

Wood, J. David, editor. *Perspectives on Landscape and Settlement in Nineteenth Century Ontario*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1975. Pp. xxviii, 213. \$4.95

Darrell Norris

Numéro 3-76, february 1977

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019470ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019470ar>

[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

Norris, D. (1977). Compte rendu de [Wood, J. David, editor. *Perspectives on Landscape and Settlement in Nineteenth Century Ontario*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1975. Pp. xxviii, 213. \$4.95]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, (3-76), 59–62. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019470ar>

Wood, J. David, editor. Perspectives on Landscape and Settlement in Nineteenth Century Ontario. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1975. Pp. xxviii, 213. \$4.95.

This collection of essays is a captivating introduction to the historical geography of Southern Ontario. J. David Wood adroitly ties together the thematic research interests of nine contributors. Around these essays Wood weaves an introduction and commentary exploring geographical context in its widest sense. He traces the interplay of colonial policy, resource exploitation and human migration in a society imbued with the doctrine of progress, a society tied simultaneously to Britain and the United States. As Wood notes in an epilogue, the collection of essays mostly focuses on Ontario before 1850. Certain themes are not treated--railway development, changing urban patterns, demographic change, secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy, and urban social geography. Instead, the essays encapsulate Ontario landscapes during the first few generations of human occupation.

The first five essays examine distinct themes: pre-contact indian occupation, the impact of initial colonial settlement planning, road transportation, agriculture, and forest exploitation. The last four essays seek a synthesis of factors in settlement, and focus on small geographical areas. Two rural (Peterborough County and the Guelph Block) and two urban case studies (Kingston, Cobourg and Port Hope) are included. All nine contributors provide a basis for future and comparative research. The essays echo the tradition of imaginative use of sources in historical geography. The reader who is unfamiliar with statistical methods is not penalized: the clarity and methodological simplicity of the volume will attract a wide readership.

In the first thematic essay, Victor Konrad brings a geographer's perspective to an archeological problem. He investigates the distribution of pre-historic village sites in the Toronto area and reveals general environmental preferences of Iroquoian shifting cultivators. Konrad

also discusses the morphology of village sites. Although he stresses the preliminary nature of the evidence, it is interesting to note that even less is known about locational and morphological preferences underlying the hamlets and villages of nineteenth century Ontario. Discussion of such foci is conspicuously absent in the second essay, in which R. Louis Gentilcore and J. David Wood tie the strategic design for Upper Canada conceived circa 1790 to the realities of settlement prior to 1850. They stress port and administrative functions as urban stimuli in a simple resource exploitation economy. Thomas McIlwraith carries this line of reasoning back to the settler-farmer. His essay outlines the rationale for and use of a road system which brought the back country farmer to the lakefront wheat port. McIlwraith makes the point that individual farmers handled not only the building of most roads but also the traffic they conveyed. Thus these informal, and critical, elements of the early nineteenth century landscape are faintly echoed in the documentary record.

The farmer's response to his immediate environment is discussed in the essay by Kenneth Kelly, who considers the evaluation of land and its modification by man. Kelly deftly handles dichotomies of landscape change, for example clearance and accelerated run-off, wheat and weeds. He identifies remedial modifications to the 'over-cleared' agricultural scene: crop diversification, reforestation and improved drainage. Kelly notes, however, that general trends were disguised at a local level by a complex mosaic of farmscapes, of individual parcels differing in the rate and point of an overall transition from pioneer to mixed farm. Kelly too stresses the individual farmer, citing his context and acumen as important factors in the appearance of the pre-1880 rural Ontario landscape.

Similar levels of resolution are adopted by C. Grant Head, who reviews the pattern of commercial forest exploitation in Ontario in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Although he provides an excellent aggregate view of the squared timber and sawn lumber trades

and their associated spatial patterns, Head's major contribution is to proceed to a detailed examining of licensing and cutting within a single producing area. Within the Belleville Agency, he further considers the activities of a single company. Head finds that unreliability of water supply in headwater streams encouraged a dispersion of cutting activity in order to minimize risk.

Alan Brunger's analysis of settlement in Peterborough County suggests that initial farm locations were generally chosen for rather than by Irish emigrants, and that official direction was cognizant both of land quality and social ties as bases for successful settlement. Brunger's essay also describes the unsuccessful attempt to settle Shield land by means of government colonization roads and a free grant policy. James Cameron also considers a land settlement scheme, the Canada Company's acquisition and promotion of the Guelph Block. Cameron presupposes eight general factors in land development and evaluates four of these with reference to Company activities. He discusses the role of capital, infrastructure development, the encouragement of emigration, and ensuing settlement growth. Cameron does not, however, establish that the Guelph Block's subsequent development differed in degree or kind from those areas in which such initial organization and impetus were lacking. Certainly Guelph's hinterland served its city better than did Kingston's.

Brian Osborne's essay treats the poorly developed territory around Kingston as one of several factors in its stagnation after 1843. He discusses familiar aspects of Kingston's demise--the loss of the seat of government, detrimental effects of canal and railway improvements, the removal of the garrison and the decline of the port and its related activities. Osborne's essay reflects a growing interest in the general and particular aspects of small urban centres in Ontario. Peter Ennals provides an instructive parallel to the crisis of confidence which accompanied and reinforced Kingston's misfortunes. Ennals' discussion of Cobourg and Port Hope focusses on a doctrine of success and

competition expressed in municipal involvement in port and interior transportation development. After reviewing this struggle for back country trade, Ennals speaks of many Cobourgs where "hopes of grandeur were made to face a crushing reality". McIlwraith and Ennals adopt instructively distinct perspectives on back country penetration.

Readers will leave this book impressed by this and other comparative perspectives on the changing Ontario landscape. For this reviewer, the collection of essays struck a balance between those seeking individual context and behaviour as an arbiter of pattern and change, and those interpreting change as an outcome of collective or exogenous forces. Such a range of perspectives merits a wide readership, and augurs well for the future of historical geography in Ontario.

Darrell Norris
Department of Geography
McMaster University

* * *