

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Books of Note

John Taylor

Volume 18, Number 2, October 1989

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1017768ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1017768ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (print)

1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Taylor, J. (1989). Review of [Books of Note]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 18(2), 188–191. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1017768ar>

starts with the crucial convergence of the railroad, great natural beauty, and selective population concentration. Together they allowed the North Shore to evolve into a network of high-income suburbs, each with its own identity. The railroad provided the mobility, the rural ideal much of the attraction, and population growth the affluent residents. Like Stilgoe's vivid descriptions of borderlands observers, Ebenr's accounts of individual and group promoters of suburbia are interesting and informative; in both works attention to the human element is not neglected.

As urban problems became more evident in Chicago, escape to the North Shore railroad suburbs became increasingly inviting to those who could afford it; great tragedies such as the Chicago fire of 1871 only hastened the exodus. By 1896, when Kenilworth became the last of the eight communities to incorporate, the "approximate shape of the western shoreline of Lake Michigan as we know it today had been set into place." Ebner provides readers with individual biographies of the eight communities of the North Shore, often noting their differences as well as their similarities. The author covers topics ranging from the significance of country clubs and high schools to the dangers of annexation and "out of place" military installations to race and religious relations.

As a place name for the eight suburbs along Lake Michigan, North Shore had achieved currency by 1890. The North Shore Improvement Association and other organizations were created to address regional interests and problems, but suburban dwellers retained "deeply rooted loyalties to their respective communities." Representatives of the eight communities accepted the name North Shore as a symbol of common circumstances, but also rejected anything that threatened their particular environs. In the early 20th century, North Shore people developed "a sense of dual allegiance, at once identifying with one

suburb yet simultaneously thinking of themselves as residents of a suburban network."

Both works are superb and should be read by all interested in the evolution of the suburbs and the crucial role they have played in the development of metropolitan America.

Brad Luckingham
Department of History
Arizona State University

Fairbanks, Robert B. *Making Better Citizens: Housing Reform and the Community Development Strategy in Cincinnati, 1890-1960*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988. Pp. 243. \$24.95 (U.S.).

This study of how one American community dealt with the issues of public housing, reform, and urban development during half a century traces the efforts of city planners, housing reformers, and government officials who sought to provide an ideal — "good citizenship" — in an era before drug-related gangs became commonplace on the streets of America's cities. In the years from 1890 to 1960, Cincinnati's civic officials hoped to create a healthy social atmosphere, with low cost housing as one of their main goals.

The book, with its solid dissertation-like tone which is reflected in its rather trite title, is a highly specialized work, even for academic purposes. The author missed various opportunities to make the narrative more sprightly, including a chance to humanize such idealistic leaders as Clarence Dykstra, who went on to become UCLA's first provost from his position as city manager of Cincinnati and who merits special treatment. His was a generation of progressives which still had unbounded faith in urban planning. They pioneered in slum clearance, the rebuilding of urban centres, and the creation of greenbelts.

Unfortunately, the liberal-minded environment that these reformers hoped to achieve did not survive. Indeed, as the author states, the 1950s "saw the breakdown of the metropolitan community mode of thought." The breakdown in urban planning would later be accompanied by the crime-ridden epidemics of today. (There is no entry under "crime" in this book's index.) Fairbanks's volume evokes almost nostalgic feelings for those of us who have lived to see the decay and deterioration of our crowded inner cities. Today the liberal ethic is everywhere in retreat.

Andrew Rolle
Department of American Studies
Occidental College

Books of Note

Ruddel, David T. *Quebec City: 1765-1832: The Evolution of a Colonial Town*. Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, Mercury Series/History Division Papers No. 41, nd. Pp. 291. Illustrations. Disponible aussi en français.

This volume is one of the richest yet produced on a city in Canada. While it treats the more usual form, economy, demography, and polity, its focus is also much on material history and how it can be read to obtain a sense of everyday life. Material history is central to museum research, and the author, who works at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, is perhaps writing from that perspective. Nevertheless, he has opened up a little-exploited dimension of urban history. The conventional approach, however, is also represented in strength, and the conventional and innovative together have substantially altered a number of the standard views of urban development.

Possibly the most important of these views is that linking urban segregation with the industrial period of the city. In Quebec such segregation occurred between 1807 and

1835 along socio-economic and ethnic lines, and in a mercantile environment. Ruddel confirms through his detailed work what many have suggested: that social segregation was typical of the mercantile city but often too fine-grained to be easily detected. The central place of ethnicity, too, places much of the older theory in a half light.

Also central to the study of cities is the manner in which mercantile groups, with an English connection, controlled local politics and administration in order to shape and to use the city to their economic advantage. Even at this early date the nexus of capital with the local state again proves of crucial import, as does the necessity of creating appropriate structures in order to harvest wealth, often, as is the case here, in uneven fashion.

In its detail, in its pathbreaking initiatives, and in its theoretical implications, Ruddel's volume should form an essential part of any urban historian's bookshelf.

Armstrong, Frederick H. *City in the Making: Progress, People and Perils in Victorian Toronto*. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1988. Pp. 358. Illustrations. \$29.95 (cloth).

Most urban historians in Canada are familiar with the work of Fred Armstrong, and in this volume he has pulled together his many writings, published and unpublished, on Toronto. The reader is provided at the same time with an especially informed man's view of a city, and an autobiography of a scholar through his works.

The three essays in Part I, "The Urban Background," are most explicitly focused on Toronto, and reflect Professor Armstrong's early work on the drive of Toronto to obtain metropolitan status. In this section he is being most explicitly the urban historian.

A second section deals with "The Most Controversial Torontonian: William Lyon Mackenzie," who will probably be remembered in history as the man who saved the city from terminal stuffiness. In Mackenzie, the reader can find the merging of Armstrong's interests in Toronto, the rebellions, and biography.

The third section, "Types of Torontonians," places the biographical interest at the forefront, a reflection of Armstrong's long interest in the work of Henry Scadding and of his work for the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*.

Finally, there is a fourth section of three essays on fires. They are Toronto fires, to be sure, but behind them lies Armstrong's experience in the insurance business before his return to doctoral studies in 1960.

Most of what is in this volume can be found in some form elsewhere, but with some difficulty. The volume provides accessibility, and gives shape to a scholarly life.

Levesque, Andrée. *La norme et les deviantes: des femmes au Québec pendant l'entre-deux-guerres*. Montréal: Editions du remue-ménage, 1989. Pp. 232. Illustrations. \$19.95 (paper).

Professor Levesque states in her introduction that the dichotomy between prescription and practice in the life of women informs her study of Quebec women between the wars, while reproduction and sexuality provide the organizing principles. Her assertions are reflected in the actual production of her book.

The book, in fact, is split in two. The first half is devoted to the "norme," with chapters on "La Maternité" and "La Sexualité," each considered in terms of the "discours normatif" and "pratiques normatives." In the second half, "deviance" is considered broadly. Chapters deal with rejected

maternity (contraception, abortion, infanticide, and abandonment), celibacy, and prostitution.

Women's experience is placed in the context of the forces of the interwar period that induced instability (such as industrialization and urbanization) and induced anxiety (such as economic swings and Americanization of the period). In this sense the cultural manifestations, so to speak, of secular change, much of it city-based, become evident. In the life of Quebec women of the period change meant a more tenacious adherence to the "norme" even though reality altered regardless.

In this way Levesque's volume is not only an insight into the lives of women, but a serendipitous commentary on the nature of social change. The history of the interwar period is much enriched by this book, including, and perhaps especially, the history of the cities. And finally, the richness of judicial sources, for this and other histories, is a revelation.

Fingard, Judith. *Jack in Port: Sailortowns of Eastern Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988. Pp. 292. Illustrations. \$15.95 (paper).

This paper-bound version is the long-awaited reprint of Fingard's 1982 volume of the same title. Originally brought out to much critical praise, the book is now available at a price that makes feasible its classroom use as an important link between social and urban history.

Hawkins, W. E. *Electrifying Calgary: A Century of Public and Private Power*. Calgary: The University of Calgary Press, 1987. Pp. 271. Illustrations. \$15.95 (paper).

Electrifying Calgary is at least in part an insider's view of a major urban utility. In 1949 the author joined Calgary's Electric Light Department as an engineer, and years later

he retired as general manager of the City of Calgary Electric System. As such, he is sensitive to technological, management, and political problems of such institutions, and the sensitivity is reflected in the narrative.

This study is, in fact, uncommonly satisfying and informed, more than a compendium of events and personalities. It has a fine sense of the dynamic of the system, identifying what is important and what is not. Generalizations, though, do not go much beyond Calgary.

In all these respects, urban historians should be able to use this volume with confidence: the work is well documented and the story is told authoritatively. More recent events are also at first hand, but they, alas, form only a small portion of the opus.

Farr, David. *A Church in the Glebe: St. Matthew's Ottawa, 1898-1988*. Ottawa: St. Matthew's Church, 1988. Pp. 155. Illustrations.

David Farr, a professor emeritus at Carleton University and noted historian of Canadian external relations, turns his hand in this centenary volume to the history of a religious institution in a major urban community. The result is uncommonly good. The account is authoritative, with a measured sense of the relationship of the church and its community, as priorities of history do not fall before those of the constituency. In the developing sense of the urban fabric, Professor Farr has made a useful contribution, whatever might be the additional benefits to religious studies and the community for whom he wrote.

Choko, Marc H., et Harris, Richard. *L'évolution du mode d'occupation des logements à Montréal et à Toronto depuis le milieu du XIX siècle*. Montréal: INRS-urbanisation, 1989. Etudes et Documents 061. Tables, cartes. Pp. 126. Also in English as: Harris, Richard, and Choko, Marc H. *The Evolution of Housing Tenure in Montreal and Toronto Since the Mid-nineteenth Century*. Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, 1988. Research Paper No. 166. Tables, maps. Pp. 126. \$6.25.

Publication of this study represents a quantum jump in knowledge about housing trends in Canada. For the first time - after many tentative starts - scholars have reliable long-run data about tenure, in this instance for two major Canadian cities and in terms of their metropolitan, not just their core space. In addition, the care given to gathering the data provides some solid indications of the reliability of sources. The ward data and the slice-of-time cartography provide additional invaluable resources for research and classroom.

Choko and Harris derived their numbers chiefly from the census reports, and from sampled directories and assessment and tax rolls. The first boundary year is 1862, when "legible" information is reported on Toronto assessments and distinctions can be made between residences and small businesses in Montreal. The terminal year is 1981. Cross-sections are generally taken in census years at ten-year intervals, with assessment samples drawn about every 20 years.

Although the general trend in home ownership in both cities has increased, the study found considerable difference in the Toronto and Montreal patterns. In 1862 ownership rates in the two cities were about the same. "By 1921 Toronto could claim to be a city of 'homes' while Montreal remained a city of tenants." Only since 1941 have ownership levels in Montreal risen appreciably.

Perhaps the most interesting finding is the nature of the "tenure gradient" between core residential areas and the suburbs. This gradient was established in Toronto about 1901 and in Montreal a little later. With condominium development, the gradient has become less steep and has even reversed as people return to the core to live.

In a more general sense the "data reveal the existence of three stages in the evolution of tenure differences between Toronto and Montreal." They also, perhaps coincidentally, represent the three distinct stages of housing provision in North America: building for or by the occupant, mixed small-scale and large-scale development with growing government intervention, and the emergence under government oversight of integrated developers.

The authors plan to use these periods as "the historical framework for future research." In the next phase of their research, Harris and Choko intend to look at the middle of the three periods, covering roughly 1921 to 1951. They argue that in these years differences between the cities were at their greatest and also that these years are the least understood. On the basis of the research published, their findings on the second phase cannot come soon enough.

Isin, Engin F. *The Birth of the Modern City in British North America: An Introduction*. Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, 1989. Research Paper No. 173. Pp. 41. \$4.50.

Isin, in this introduction to a projected study, reminds us that "the emergence of urban studies in the 20th century was not a creation *ex nihilo*." Such emergence may well be simply academic conceit. In fact what we might call urban studies in North America has its roots in the administrative history of European nations and what they saw as the role of "towns" in the new world.

It was, as Isin points out, a shifting vision, contingent on altered European perspectives (for example, regarding mercantilism) and shifting events and processes (for example, the American Revolution or the rise of industry).

In this paper the author examines with some care the British colonial record on policies regarding "towns," both for post-conquest Quebec and for pre- and post-revolutionary British North America. Policy shifts are isolated and interpreted. He proceeds with some confidence in this era, and goes on to examine the "urban" problem as conceived of in the later 19th century, but with less certainty. Teaford and Taylor would provide some help in this area.

Still this is a timely review of what it has meant - or can mean - to study the urban question in a broader sense than an academic historiography. Subsequent work is awaited with interest.

Harris, Richard. *The Family Home in Working-Class Life*. Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, 1989. Pp. 27. \$3.50.

This small study is one of very few that brings together people and the places in which they live. These two factors are usually treated separately, for example as the family or working men in the former case and as housing in the latter. The dwelling is not simply a reflection of family status, an indicator of its capacity to choose. It is, rather, the operational territory and structure of the family, and is capable of shaping it.

As Harris points out, such influences may be especially true among working-class families. "Wives of male workers have been especially likely to use the home to obtain income from boarders, home daycare and industrial homework. The men have been more than usually likely to invest labour in their home." In this sense the home can

become a means to reduce class inequities, and possibly breed conservative political and ideological attitudes.

A number of noteworthy institutional publications are now available.

There are two recent arrivals in Parks Canada "Heritage Commemoration Series": Mills, Edward. *Former Territorial Courthouse: Fort Macleod, Alberta*. Ottawa: Supply and Services, 1988; and Johnson, Dana. *Ottawa Teachers' College: Ottawa, Ontario*. Ottawa: Supply and Services, 1988.

The most recent supplement to the bibliography of the Sherbrooke area, begun in 1972, is now available as: Dubois, J.M.M., et Dubois, Lise. *Bibliographie sur les caractéristiques physiques des cantons de l'est, Québec, Canada (Supplément no. 7)*. Sherbrooke: Géographie, Université de Sherbrooke, 1988. Pp. 174.

One of the few administrative histories of a Canadian city and a guide to its records is available for Hamilton: Gray, Carolyn. *Historical Records of the City of Hamilton, 1847-1973*. Hamilton: McMaster University, 1986. Pp. 119.

John Taylor
Carleton University