and assessment rolls) and oral histories. John Zucci's piece on the Italians is particularly effective in this regard. The volume, however, is very much less than the sum of its parts. Most of the analysis that would be needed to address the important issues noted above is left to the reader. While this book has a more scholarly appearance to it (the essays are all thoroughly documented, for example), students of Toronto's ethnic past may still find a picture book entitled *Immigrants: A Portrait of the Urban Experience, 1890-1930* (Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1975), which Harney edited with Harold Troper, to be a more cohesive work.

Gathering Place begins in a rather curious fashion with an essay by the editor entitled "Ethnicity and Neighbourhoods." While the paper starts usefully enough with a strong statement on the need for an ethnic history of Toronto, followed by a brief statistical analysis of the City's ethnic composition between 1911 and 1941, it soon bogs down in a rather tiresome and often repetitious discussion of the need to study the "sensibilities, identities and *mentalités* of ethnic groups" (p. 3). I am not disputing the validity of these sentiments by any means. What does bother me, however, is the patronizing tone of the essay. Moreover, Harney's essay does not set the stage for the papers that follow it. Only in the final, brief paragraph of this 22 page piece does he try to link his sense of the nature of ethnic history and the way it should be conducted to the efforts of his contributors. Harney never really tells us what to expect as we make our way through the volume. Nor is there a concluding paper to summarize where we have been and still need to go.

A second curious feature of *Gathering Place*, given the nature of its subject matter, is the almost total absence of maps in the book. The entire volume contains a single map (entitled Toronto Neighbourhoods) which identifies the locations of railway lines (as crudely as I have ever seen in a published map), selected streets (not all of which are named), certain of central Toronto's physical features, and six neighbourhoods (presumably of an ethnic nature), all for some unspecified date and without reference to any scale. This map, which also appeared in a very slightly altered form in the earlier Harney and Troper book noted above (where it was called Toronto 1921), is reproduced twice in the book under review here (at the front and the back), does not outline Toronto's city limits for any point in its history, and is never referred to by any of the authors. In sum, it is not very helpful and should never be reprinted again. Fortunately, the contributors (including Harney) do have a sense of the importance of spatial relationships within and between neighbourhoods. They are forced, however, to paint cumbersome word maps when a few well-constructed and well-chosen diagrams would have been much more useful. I am a native Torontonians who makes his living, in part, by studying Toronto's development — past and present; but even that was not sufficient to prevent me from having to reach for my trusty *Perly's Map Book* to pinpoint some of the innu-

merable locations mentioned in the essays. Pity the poor uninitiated reader. Apparently, historians still have much to learn about the value of maps in these scholarly situations. Since the book contains reproductions of 22 photographs of various ethnic groups and their areas, cost should not have been a factor in the decisions regarding appropriate ways to illustrate a work of this type.

A final curious feature of this book is that the various contributors do not seem either to have cared about or known about the study period suggested in its sub-title, 1834-1945. Obviously, not every ethnic group included in the essays has been present in the city since its incorporation; but since they were all there in 1945 the dates actually covered by the authors seem rather odd. Dan Hill's essay on Toronto's Black community spans the years between 1793 and about 1860 for no apparent reason. For statistical convenience, J.M.S. Careless restricts his analysis of Cabbagetown (an anglo-saxon area) to the period between 1859 and 1892. The paper on Toronto's Jews, by Stephen Speisman, focuses on a single year, 1911. At the other extreme, Dora Nipp's study, "The Chinese in Toronto," brings us well past 1945. All of this temporal diversity smacks of convenience in preparing the volume. It does not, however, result in a cohesive collection of essays.

The study of Toronto's ethnic history is underway. In spite of its many limitations, *Gathering Place* is a step in the right direction, especially for those who are interested in the experiences of the particular groups covered in the book. But this represents a rather unidimensional view of Toronto's ethnic roots. The most interesting questions concerning the emergence of the city's "polyethnic character" remain unanswered. What level of interaction took place among groups in Toronto neighbourhoods? When and why did the attitude of intolerance on the part of the host society described in most of the papers give way not only to one of tolerance but also to the overt encouragement of multiculturalism? What impact has the rapid growth in the population belonging to visible minority groups had on the City and its neighbourhoods? Are there differences in attitudes between central-city and suburban residents?

In 1993 Toronto will celebrate the bicentennial of the founding of the Town of York. A more definitive analysis of the emergence of multiculturalism and tolerance should be possible by that date. To be useful, this will require a dedicated multi-disciplinary approach that is sensitive to spatial, social, cultural, cross-cultural, public policy, and historical concerns. It also must come to grips both with the period after 1945 and with a broader range of ethnic groups. On the latter point, the choice of the groups that were included in *Gathering Place* is, of course, open to question; but then so would any selection of this type. I do wonder, however, why there would be an essay on the Finns, but none on Toronto's German population, and why the Poles warranted both a brief preface and an essay. Nevertheless, I do want to

compliment Harney for reminding us that everyone is ethnic through his inclusion of the article on Cabbagetown by Careless. For the present, however, the comprehensive ethnic history of Toronto remains largely unwritten.

Michael J. Doucet
School of Applied Geography
Ryerson Polytechnical Institute

McHugh, Patricia. *Toronto Architecture, A City Guide*. Toronto: Methuen for Mercury Books, 1985. Pp. 264. Illustrations. \$14.95.

The promenade was a popular form of amusement in 19th century Canadian cities. Many residents spent pleasant Sunday afternoons, walking the streets, parks, cemeteries and boardwalks of the community. Though undoubtedly recreational, the walk-about had other uses, too. Authors often employed the city tour to introduce visitors to their town. Newspaper editors sometimes did a spring or late summer walk of various districts, using the occasion to point out the finest of the new buildings in the community, and to applaud the energy, industry and cultivated taste which produced them. Indeed, as Henry Scadding showed in *Toronto of Old*, the history of a city's development could be told in this way.

In the 20th century, visiting the outstanding sights continues to be one of several methods of judging the vitality of our cities. The 19th century promenade has become, at a somewhat more lively pace but with some of the same didactic purposes, the 20th century walking tour. Authors have responded to this growing demand by devising walking (and sometimes cycling or driving) tours of our major centres. They range from single-page handouts produced by municipalities and local heritage groups, to full-scale books, such as Hal Kalman and John Roaf's two studies on Vancouver and Ottawa. Patricia McHugh's *Toronto Architecture, A City Guide* is undoubtedly one of the most detailed and useful Canadian works of this genre.

The book consists of a brisk six-page introduction to the development of Toronto, a very useful eight-page discussion of the styles of architecture identifiable within the areas covered by the book, and twenty walking tours of ten distinct areas, covering 750 buildings. The book covers a relatively small part of the city, its downtown core from the waterfront north to Davenport, and from the Don River on the east to Bathurst Street on the west and includes areas such as the University of Toronto, Cabbagetown, Yorkville and the Annex. It is not therefore a comprehensive guide to the city's important buildings; for example, it does not introduce the reader to many buildings listed by the Toronto Historical Board as being of historical or architectural significance,

such as Casa Loma or Spadina, nor does it cover equally interesting neighbourhoods such as Rosedale and the Beaches.

Within this understandable limitation, the book possesses many merits. First and foremost, it is a splendid read. The author fairly bristles with thoughtful judgements, carefully chosen anecdotes and arcane information. One can always quibble over the assessments (as indeed this reviewer often did) but that is part of the fun. It is also well organized. Ms. McHugh has taken 750 downtown Toronto buildings, and written crisp, informative paragraphs about each of them. She has divided this voluminous material — which might well have overwhelmed a reader otherwise — into twenty walking tours, each described by the author as taking roughly an hour and a half.

On the whole, the book is a delight. Though there is a somewhat uncritical attitude towards post-modern architecture and an occasional tendency to gush, the author's judgements are generally balanced and thoughtful. St. Lawrence Hall "is Toronto's Victorian classicism at its very best," the original Knox College is a building which "took its formal, symmetrical responsibilities perhaps too seriously," while the Yorkville shopping complex Hazelton Lanes "is so tortuously laid out it's almost impossible to find your way without dropping bread crumbs — or perhaps croissant crumbs, this being Hazelton Lanes." The book contains an immense amount of detail, garnered from sources ranging from assessment rolls to private papers to architectural journals.

This book will be of value to a variety of audiences, roughly in the order of interests listed on its back cover (Travel/Architecture/Reference). For the traveller — arm-chair or real — it provides a relatively inexpensive, convenient, well organized and fact-filled introduction to the city that the rest of Canada loves to hate, but many of the world's cities envy. For the architectural historian, the book offers a compressed but fact-filled history of a remarkable range of downtown buildings, a third of which are illustrated by clear black-and-white photographs. The variety of building types illustrated is an important feature. Though major Toronto landmarks as varied in time and purpose as the Grange and Eaton's Centre receive due attention, it is one of many delightful aspects of McHugh's book that the author gives nearly equal attention to the houses, factories and small commercial properties which were the less ornate lifeblood of Victorian and Edwardian Toronto. Though they are much the most important part of her study, buildings are not the author's sole interest: she includes monuments, squares and streetscapes as well.

The book has a number of minor problems. Unlike a number of similar guides, the author illustrates a relatively small proportion of the buildings she discusses, roughly one