

Mission Life in Cree-Ojibwe Country: Memories of a Mother and Son, Elizabeth Bingham Young and E. Ryerson Young
edited and with an introduction by Jennifer S.H. Brown

Jean Friesen

Volume 107, Number 2, Fall 2015

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1050640ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050640ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Friesen, J. (2015). Review of [*Mission Life in Cree-Ojibwe Country: Memories of a Mother and Son, Elizabeth Bingham Young and E. Ryerson Young* edited and with an introduction by Jennifer S.H. Brown]. *Ontario History*, 107(2), 268–270.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1050640ar>

way's book deal with citizen opposition to full amalgamation, the impact of disentanglement/off loading, government claims as to the benefits of amalgamation, the utility of small scale government, de-amalgamation, and examples of where de-amalgamation have been attempted or successfully carried out. The author's conclusion investigates where the City of Toronto could go from here. Redway calls for a serious review and re-evaluation of the city's current political state, and suggests a return to the pre-amalgamation form of government. This he believes would bring decision making back to our community councils, which in turn would facilitate improved local government. It is the author's hope that a groundswell of public opinion will show the provincial government that the current form of municipal governance in Toronto is not working very well, and therefore it is time for something

else to be considered. Noting that Kathleen Wynne was opposed to amalgamation before becoming premier, Redway feels it is time that she initiates a review of a drastically centralized Toronto government, which in his opinion has drastically diminished resident/taxpayer access to and participation in municipal decision making.

Redway's work raises some interesting questions to ponder, but also the book itself, in the words of East York journalist Joe Cooper, "...is valuable reading for anyone who wants to understand this city's [Toronto] municipal politics and cares about its future as a working city." I would agree with Cooper's assessment. Do get your own copy of this wonderful book!

Dr. John C. Carter,
Research Associate, School of Humanities,
University of Tasmania

Mission Life in Cree-Ojibwe Country

*Memories of a Mother and Son, Elizabeth
Bingham Young and E. Ryerson Young*

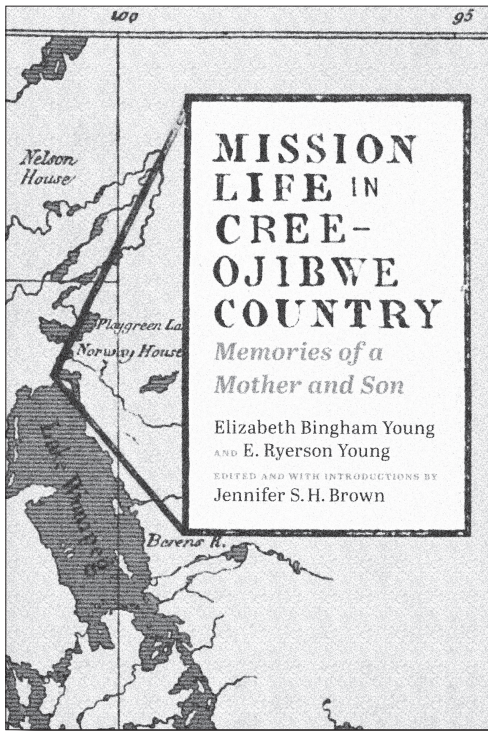
Edited and with an introduction by Jennifer S.H. Brown

Edmonton: AU Press (Athabasca University), 2014. 316pp. \$29.95 paperback. ISBN 978-1-77199-003-5. Free pdf. ISBN 978-17719-004-2. \$29.95 eBook. ISBN 978-177199-005-9. (www.aupress.ca)

This is a book of many layers, of interest and accessible to diverse audiences. The undergraduate or interested reader searching for the telling anecdote of family and bush life in Canada in the last quarter of the nineteenth century will find much to engage with. These accounts of the hardships and endurance of an Ontario missionary family might offer spiritual sustenance to some, and the reader may even be led to reflections on the institutional role of the United Church of Canada amongst First Nations. Even more importantly, to the people of Lake Winni-

peg, these reminiscences of Elizabeth Bingham Young and her son, E. Ryerson Young, of their years at Norway House and Berens River offer a perspective on the history of their own families—Paupenekis, Ross, Harte and many others—and on the extensive Christian tradition of their communities.

Jennifer Brown, now Professor Emeritus of the University of Winnipeg, is an experienced editor of historical documents. Here she draws on the manuscripts of the Young family now in the United Church Archives in Toronto and the personal collection of her



unpublished letters and documents from the family's collection and is enhanced by colour illustrations of relevant artifacts, and family photographs. Numerous transcription and editorial decisions were involved in this undertaking and the transparency the editor provides is commendable. But what elevates this manuscript is the constant interweaving of the disparate parts through precise cross referencing in extensive footnotes. Brown binds the mother's story to the son's reminiscences. She draws on E. Ryerson Young's later extensive popular writings and gives us a broader Canadian context through family letters and her introductions. It is unusual, but necessary here, to single out the lowly footnote as the essence of scholarship. But, as Donald B. Smith concludes in his Foreword, "Jennifer Brown is a superb editor," and herein lies the evidence.

Brown began her academic career as an anthropologist and the concerns of that discipline in the mid-twentieth century constitute one of the strengths of this study. Her commentaries on the decorum of young Cree women, the conflict that she emphasizes in the attitudes to child rearing of European missionary and Cree nurse, and the contrast we are shown between daily domestic life in Ontario and northern Manitoba are only a few of the ways she draws our attention to the significance of these reminiscences. Contemporary Canadian historians have turned to some of these domestic concerns—once much mocked as the study of 'housemaid's knee in Belleville'—, and scholars in the fields of relationships, memory and emotions will find food for thought. These documents provide a rich source for understanding not only the role of the missionary wife and the intimacies of devout Christian parents but also give us glimpses of their relationship with their Cree speaking son, of the food practices and exchanges that were central to maintaining relations with their Indigenous neighbours

father, Harcourt Brown, grandson of Egerton R. and Elizabeth Bingham Young. She has benefited from strong collaborative relationships that make possible a volume of this complexity. Her footnotes fully acknowledge the archival assistance of Anne Lindsay and the linguistic assistance of Keith Goulet and Jeffrey Muehlbauer.

Part 1 of the book consists of a memoir by Elizabeth Young, written in 1927, of her years between 1868 and 1876 as the young wife of the Rev. Egerton Ryerson Young, Methodist missionary from Ontario, first to the Cree of Rossville, near the Hudson's Bay Company's post of Norway House on Lake Winnipeg, and later to the Ojibwe of Berens River. Part 2 contains the reminiscences of E. Ryerson Young, Elizabeth and Egerton's eldest child, born at Norway House and cared for by 'Little Mary', a determined Cree nurse. The book concludes with an edited selection of largely

and staff, and, as any northerner would have understood, of the patience and intelligence required in their relationships with their dogs, animals which ensured their survival.

Students might have welcomed a bibliography which collated the many scholarly references in the footnotes and introductions, and the account could also have benefitted from some reflections on the Manitoba missions as one small part of the global expansion of European Christianity that accompanied the 'Great Land Rush'. The absence of much editorial comment on the twin goals of Christianity and civilization will be puzzling to some. And to others, perhaps some notes on the continuing strong presence of Indigenous Christianity in both communities, and, indeed, of the work of the Rev. Stan

Mackay of Norway House, the first Indigenous Moderator of the United Church of Canada, might have been appropriate.

But the vivid pictures the primary documents offer will remain with the reader. How better to understand the unspoken practices of colonialism than to read of the journey of the portrait of Queen Victoria to its place of honour in the mission. And how better to encounter Cree and Ojibwe family life than to read of the food sharing, the winter travel accounts, the tenderness of Mary for the Young's son, and the teaching him of "what is good" by Jackoos, who convinced the Youngs to 'lend me your boy'.

Jean Friesen,
University of Manitoba

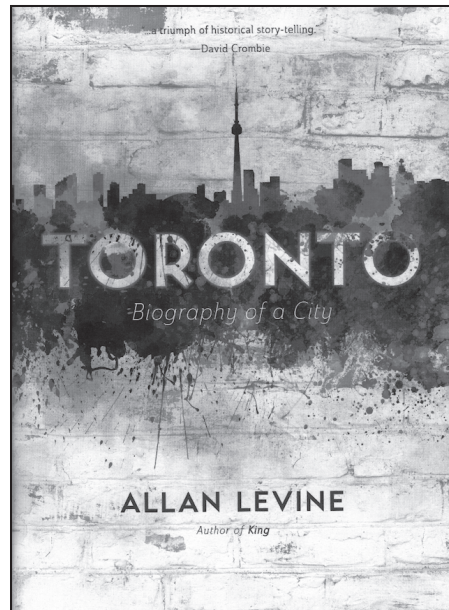
Toronto: Biography of a City

By Allan Levine

Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 2014. 496 pages. \$36.95 hardcover. ISBN 978-1-77100-022-2. www.douglas-mcintyre.com)

Toronto—a city that has, in recent years, produced scores of books exploring its architecture, cultural diversity, literature, music, art, neighbourhoods and political economy—has, oddly, produced only a very few wide-ranging works tracing the broad terrain of its history. Exceptions include Reverend Henry Scadding's *Toronto of Old* (a chatty account of Toronto's early years, first published in 1873), Eric Arthur's *No Mean City* (currently on its third updated edition since appearing in 1964), William Kilbourn's *Toronto Remembered* (1984), James Morris Careless's *Toronto to 1918* (1984) and James Lemon's *Toronto Since 1918* (1985). All have remained classic reference works, in large part because there has been no comprehensive history to replace them.

Urban historian Allan Levine's *Toronto:*



A Biography brings readers up to date on the city's recent history, while adding valuable analytical depth to the preceding period. Cast as a "popular-style "biography" offering "a selective, sometimes arbitrary, chronicle of To-