

Ethnologies

Herb MacDonald. *Cape Breton Railways. An Illustrated History.* (Sydney: 2012, Cape Breton University Press. Pp. 260. ISBN: 978-1-897009-67-3)

Vanessa Childs Rolls

Volume 34, Number 1-2, 2012

URI: id.erudit.org/iderudit/1026157ar

DOI: [10.7202/1026157ar](https://doi.org/10.7202/1026157ar)

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN 1481-5974 (print)
1708-0401 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Rolls, V. (2012). Herb MacDonald. *Cape Breton Railways. An Illustrated History.* (Sydney: 2012, Cape Breton University Press. Pp. 260. ISBN: 978-1-897009-67-3). *Ethnologies*, 34(1-2), 322–323. doi:10.7202/1026157ar

Tous droits réservés © Ethnologies, Université Laval, 2012

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online. [<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>]

The logo for Érudit, featuring the word "érudit" in a bold, red, sans-serif font. The letter "é" has a distinctive red accent mark above it.

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research. www.erudit.org

Herb MacDonald. *Cape Breton Railways. An Illustrated History.* (Sydney: 2012, Cape Breton University Press. Pp. 260. ISBN: 978-1-897009-67-3)

The history of the railroad in Cape Breton is tied to the island's industrial past. Rail lines were a key development for both the coal fields and the steel industry. While it is common for writers who focus on railways to wax romantically about the majesty of steam in a tumultuous industrial world, MacDonald resists this urge and focuses on the facts. Instead of glorifying the rail industry, his passion for the subject is presented through meticulous attention to detail.

Herb MacDonald's *Cape Breton Railways. An Illustrated History* chronicles the rise and fall of the rail industry in Cape Breton from the early nineteenth century to the present. The rail lines began in the coal fields, transporting coal from the pit head to the shipping piers using wooden rails and horse power. By the late 1800s the process became industrialized and utilized steam engines and steel tracks. The coal that the railway was created to haul was readily available to power steam engines, and this new technology facilitated travel across greater distances. During the golden age of rail in Cape Breton, there were several passenger trains each day and industrial trains carrying coal and steel to external markets. Then, industry declined. Coal and steel ceased to be exported and the rail lines fell to disuse. Modern rail use in Cape Breton is currently restricted to moving coal from local docks to the power plant.

MacDonald's extensive knowledge of rail lines is clear in this book. His in-depth understanding of the rail system, however, can sometimes leave the inexperienced reader confused and feeling lost. Many of the technical details he uses to discuss the early stages of rail lines need further explanation and clarification. Further, the revolving ownership of several of the Cape Breton rail lines makes that particular topic extremely confusing. While there are many facts presented, a clear narrative is lacking, especially in the sections that examine the businesses that controlled the rail lines. Perhaps the emphasis should have been on the lines themselves and their services, rather than the companies that owned them. Finally, the narrow focus on the history of the companies who ran the railways relegates the people who worked on them to small vignettes or the single chapter dedicated to unions and workers. There is virtually no discussion of the passengers who used the various services that the rail lines offered

and virtually no information on railway porters.

The most impressive part of the book is the collection of photographs that MacDonald gathered from a multitude of different museums and private collections across Cape Breton Island. MacDonald managed to find photos of almost every locomotive that served the island, as well as several images of the island's railway stations. For this reason alone, it would be a welcome addition to any Cape Breton or railway history collection. Further, MacDonald is clearly an expert in the Maritime railway and this book is the culmination of an impressive amount of research into a topic that has little or no source material. *Cape Breton Railways* will be a key resource for any future research into rail lines and industry in Cape Breton. Despite the narrow focus, this book will have broader appeal to those with an interest in transportation and the development of railways in Canada.

Vanessa Childs Rolls
Memorial University

Alison R. Marshall. *The Way of the Bachelor: Early Chinese Settlement in Manitoba*. (Vancouver: 2011, University of British Columbia Press. Pp. xv-226. ISBN 978-0-7748-1916-9)

The Way of the Bachelor is a history of early Chinese immigrants to Western Manitoba and adjacent areas. The group history is successfully told through the stories of individuals who might be different from each other in various ways, but due to the institutional and social context, experienced similar life patterns in the Canadian Prairies in the period between their first arrival and the repeal of the Canadian Chinese Immigration Act (1884-1947). This life pattern is termed "the way of the bachelor," which refers to a process of Chinese settlers, who were often separated from their families in China and forced to live with other males of the same ethnicity, forming relationships, becoming nominal Christians, and winning the respect of the town people (108). The similar contextual situation and life track define a united Chinese community: "Chinese men who worked together in laundries and cafes may not have been brothers by blood, but