

Scientia Canadensis

Canadian Journal of the History of Science, Technology and Medicine
Revue canadienne d'histoire des sciences, des techniques et de la médecine

Scientia
Canadensis

Medical Topography of Upper Canada. John Douglas, London, 1819, reprint edition Science History Publications, 1985. Introduction by Charles G. Roland. Pp xii + 42, index. \$13.95

J. T.H. Connor

Volume 11, Number 1 (32), Spring–Summer 1987

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/800247ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/800247ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

CSTHA/AHSTC

ISSN

0829-2507 (print)

1918-7750 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Connor, J. T. (1987). Review of [*Medical Topography of Upper Canada.* John Douglas, London, 1819, reprint edition Science History Publications, 1985. Introduction by Charles G. Roland. Pp xii + 42, index. \$13.95]. *Scientia Canadensis*, 11(1), 46–47. <https://doi.org/10.7202/800247ar>

Tout droit réservé © Canadian Science and Technology Historical Association /
Association pour l'histoire de la science et de la technologie au Canada, 1987

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit
(including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be
viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

Érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal,
Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to
promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTEs RENDUS

Medical Topography of Upper Canada. John Douglas, London, 1819, reprint edition Science History Publications, 1985. Introduction by Charles G. Roland. Pp xii + 42, index. \$13.95.

Original copies of John Douglas' 1819 *Medical Topography of Upper Canada* are relatively scarce; thus, this reprint edition -- one of the Resources in Medical History series -- is a welcome publication. This short work, in which Douglas related his observations and experience as an assistant-surgeon in the Eighth Regiment (the King's Liverpool Regiment) during the War of 1812, is divided into six sections: the topography of Upper Canada; details of the province's soil and climate; activities of the troops; prevailing diseases; clinical treatment of the wounded; and medical and general observations on Upper Canadian Indians. Due to this eclectic subject matter, this primary document should be of interest to military, medical and general historians as well as to geographers and physicians. In particular, this book is recommended for those involved in military historical site interpretation, especially interpreters of forts with restored surgeons' quarters or hospitals. Moreover, owing to its lucid, narrative style, general readers might also find Douglas' comments interesting, but the more squeamish among them might wish to skim those passages that deal with the extraction of live maggots from the festering wounds of war amputees.

From Douglas' work we learn that the ravages of nature and disease exacted a toll on the British troops that was perhaps as great as that inflicted by American forces. In summer, troops were exposed to insect-borne fevers, although Douglas attributed these fevers to marsh miasmas rather than to mosquitoes, while in winter, many suffered from frostbite. And throughout the year, long and arduous forced marches through rough terrain caused many rheumatic and pulmonary afflictions among army personnel. Contrasting with the generally sickly condition of the British troops, Douglas commented that the Upper Canadian settlers enjoyed fairly good health; likewise, the Indians of the province were not subject to many diseases. To explain this situation Douglas suggested that continual exposure to natural hardships rendered these people some resistance to disease. Also, details of some of the therapeutic measures employed by contemporary medical practitioners may be gleaned from this work, including bleeding and the use of purgatives and mercuric compounds.

Special mention should be made of the useful introduction to this book by Charles G. Roland, Hannah Professor of the History of Medicine at McMaster University. In it, Roland provides details of the personal and professional life of John Douglas and places his work in its medical historiographical context as well as that of the War of 1812.

Finally, one wonders why it has taken more than 150 years to have this

modest-sized but important source readily available in a reprint edition; and further, instead of originating from Ontario or Canada,

why was this undertaking performed by an American publisher and an Indian (New Delhi) printer

J.T.H.Connor
University of Waterloo