

*Toronto: An Illustrated History of its First 12,000 years* Edited  
by Ronald F. Williamson

Jim Lemon

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records that the statement is based upon only three instances. I am sympathetic to this circumstance because frequently data are simply in short supply, and one has to be appreciative of any insight. But clearly there is still work to be done. That said, we have to be grateful for Wilson's endurance and achievement. We have much to celebrate in her work.

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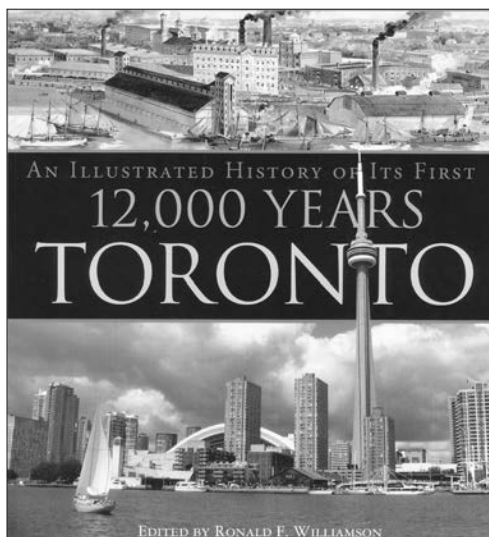
*Toronto: An Illustrated History of its First 12,000 years*

Edited by Ronald F. Williamson

Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 2008. 128 pages. \$29.95 softcover. ISBN 1-55277-007-9 ([www.formac.ca](http://www.formac.ca))

Ronald Williamson apparently had a clever idea. Wanting to find a wider audience for his studies of pre-European aboriginals in the Toronto region, he struck on the idea of recruiting other writers to discuss Toronto's past through various periods. Peter Carruthers frames the task in his preface. Robert MacDonald's chapter deals with the natural history, followed by Williamson's on about 10,000 years of native occupation. Carl Benn covers the period 1700 to 1850, Christopher Andrae roughly the subsequent century, and finally Roger Hall on the past half century or so. Note: not until half way through the book do we meet the founding of York.

Archeologist MacDonald reminds us of very ancient bedrock underlying the Toronto region and visible at the Don Valley brickyard, as are interglacial, glacial and post-glacial beds. By 12,000 before present (BP) the retreat or melting of the continental glacier



had concluded, though the lake level subsequently rose higher and then lower before coming up the current stage. By about 7,500 BP the modern forest as we know it had arrived, after the land had passed through the tundra and boreal stages.

In an oddly named chapter, "Before the Visitors," Williamson brings the aboriginals onto this scene about 11,000 BP, and then with deepening understanding describes their presence up to European contact and beyond. He lays out five periods of occupancy. Not

unexpectedly, only the most recent period—that is, since agriculture was introduced about 1,500 years ago—yields the artifacts to tell us very much. The neolithic age had finally arrived with maize, squash and beans imported from the south. Women became responsible for the crops, and so profound was this development on life that lineages shifted to the female line. Men continued to hunt and fish, and women gathered fruit and nuts. The Iroquoian-speaking residents sited their fortified villages of longhouses on bluffs above streams.

Two points. I was surprised that Williamson failed to discuss the severe impact of European diseases, mentioning them only in passing: mostly smallpox and measles that decimated native populations in most (?) parts of North America. The second point has to do with military operations. Williamson mentions fortified villages but does not tell us of violence and bloodshed. (That does not suggest that I see the aboriginals as any more savage at times than were my ancestors.)

Carl Benn is the most surefooted of the authors in his chapter, “Colonial Transformations,” the period from 1700 to 1850 being his forte. The aboriginals in the Toronto region no longer were Iroquoian, but Algonkian, non-farming Mississaugas, and they had to balance trade and military connections with both the French and the English. In 1759 the French left Lake Ontario for good, even as the fur and skin trade was gradually disappearing from the region. A generation later the British bought Mississauga land already being settled by Loyalist farmers and, soon after the founding of Upper (and Lower) Canada in 1791, York replaced Niagara (on-the-Lake) as capital. Until 1815 York was a military camp and grew only slowly; during the War of 1812 Americans attacked it three times. Yonge Street traced a path northward to Lake Simcoe, and its construction was followed by roads running to the

east and west. The town (which became the City of Toronto in 1834) progressed materially through commerce, shipping, banking and insurance, and manufacturing, and slowly added public services as the population grew. The 1837 economic downturn, felt on both sides of the Atlantic, was accompanied by the famous rebellion, led by printer and one-term mayor William Lyon Mackenzie, against the elite Upper Canada government. Thereafter Upper and Lower Canada were united, with Toronto being the capital from time to time until Confederation.

In “The Age of Industry” Christopher Andreae draws on his immense knowledge of the railway and waterway systems as they developed. Late compared to other larger cities in the United States and Montreal, by 1855 engineers and workers had built the first railway to connect Toronto with Georgian Bay at Collingwood, reaffirming the Toronto Passage of old. Soon after, other rail connections linked the city into networks. All lines had to be accommodated on the waterfront, which forced Toronto into the creation of land by filling, in stages. Andreae packs into a few pages a useful, balanced overview of internal changes and connections to the outside.

Roger Hall leads us, as he says, into the 21st century, from about 1945 onward. He captures a good share of the politics and economy of the revival of prosperity, conditions that led to the highest degree of material well being ever achieved for the widest number of people, now including many immigrants. Hitherto unknown social programs for health insurance, pensions and social assistance created a safety net for most. But instead of warning of the erosion of this collective reality since the 1970s—most startlingly in the mid 1990s when the federal Chretien-Martin budgets, and even more brutally Harris provincial funding, whacked the poor—Hall concludes with musings about Toronto’s status in the world.

In his preface Carruthers refers to Toronto as the Middle Ground, connecting Ontario and Canada to the rest of world, and asserts that THE history of Toronto is contained within these pages. Hold on! A lot was not said; the authors had to be selective. I worry too about the word “heritage” as being soft history; too little is made of difficulties expe-

rienced by many.

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## *A Silent Revolution? Gender and Wealth in English Canada, 1860-1930*

By Peter Baskerville

Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008. viii + 375 pages. \$29.95 softcover. ISBN 0-7735-3470-4 ([www.mqup.ca](http://www.mqup.ca))

Contemporary historical geography continues to turn an eye to the more complex readings of spatial identities that may be gained by examining gender. Traditional approaches have engaged with masculine and feminine identities through the division of public and private spheres, and have explored how women's roles have been historically shaped by more limited mobility and independence in their more private, domestic roles. Peter Baskerville's *A Silent Revolution* offers a direct challenge to these assumptions, through an examination of women as managers of property and wealth within the urban middle class. This narrative serves as a response to historians who have labeled women, Baskerville notes, as “crippled capitalists” or as individuals lacking in independence or mobility outside of the domestic sphere.

This text examines women's relationship to wealth in English Canada

between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Baskerville approaches this task through an analysis of probate documents, newspapers, wills, property investments, mortgages, and so on, for women in Hamilton and Victoria from 1860 to 1930. His goal in doing so is to present a national picture through localized stories of individual women and their economic worlds, asking “what do we know about the independent economic activity and wealth-holdings of married and other women in late-nineteenth century urban Canada?” (p. 8)

Much of Baskerville's focus is directed towards the introduction of Married Women's Property Laws (MWPLs), which allowed for dramatic change in the proportion of property owned by women. In contrast to the period before the introduction of this 1870s legislation, when it was not possible for women to own property in their own name or conduct busi-

