

Miller, Ian Hugh Maclean. *Our Glory and Our Grief: Torontonians and the Great War*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. Pp. 267. Photographs

Tim Cook

Volume 31, numéro 2, spring 2003

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1015774ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1015774ar>

[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

Cook, T. (2003). Compte rendu de [Miller, Ian Hugh Maclean. *Our Glory and Our Grief: Torontonians and the Great War*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. Pp. 267. Photographs]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 31(2), 53–54. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1015774ar>

Book Reviews

à redessiner les alliances stratégiques entre les acteurs de la société civile.

Il est difficile de faire ressortir en quelques lignes la richesse des analyses présentées dans cet ouvrage. Ce panorama européen permet de voir que certains pays, notamment l'Allemagne, la France, l'Italie, la Hollande et l'Angleterre ont développé un corpus dense d'études traitant de la pollution urbaine dans une perspective historique. On souhaite voir émerger au Canada des analyses aussi riches et stimulantes des enjeux sociaux, politiques, culturels et économiques rattachés à la pollution urbaine et à ses mesures de contrôle. Par exemple, on connaît l'omniprésence de l'industrie du cuir dans l'économie de Montréal ainsi que celle de la fabrication du matériel roulant de chemin de fer. Quel fut l'impact de ces activités industrielles sur l'environnement de la ville ? Aujourd'hui, ce lourd passé industriel nous laisse avec des sols contaminés dont les coûts de réhabilitation effraient les promoteurs. D'importantes quantités de sédiments contaminés couvrent le fond de nos cours d'eau. Qui plus est, la pollution industrielle et urbaine a quitté les villes pour aller rejoindre les espaces ruraux et de villégiature en raison de l'industrialisation de la production agricole et de l'étalement urbain. En bref, il est à espérer que cet imposant ouvrage encourage les historiens canadiens à entreprendre des travaux sur la pollution et les enjeux environnementaux.

Claire Poitras
INRS-Urbanisation, Culture et Société

Miller, Ian Hugh Maclean. *Our Glory and Our Grief: Torontonians and the Great War*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002. Pp. 267. Photographs.

Ian Miller's *Our Glory and Our Grief: Torontonians in the Great War* challenges the orthodoxy surrounding the Great War and how it was experienced on the home front. Previous historiography, most notably Jeff Keshen's *Propaganda and Censorship* (1996), argued that strong censorship in Canada and self-censorship among soldiers overseas left the citizenry of Canada blindly supporting a war they did not comprehend.

From scrutinizing Toronto's six newspapers, Miller suggests, in direct contrast to Keshen's work, that Torontonians were painfully aware of the horrors of trench warfare with its indiscriminate death and apocalyptic landscape of mud, corpses, and destruction. Miller makes a convincing case that Torontonians understood the magnitude of the war and that official censorship could not block the grim messages from the front, either in the form of letters from soldiers or the unending lists of casualties that were published throughout the country's newspapers.

Yet there are countless examples of soldiers who self-censored their own letters for fear of contravening army censorship rules. Others felt that those at home would not or could not understand the grim reality of war. Moreover, for those on the home front, reading about lice and rats did not equate to experiencing parasitic insects burrowing into one's skin or rodents running over one's sleeping body. The gulf of understanding widens

when one considers the smell of unburied corpses, the fear and anxiety experienced during a drumfire bombardment, or the constant sorrow of seeing friends killed. Even when poignant, heart-breaking letters were sent home or published, an avalanche of 'stiff upper-lip' accounts usually buried them. Nonetheless, even if Miller pushes too hard to prove his thesis that Torontonians understood the overseas trench warfare experience, he is certainly correct in arguing that Canadians on the home front knew about the terrible struggle overseas.

Despite this innovative argument, *Our Glory and Our Grief* still reads like a Ph.D. thesis that has not made the full transition into a monograph. That does not mean the reader has to plod through stodgy academic prose. Miller has an exciting writing style, and his text is infused with clever anecdotes and stories that he has drawn from his primary source, Toronto's newspapers.

The problem with this book is its almost single-minded viewpoint that Torontonians, with almost no opposition, supported the conflict. Although Miller has some insightful observations on the patriotic work of Torontonians, the role of women during the war, the number of potential soldiers turned down due to medical problems, and the 1917 election, he misses the opportunity to explore issues of urbanization, the marginalized, and war munitions. All are relevant to any assessment of how the war affected Torontonians.

The treatment of labour issues is even more troubling. In hammering away at the thesis that Torontonians were overwhelmingly behind the war effort, he suggests that labour worked in accordance with big business and supported conscription. Although labour took the opportunity to support conscription if it also meant the conscription of wealth, to judge newspaper-reported public statements by labour leaders as supportive while they were mainly attempting to curry favour with the public is not terribly convincing. This viewpoint is an indication of the problem of relying almost exclusively on newspaper accounts. It may be true that we need a re-appraisal of the role of labour, but we do not get enough analysis in this work to draw any firm conclusions. The vast increase in strike days lost in 1918 is not easily or persuasively explained away in his concluding chapters.

Despite a robust bibliography, as the endnotes reveal, *Our Glory and Our Grief* is written almost entirely from newspaper accounts. Although Miller cites the pitfalls of using newspaper sources in his introduction, he does not appear to have heeded his own advice. Newspapers, and especially early twentieth century ones, were strongly controlled and influenced by their editors and patrons. Does an editorial reflect the views of working-class women or recent immigrants?

Miller's use of letters to the editor is more representative, but they, too, reflect bias and privilege. Did every letter sent to the newspaper get published; did those that questioned the war see print? Did those women who lost a son or a husband ever have doubts about the war? Apparently not, but of course that form of discourse would never make its way into the newspapers. That does not discount Miller's thesis, but the *Glory and the Grief* allows no space for this hidden history of the war.

Miller's reliance on local newspapers also detracts from placing the experience of Torontonians in the wider context of the war. The author did not set out to write a comparative analysis of various Canadian cities (although other scholars may now build on Miller's work), but a case study like this would have been stronger if it had been more firmly situated within the national context.

Miller's work is a significant contribution to our understanding of the home front during the Great War. *Our Glory and Our Grief* ensures that historians will no longer assume that Canadian citizens blindly supported the war, tricked by diligent censors or immoral politicians who kept the truth from the public. Despite his focus on the patriotic support of the war, one would still expect issues relating to the city itself – transportation and housing – to be examined, for these too would have impacted on Torontonians and the war. Nonetheless, this book enriches our understanding and is a welcome addition to the thin historiography of writing relating to the role of Canadians on the home front during the Great War.

Tim Cook
Canadian War Museum

Korinek, Valerie J. *Roughing it in the Suburbs. Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000. Pp. xv, 460. Black and white illustrations, bibliography, index. Can\$75.00 (hardcover) Can\$29.95 (paper).

"Suburban" has always meant a place and also a way of life. In the early postwar decades this life centred on home and family and involved a clear division of labour between wives and husbands. In the late 1960s and 1970s, inspired by Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), a new wave of feminists rebelled against this way of life, and also the manner in which it was endorsed by the media. Among their targets were women's magazines that supposedly stereotyped women as homemakers, urging and helping them to excel in that capacity through wise purchasing and skilful domestic labour. To second-wave feminists, the suburbs became the main site of women's oppression, and women's magazines a leading apologist.

Using the suburbs as a metaphor for women's estate in the 1950s and 1960s, Valerie Korinek, a historian at the University of Saskatchewan, challenges the feminist critique of women's magazines. She shows that *Chatelaine*, by far the most popular periodical directed at Canadian women during the 1950s and 1960s, presented mixed messages that allowed – and arguably encouraged – its readers to reflect critically on the appropriate role of women in Canadian society. There was a counterpoint and sometimes an opposition between the business department, led by advertising, and the editors. The covers and advertising presented a consistent stereotype of the housewife as happy household manager and general purchasing agent. The service departments of the magazine, for example those that dealt with food, home crafts, and gardening, reinforced this image, although they were sometimes a little out of step with the

advertising: a surprisingly large number of the recipes, for example, made little use of the new varieties of packaged food.

In contrast, *Chatelaine's* fiction and editorial matter presented views that questioned the suburban ideal. Fiction, a waning department, often dealt with the dissatisfactions and problems of women's lot, and sometimes of men's too. Formulaic, it usually concluded with a pat resolution. Editorials and feature articles, however, "the most lively and consistently appealing pages", covered most of the important social issues of the day. Especially after Doris Anderson took over as editor in 1958, these were dealt with consistently from a feminist point of view. In 1952, an article entitled "Canadian Women are Suckers" challenged gender stereotypes. Later in the decade two major features, "How to Live in the Suburbs" and "The Sickness of the Suburbs", as well as a series of articles on fatigue by Dr. Marion Hilliard, recognized the deficiencies of suburban living for many women, and anticipated Betty Friedan's better-known critique. In the 1960s, a succession of features, for example those on contraception and poverty, articulated a feminist point of view. Far from hindering the feminist cause, then, *Chatelaine* may be said to have promoted it.

Korinek documents her case effectively, and indeed exhaustively. She scanned the magazine from 1950 to 1969, read and tabulated the published letters, examined the archived unpublished letters from 1962, interviewed key writers and editors (including Doris Anderson) and examined useful readers survey data. These sources allow her to show that readers probed and criticized the messages that *Chatelaine* contained – both those of the advertisers and also those of the feminists associated with the magazine. Given that *Chatelaine's* readership was a cross-section of the female population, the letters in particular show that by the 1960s it was as feminist as any popular magazine could hope to be.

Korinek is less convincing in her attempts to explain why *Chatelaine* differed from its American counterparts. Half of the story, she argues, is that it was mostly edited by women. Maclean-Hunter, the publisher, often ignored their editorial line because its attention was focused elsewhere, on *Maclean's*. The other half of the story, she suggests in the introduction, is that Canadian families were less affluent and Canadian suburbs more diverse. Many were "roughing it" without services and transit. Surprisingly, given the catchy title, Korinek does not develop this argument, perhaps because it is unsustainable. Certainly, as Veronica Strong-Boag has shown, many Canadian women faced real difficulties in the early postwar suburbs. Supposing this was not true in the United States, however, it is unclear how it could have made *Chatelaine* more feminist. Korinek presents no evidence that those who faced the greater hardships were more receptive to feminist ideas. Indeed, such is unlikely since second-wave feminism was, disproportionately, a middle-class movement.

Settlement patterns suggest that, if anything, *Chatelaine's* readership should have been more conservative than those of American magazines. In the 1950s Canada was a less urban, and a less suburban nation, than the United States; a high proportion of *Chatelaine's* readership came from rural areas and small