

## *Port Hope: A History* By Ian Montagnes

Peter Ennals

---

Volume 99, numéro 2, fall 2007

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065746ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065746ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

---

### Éditeur(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

### ISSN

0030-2953 (imprimé)

2371-4654 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

---

### Citer ce compte rendu

Ennals, P. (2007). Compte rendu de [*Port Hope: A History* By Ian Montagnes]. *Ontario History*, 99(2), 259–260. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065746ar>

casual reader, for the avid student of transit systems or those interested in the history of Canada's capital, such detail will enhance the enjoyment of the work. In addition to colourful anecdotes and studies of various personalities involved in the running of the streetcar system, the hundreds of archival photographs, maps, and other material (in black and white and colour) closely complement the text and make for a visually stunning book. Sussex Street at Rideau Hall gate about 1900 is one of the best: horse-drawn carriage waiting in the dusty street (with

bits of litter strewn about) as the open-sided "Chaudiere Falls" car clatters past, passengers dangling dangerously. (p. 79) Readers are in for a visual feast. On the whole *Ottawa Streetcars* provides interesting insights into the broader social and political history of Ottawa for the better part of a century and highlights the importance of transit systems to the Canadian urban experience.

Gregory Stott  
University of British Columbia, Okanagan Campus

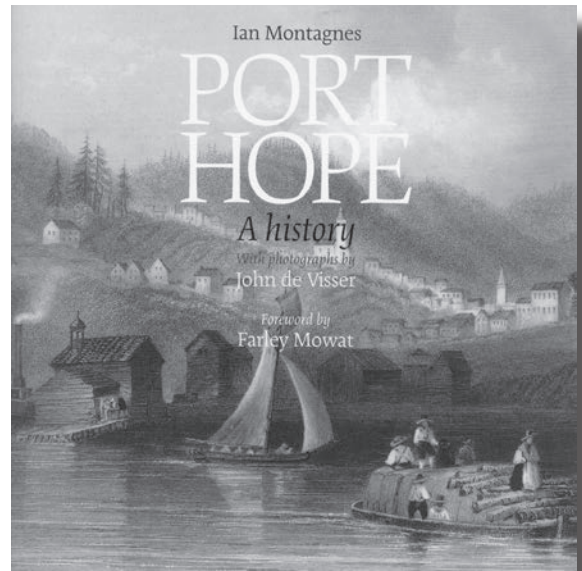
## *Port Hope: a History*

By Ian Montagnes. Port Hope, Ontario: Ganaraska Press, 2007. vii + 228 pp. \$29.50 soft-cover. ISBN 0-9781968-0-5.

The launch of this book signals the birth of the Ganaraska Press, the brain-child of Ian Montagnes and his wife Elizabeth Wilson. Montagnes is the former editor-in-chief of the University of Toronto Press and, not surprisingly, he has been able to draw on this experience and his considerable literary and production connections in the execution of this inaugural book. The foreword by fellow Port Hope resident Farley Mowat and the superb photography of John de Visser, along with the book design of Willem Hart, make this a singularly attractive and readable book and set it above many, if not most, of the 'community histories' that form this burgeoning genre.

Comprising twenty-five tightly-focused chapters, *Port Hope: a History* surveys a wide range of topics that track the unfolding of this town from first settlement in 1792 to its modern manifestation in the late twentieth century. At the heart of this narrative is the river, initially called Smith Creek and

later the Ganaraska, and the harbour which formed the river's outlet into Lake Ontario. Port Hope is one of a string of towns on the 'Old Ontario Strand' each of which served a rural hinterland encompassing not only the first tier of counties along Lake Ontario but also the back country districts of Peterborough and beyond. As ports these towns, which included (among others) Cobourg, Grafton, Colborne, Brighton, Trenton, and Belleville to the east, as well as Port Britain, Newcastle, Bowmanville, Oshawa, and



Whitby to the west, vied with each other to capture the rich trade that moved along and across Lake Ontario. Critical in this activity was the quality of the harbour, the skill and connections of local entrepreneurs, and the foresight of town fathers in financing infrastructure at key moments, such as the arrival of the railroad in the 1850s. Montagnes rightly describes Port Hope's key role in the creation of the Midland Railway of Canada in competition with its rival, the ill-fated Cobourg and Peterborough Railway.

In the same way, the author emphasizes the development of local industry and the articulation of the town's urban fabric through the nineteenth century. Using evidence obtained mainly from the pages of the town's principal newspaper, the *Port Hope Evening Guide*, Montagnes reconstructs the town's struggle with issues of harbour development, fire protection, municipal water service, waste disposal, street paving, schools, hospitals, and other services. Port Hope's town fathers seemed particularly reluctant to invest in many of these amenities, compared to neighbouring towns like Cobourg, for example. We also see a town riven with sectarianism, the excesses of Victorian patriotism, and class consciousness. Nevertheless, we discover a town that for a time claimed to be among the leading ports of early Ontario. But here, of course, the author must filter the rhetorical assertions and rampant boosterism that was the hallmark of small town newspaper editors.

Montagnes also describes the waning economic fortunes that descended upon most of these small towns after 1870 as the growing shadows of Toronto and Hamilton overwhelmed small industrial producers and the brightest and best were lured to these cities. Thereafter Port Hope and other of its likeness entered a long hiatus, only to rebound when the metropolis began to impinge on it in the 1960s by means of su-

per highways. With this new relationship some towns, and Port Hope is a wonderful case example, attracted people seeking out a small town lifestyle and ambience. Accordingly Montagnes offers a celebratory chapter entitled 'Restoration and Renewal' which details the role and accomplishments that key individuals played as early champions of architectural preservation. It is clear that these efforts have been an important part of defining Port Hope's current status as a desirable place to live.

On balance *Port Hope: a History* is a delightful book. Among its strengths is Montagnes' economical and uncomplicated writing style. Uncluttered by jargon, the prose will be accessible to all readers including school children. The book includes a couple of chapters that are concessions to past notables. The chapters on the Great Farini (a local daredevil) and the Hero of Batoche add human interest but seem out of place with respect to the main theme. For an academic audience the book will seem somewhat deficient in terms of analytical stance and the depth of research. Here the repetition of well-worn evocations of the crudeness of nineteenth-century roads and the rigors of daily life, combined with the hyperbole and parochialism of local boosters, will seem all too familiar. Clearly there is need for a more scholarly literature that probes the nature of Ontario's early small towns and their various transitions, set against a broader socio-economic process and context. Nevertheless this volume offers much for a general reader. It deserves to be read as a fine example of a local history that balances reverence for one's ancestors with an insightful account of urban and social development processes, and does so with exquisite visual materials and engaging story-telling.

Peter Ennals  
Mount Allison University