

The Romance of Boys Bathing in Toronto's Don River, 1890–1930

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Volume 47, Number 1-2, Fall 2018, Spring 2019

Bad Behaviours and Disorderly Public Spaces
Incivilités et désordres dans l'espace public

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1064875ar>
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1064875ar>

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Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (print)
1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Barbour, D. (2018). The Romance of Boys Bathing in Toronto's Don River, 1890–1930. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 47(1-2), 11–26.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1064875ar>

Article abstract

This article uses a study of Toronto in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to upend assumptions about class, the urban environment, and the presentation of the naked body. Rather than attempting to drive bathers out of urban space, the city's middle class viewed the bathing boy through the lens of anti-modernism and turned them into pre-industrial folk figures. Puncturing the nostalgic gloss of the swimming hole allows us to see the city with new eyes. We can avoid declensionist narratives that imagined Toronto's Don River as too polluted or too industrial for recreational use. When we follow the bathers we find that the marginal, semi-industrialized river provided an ideal recreational space that cloaked and contained the undressed male body. This project relies on newspaper accounts of drownings and rescues, municipal records, regional histories, and visual culture to recreate the social environment of early twentieth-century bathing spaces.

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This article uses a study of Toronto in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to upend assumptions about class, the urban environment, and the presentation of the naked body. Rather than attempting to drive bathers out of urban space, the city's middle class viewed the bathing boy through the lens of anti-modernism and turned them into pre-industrial folk figures. Puncturing the nostalgic gloss of the swimming hole allows us to see the city with new eyes. We can avoid declensionist narratives that imagined Toronto's Don River as too polluted or too industrial for recreational use. When we follow the bathers we find that the marginal, semi-industrialized river provided an ideal recreational space that cloaked and contained the undressed male body. This project relies on newspaper accounts of drownings and rescues, municipal records, regional histories, and visual culture to recreate the social environment of early twentieth-century bathing spaces.

Cet article utilise une étude de Toronto à la fin du dix-neuvième et au début du vingtième siècle pour mettre au défi certaines présomptions sur la classe, l'environnement urbain et la présentation du corps nu. Plutôt que d'essayer de chasser les baigneurs de l'espace urbain, la classe moyenne de la ville a vu le baigneur à travers le prisme de l'antimodernisme et en a fait un personnage préindustriel. Regarder au-delà de l'appel nostalgique du trou d'eau nous permet de voir la ville avec de nouveaux yeux. Nous pouvons éviter les discours déclensionnistes qui imaginaient la rivière Don, de Toronto, trop polluée ou trop industrielle pour un usage récréatif. Lorsque nous suivons les baigneurs, nous découvrons que la rivière marginale, semi-industrialisée, offrait un espace de loisirs idéal recouvrant et contenant le corps masculin non habillé. Ce projet s'appuie sur des récits de journaux sur les noyades et les sauvetages, les archives municipales, les histoires régionales et la culture visuelle pour recréer l'environnement social des espaces de baignade du début du XX^e siècle.

Albert Petrie, nineteen, slipped in behind the Rosedale Train Station to bathe in the Don River on Saturday, 14 June 1913. An orphan, Petrie boarded with Mrs. George Thom, at 63 St. James Avenue, just west of the Don River, and worked at Hope's Bird Store on Queen Street West. He had joined thirteen-year-old Gordon Thom and a number of other boys and young men for a swim. In the midst of a warm spring day, Petrie stepped into a deep hole in the streambed and slipped beneath the water.

"Albert was used to the water and we never expected any trouble until we saw him go down," Thom told the *Star*, suggesting how Petrie might have been expected to *know* the river and have a feel for where its dangers lurked. "We were frightened and yelled out to the brakeman on a train that was passing. He ran down, only taking off his shoes, and dived three or four times. At last he got the body, and he and another brakeman and two other men worked over the body for a long time."¹

The image of a rail worker racing to the river, kicking off his shoes, and diving in to rescue a drowning teenager is probably the best example we could find of the melding of industry and recreation in Toronto.² The Don River was a borderlands space, the ragged edge between nature and the hard edge of development. The clanging of trains mingled with the sound of rushing water and the screech of brakes signalled trouble along the river.

This article will demonstrate how the distinctive physical and social environment of the Don River between 1890 and 1930 fetishized the swimming hole as a pre-modern oasis and enabled and prolonged "vernacular bathing." *Vernacular* refers to an experience or a language that is produced, fitted, and formed within the local environment. Bathing, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, combined recreation and hygiene. The vernacular bathing space could be rendered knowable only through the acquisition of an embodied sense of space and practice and a learned physical routine.³ As Joy Parr suggests, "There is a material body, resplendent and responsive beyond words, and this is a body attuned by and to its time."⁴ Bathers

needed to understand the physical performance of the Don River and the hybrid, industrial and natural, riparian environment that surrounded them.⁵ The tactile senses were critical for sensing danger or pollution in murky waters. The soundscape alerted swimmers to the threat and potential assistance of industrial equipment and actors, or enforcement of the city's oft-flouted bathing bylaws.⁶ People bathed in a world that echoed, stank, and tasted of the nineteenth century, and they shared their experiences to create a collective knowledge of the spaces.⁷ This embodied experience created distinct "locales" defined by "place ballets" of movement and social activity within them.⁸

I am borrowing Don River historian Jennifer Bonnell's description of "the middle Don" as a hybrid space between industry and nature and a space where "old and new political economies overlapped."⁹ But while Bonnell argues the Don shifted "from a central position in the geography and material life of the early settlement, to a polluted and reviled periphery in the latter half of the nineteenth century,"¹⁰ I suggest that the presence of boys bathing in this hybrid space created a nostalgic gloss over the middle Don and made it, at least temporarily, a space both reviled and admired. How Torontonians thought about nature and the city is key to understanding this space. Nature, as William Cronon has argued, was seen by turn-of-the-century North Americans as invigorating, in contrast to the "confining, false, and artificial" urban setting.¹¹ City and nature—humanity and nature—became a dualism.¹² But the Don—mingling mill dams, railroad tracks, and flowing waters—created a borderland space that confounded efforts to imagine a binary.¹³ I would even playfully suggest using Bruno Latour's description of non-moderns to describe the experience of being in the Don River, because bathing there blended a world of technology, nature, and social experience; that hybridity challenged the vision of modernist Torontonians as they attempted to make sense of the space and the people within it.¹⁴

The middle Don was a coherent socio-space and a temporal moment, focused between 1890 and 1930, within which a vibrant vernacular bathing culture was able to survive. The time period is framed by Toronto's decision to channel the southern portion of the Don River in the 1880s, which foreclosed recreational use of the lower river and yet helped preserve the vernacular use of the middle and upper portions, and the 1930s when growing levels of pollution drove bathers out of once-popular bathing spaces. Geographically, the middle Don stretched north from Riverdale Park and the newly channelled lower Don to roughly the forks of the river a few kilometres upstream. It straddled the boundary between the city of Toronto and adjacent county of York but was within reach of city dwellers and workers. Industry was close enough that a brakeman could be called on to rescue Albert Petrie in 1913. While nude bathing was driven out of most public spaces in Toronto in the early twentieth century, it lingered in the middle Don into the 1920s, enabled by working-class independence, middle-class indulgence, and the hybrid environment of the Don.

The bathing boy held the middle Don together as a "natural" environment, lending his discursive innocence to the river so that it might override its industrial nature and create a secure moral heterosexual terrain.¹⁵ Toronto's middle class was entranced by the presence of the youthful bodies that cavorted in the river and crafted them as "folk" figures—setting the parameters of their identity—and a "romantic antithesis" to the urban and industrial life.¹⁶ The Don was also an opportunity for middle-class men in the early twentieth century to relive their childhood experiences and the embodied sense of masculinity that came with them.¹⁷ The folk identity that the middle class projected upon people bathing in the Don enabled the activity to continue, but constrained just who might claim a space in the river. For working-class boys and men, bathing within the Don was considered a key moment of identity formation, to be held in up in contrast to the effete middle-class bathing spaces. The Don River thus was a space where gender and sexuality were performed, produced, and verified.¹⁸ This performativity was not, as Judith Butler has taken pains to point out, a simple matter of a subject "acting" like a man or woman but rather one's gender, one's subjectivity being produced through the discourse that names it.¹⁹

The construction of bathing boys as pre-modern folk flattened the identities of people in the Don River, turning people in the river into a collection of "boys." Vernacular bathing abetted this process because it depended on the communal sharing of knowledge of the bathing environment through a discrete oral culture.²⁰ Men who drowned in the river, we find, were predominantly working class. But the conscious effort by working-class writers such as Hugh Garner to see bathing in the Don as a working-class experience covers up the middle-class boys that would have used the city's popular free bathing station. These masculine performances also relied on writing women out of the picture. A survey of who drowned in the Don River finds women appear in documentary evidence only in the 1920s, but that doesn't mean women were not in and around the river, and recollections of people who swam in the river as children suggest the male space was punctured on occasion by young girls.

This project draws on the *Toronto Star*, the *Globe*, and the *Daily Mail* for stories of drownings or near-drownings in the Don.²¹ Without a formal lifesaving apparatus, it was left to newspapers to explain and narrate deaths, and in doing so they provide a window into the social life of the Don. Toronto City Council minutes and committee reports reveal how the city hoped to reshape the physical environment of the Don River and how the city added a structured "free bathing" system to the river but reveal little about the people who bathed within it. I have reviewed the city's annual police reports between 1870 and 1930 and found them notable in their silence about the Don River; nude bathing, practised in the Don well into the twentieth century, was never flagged as an issue in the reports, despite being illegal after 1880.²² Photographs wove a narrative of youthful innocence.²³ Photographer William James's work, published in the *Toronto Star* at the start of the twentieth century and

republished in regional histories, helped lock in the character of the river and joined a growing twentieth-century discourse that linked Canadian identity to nature.²⁴ Finally, autobiographies from Gordon Sinclair and Garner, and regional histories from George Rust-D'Eye and Colleen Kelly demonstrate how bathing was portrayed as a working-class experience.²⁵ Skinny-dipping in the Don became a regional myth, immortalized in print and pictures, and reflected in government documents as late as 1997 that benchmarked the potential swimability of the river as a mark of its health.²⁶

Setting: Creating the Middle Don

The Don River is just thirty-eight kilometres long and flows south from the Oak Ridges Moraine, a hilly and sandy soiled legacy of the last ice age that divides the drainage basin of Lake Ontario from Lake Simcoe. Glaciation around the Great Lakes has given the Don a deep valley, which defines its riparian zone and its influence on the urban environment.²⁷ The river draws from three principal tributaries, which meet seven kilometres north of Lake Ontario: the East and West Don and Taylor-Massey Creek. Never large, the Don carried more water 100 years ago than it does today; the steady removal of tree coverage and drainage of marshes has reduced the river's base flow, while urbanization has left it vulnerable to flash floods.²⁸

Early settlers describe an idyllic river. Elizabeth Simcoe, wife of John Graves Simcoe, Upper Canada's first governor general, romanticized walks and canoe trips along the river in her diary and in sketches from 1793 to 1795. The Simcoes built Castle Frank, a summer retreat, to overlook the valley.²⁹ Toronto clergyman and historian Henry Scadding was born in England in 1813 but spent his formative years after 1821 along the river and describes how, "in the spring and summer, a pull up the Don, while yet its banks were in their primeval state was something to be enjoyed. After passing certain potasheries and distilleries that at an early period were erected a short distance northward of the bridge, the meadow land at the base of the hills began to widen out."³⁰ From there a paddler entered a wooded wonderland.

The lower reaches of the river were being industrialized in Scadding's earliest recollections. European beliefs that Ashbridge's Bay marsh at the mouth of the Don was an unhealthy source of miasma and ague pushed residential



Figure 1. The principal branches of the Don River and land ownership in the valley in the 1870s. Source: Illustrated Historical Atlas of the County of York and the Township of West Gwillimbury & Town of Bradford (*Toronto: Miles, 1878*). McGill University.

development away from the river but opened the door for breweries, distilleries, tanneries, candle- and soap-makers that were too loud, smelly, or waste-intensive to be placed in other areas of the city.³¹ Industry shifted to institutional uses at Carlton Street, with the Don Jail, the House of Industry on the east bank, and the Necropolis and St. James Cemetery on the west.³² The lower Don was the only section of the river that could be bridged economically, which meant traffic and the eyes that came with it were focused there.³³ Toronto's civic boundary stopped at Bloor Street until 1883, and thereafter the city avoided the river—and its unindustrialized portions—as it expanded northward.³⁴ This truncated relationship with the Don ensured that it was seen as "polluted, dangerous, and disease-ridden" and industrial.³⁵ The water was already being referred to as "questionable" in the press in 1876, and the *History of Toronto and County of York*, published in 1885, described the Don as "formerly a picturesque stream, but it has greatly diminished in size of late years and has been shorn of much of its ancient glory."³⁶

The lower Don was a popular bathing space, despite its industrial nature, in the 1880s.³⁷ However, development around the river, traffic corridors passing over it, and recreational use by boaters, ensured there was little opportunity for the bathers to hide from the eyes around them. *The Globe* complained of an "infestation" of people bathing near the Eastern-Avenue bridge making it unsafe "for any female to go near either in a boat or along

the banks” in 1880. We can read the complaint another way: women moved along the Don and did see people bathing.³⁸

The Don Improvement Project clarified the muddy relationship between bodies, the river, and industry in the 1880s by giving the lower Don an industrial form. At the heart of the project were four goals: to improve the sanitary condition of the river; to make the lower Don navigable; to create a corridor for the railway companies; and to create new land for industry.³⁹ The once serpentine lower Don would be given “as near a perfect straightening as the high banks would permit.”⁴⁰

Channelization fulfilled few of the city's goals. The river was straightened and new land was created for industrial use. But a shallow channel, combined with low bridges, kept ships from navigating the new route.⁴¹ Rail companies used the easier grade of the valley floor and banks of the new channel as a corridor into the city, but doing so hemmed in the river and ensured it could never conveniently be used for shipping.⁴² Promoters had argued that straightening the river would increase its flow and allow it to draw pollution—a “cloacal effect”—out of the land around it.⁴³ But that logic meant the lower Don was treated as an open sewer, a result ensured when Toronto voters vetoed an interceptor sewage project in 1886 that would have rerouted sewer lines away from, rather than into, the river.⁴⁴ There were promptly discussions about dredging or enclosing the lower Don.⁴⁵

The Don Improvement Project severed the river's recreational relationship with Lake Ontario, yet that break enabled the creation of a vibrant vernacular bathing culture in the middle Don. Few people bathed south of Winchester Street and Riverdale Park after 1890.⁴⁶ The Don Rowing Club decamped to Ashbridge's Bay.⁴⁷ Paddlers felt little urge to come up the river and compete with bathers for space; bathers felt little inclination to look to the lower reaches of the river when they swam. The project turned the Don into a regional river that was accessed primarily on foot. While people bathing on Toronto's waterfront or in the less industrialized Humber River had to compete with other recreational users, they could claim the middle Don as their own.

The Hybrid Geography of the Middle Don

Development ended bathing in the lower Don, but when we look north we find a series of blended natural and semi-industrial bathing sites.⁴⁸ Some, like “Dunnett's swimming hole,” were intimate, others such as Clay Banks on the eastern Don were large enough and popular enough to hold dozens of bathers.⁴⁹ Bathing spaces formed at the confluence of natural and constructed influences and created a human geography in and around the river.⁵⁰ They retained their popularity over generations, suggesting how their use was embedded in the social landscape of the city.⁵¹ The Winchester Street Bridge, north of Riverdale Park, was the beachhead for bathing and popular enough that when the city debated extending restrictions against nude bathing across Toronto in 1879, the draft bylaw specifically excluded the Don River north of the Winchester Bridge.⁵² (Previously restrictions against nude bathing during



Figure 2. Dunnett's Swimming Hole: Don River (West Don River), slightly west of Bayview Avenue Source: William Wallace Judd, circa 1900, 978-13-11 small, Baldwin Collection, Toronto Reference Library, Toronto Public Library

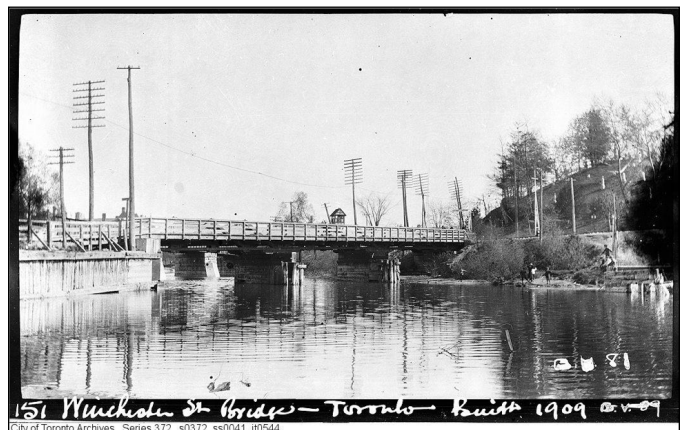


Figure 3. Winchester Street Bridge over Don River, as reconstructed, 1909: photo taken in connection with Bloor Street Viaduct construction, 1910. Source: Item 544, subseries 41, series 372, fonds 200, City of Toronto Archives.

the day were limited to a section of the central waterfront.) And while the Don was included when the city updated its bylaw in 1880 and formally required the neck-to-knee bathing dress for daytime bathing, policing the river north of Winchester was not a high priority.⁵³ The Winchester bathing area was easily visible from the bridge and intimately connected with the brickyards and urban environment. The water was deep enough to tempt bathers into a dive and crowded on hot summer days.⁵⁴ Sandy Banks was located near the Bloor Street Viaduct, though it long predated the structure. In the 1870s Scadding listed the site as a “favourite bathing-place for boys, with a clean gravelly bottom, and a current somewhat swift,”⁵⁵ and eighty years later Don River Conservationist and writer Charles Sauriol noted it as well, suggesting how these bathing spaces were imprinted within Toronto's imagination. Yet even long-established sites such as the Sandy Banks could be flagged as safe one year and dangerous the next in the fluid environment of the Don.⁵⁶

Mill ponds were among the most popular bathing spaces. The mill dams, ponds, and races used to drive the mills created micro-bathing environments. Today, Todmorden Mills hosts a museum and heritage village, but in 1795 it was known as Skinner's Mill and had been commissioned directly by Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe to supply timber for the fledgling community of York. It was already a popular space for bathing in the 1830s when owner William Helliwell wrote about bathing by the mill in his diary.⁵⁷ By the late nineteenth century the Taylor family controlled the mills, and most of the land in the middle Don. The Taylors rode an explosion in literacy and population growth that saw 172 papers publishing across Ontario by 1870.⁵⁸ The family owned 4,000 acres along the river but seem to have done little to stop people from crossing it to access the river.⁵⁹ Along with the mill at Todmorden and the Toronto brickworks, which was acquired in the 1880s, the family operated paper mills near Beechwood Drive and on the western Don, just north of the forks.⁶⁰ The three paper mills were known, appropriately, as the lower, middle, and upper mills, and each of them became a popular swimming space.⁶¹ Even after the mills ceased to run on water, the dams remained, grandfathered into the landscape and the civic imagination. It would not be until 1933 that the last of them was removed.⁶²

Within the middle Don, then, lay waters only moderately damaged by industrialization, filled with enticing infrastructure, and land owned by only a handful of people, who did little to hinder people bathing in the Don. There was little incentive for Torontonians to turn a critical gaze on people bathing around these sites and every indication when such a gaze did fall on them, it was approving or indifferent.

The Vernacular Bathing World

Bathing in the Don River, as the following series of vignettes suggests, required an embodied, though often imperfect understanding of the hybrid environment, sharing information, and a reciprocal system of watching out for fellow bathers. While the social use of these bathing spaces was sedimented into the landscape through generations of use, the embodied knowledge around them had to be renewed each spring. Many of these bathers were naked, others dressed in trunks, but few wore a bathing suit, and the act of bathing nude was considered a formative experience.

Bathing spaces were busy and integrated into the urban and industrial environment. Herbert Currie, fifteen, was surrounded by companions when he went swimming next to the Winchester Street Bridge on a Wednesday evening, 15 June 1881, and they raised the alarm when he went under. Their cries drew William Mulmer from an adjacent brickyard, who dove into the water with his clothes still on to pull Currie out of a hole in the riverbed.⁶³ Currie's companions sent word of the incident back to his parents at 80 Gerrard Street East, west of the river, and the couple headed to the Don, "having secured the services of Dr. Graham" in an effort to revive their son. When the effort failed, Policeman Thompson was on hand to help them bring their son

home. J. Currie, the father, was a manufacturer of boots and shoes and demonstrates how there were middle-class youth in the river and the fluidity of class boundaries. It would be tempting to say wealth helped the Curries secure a doctor, but doctors often headed to the river to lend a hand.⁶⁴ In this case, industrial workers, business people, police, and medical staff, women and men, flowed seamlessly to the Don.

The mill dams in the Don served as architecture for bathers to swim around or clamber on.⁶⁵ Don Valley Brickworks employees William Goddard and George Andrews headed to the lower dam for a noon-time swim on Friday, 5 July 1902.⁶⁶ Both from England, the two were boarding together in Todmorden at the home of George Wicklam.⁶⁷ The casualness of the swim is a reminder that, even as Toronto industrialized and workplace discipline increased at the start of the twentieth century, there were still moments when workers could duck out for a swim.

It may have been Goddard's first time; the *Globe* noted he had been in Canada only a few weeks after arriving from Somersetshire, and that his unfamiliarity with the river played a role in his death.⁶⁸ The two headed into the river and Andrews floated on a raft into the middle of the stream. But when Goddard, who it was noted afterwards could not swim, attempted to wade in, he sank into a fifteen-foot-deep hole and did not resurface. After failing to rescue Goddard on his own, Andrews returned to the brickworks and was joined by J. B. Millar, the superintendent, and three other workers, George Ball, James Burgess, and William Ford. A "number of lads" bathing nearby joined the recovery effort, but it would be a long two hours before they were successful.⁶⁹ The lower dam was in the news again a month later on a Monday afternoon when eight-year-old William J. Buchanan of Todmorden tumbled off it and into the deep pond at its base.⁷⁰

The groups that converged on the Don relied on an embodied understanding of its environment, but it wasn't always enough to save them. Frank Slater, twenty-two, formerly of England, had been in Canada for about eighteen months and worked as a driver for John Klees, when he headed to a spot near the Taylor Brothers' Paper Mill, the middle dam, on a Sunday afternoon in early September 1900. Roommates Thomas Jarvis and Thomas Stanburry joined him. They were familiar with the space and as they waded in Slater remarked he had almost drowned there once before. Moments later he tumbled into the same hole that had nearly claimed him before. Stanburry and Jarvis struggled to save him, but he was pulled from their grasp and went under again. The two headed to shore and caught the attention of passerby Thomas Petrie and collectively they were able to pull Slater's body from the river and summon Drs. Sneath and Vernon, who unsuccessfully attempted to resuscitate him.⁷¹

Trains were part of the Don's sensory landscape, creating noise and smoke, as they were shunted from one track to another.⁷² Charles Sauriol vividly recalled the sound of the steam engine whistling in the background as he walked in the valley.⁷³ Rail lines made accessing the Don dangerous, but also isolated the

river from the rest of the community and helped maintain its role as a male space. People within the river shifted quickly back and forth between Edenic bathing and industrial encounters. Toronto writer Gordon Sinclair recalled in one breath the natural experience of bathing without a suit and then added in the next how, “when a train would go by on the Canadian Northern, we would either kneel in the water, or stand with our hands in front of ourselves.”⁷⁴ The balance portrays the boys as icons of chaste innocence.⁷⁵

The death of Willie Wildbore in 1907 demonstrated the dangers of a hybrid space. Wildbore lost his life just after noon on Thursday, 8 August 1907, when he was struck by a CNR passenger train north of the Winchester Bridge.⁷⁶ His death kicked off an inquest that looked at the interaction between bathers and the railroad. Wildbore was deaf, and it was speculated that disability hindered his ability to know the space and hear the train coming. The Don was fenced north of the Winchester Bridge, but during the inquest it was noted the wire fence had been broken, and people were still using the river. Wildbore had been bathing there, despite his father's admonishments not to, with Fred Martin and Alberta and Norman Dwight who all lived just east of the river. Wildbore had left for home before the others, but when Martin heard the warning blast of the train whistle and the screech of brakes that followed, he pulled on his clothes and raced up to find his friend had been struck and killed.

The river-hugging line made interactions between the CNR and bathers routine and dangerous. “The foliage is considerably in our line of view, and it is often difficult to see people on the track at a distance ahead,” conductor James Campbell told Coroner Young, while indicating the rail company knew where the popular bathing spaces were.⁷⁷ The inquest didn't blame the rail company for the accident, but did call on municipal authorities to prevent boys from bathing in the vicinity of the Don flats, and for fencing along the rail lines from the moment they entered the city to the Queen Street Crossing.

The Don River represented a polymorphous space where different groups merged. A handful of friends headed down together to find other users in the river; sometimes the groups came together and other times they kept to themselves. When Cristo Tonny, twenty-one, and Vasil Nikola Poleff, nineteen, residents of the nearby working-class neighbourhood north of the Gooderham and Worts Distillery, dove into the Don north of Riverdale Park during a Thursday afternoon in the midst of a June heat wave in 1911, they were part of a group of “Macedonians.”⁷⁸ When Poleff dazed himself diving into the water and then pulled Tonny down as he struggled to steady himself, “the rest of the party raised an outcry and brought Benjamin Kirk and John Petrie to the spot.”⁷⁹ The two recovered Tonny and Poleff, and while it was too late to save Tonny, Dr. W.T. Hamilton had arrived on the scene and attempted, unsuccessfully, to revive Poleff. The Don offered a space for the Macedonians to bathe together, but they were still part of a collective experience and could call on others for help.

However, while it's tempting to imagine a folk in the Don River with ethnicity and difference disappearing and a communal social environment emerging, when we look closer we see schisms of age and ethnicity. The communal atmosphere was veneer, convenience, and a practical reality brought on by the need for safety in a shared environment.⁸⁰ We get a sense of how Poleff remained Macedonian, rather than Canadian, when a troop of Boy Scouts arrives and forms a cordon around Hamilton in an effort to help him focus on his work. The *Globe*, dividing the “us” of Anglo institutions from the “them” of ethnic others, looked on approvingly: “For a moment it looked as if they would have their work cut out, for the remainder of the Macedonians were excited. Even after the arrival of the police, the Scouts stood guard.”⁸¹ Hamilton described their work as “simply splendid.” How the Macedonians felt about being cordoned off isn't stated.

Securing the Don

Security in the middle Don rested on a system of reciprocity, rooted in the same system of mutual support that Bettina Bradbury argues underpinned nineteenth-century working-class communities.⁸² This collective engagement with the river made it knowable to bathers. People swam in communal groups and could turn to each other for help, even if they didn't know each other. People outside the river accepted that they were part of its security system and were prepared to dive into the river and help. A passing brakeman attempted to rescue Albert Petrie, brickyard worker William Mulmer responded to cries of help when Herbert Currie went under, and so on.⁸³ Doctors, living or working around the Don, readily entered the riparian environment in an effort to save lives. The expectation that people would watch over each other helps explain the presence of youngsters bathing in the Don. Parents let their children go because they believed that other bathers would look out for them.⁸⁴

The reciprocal safety system was so well known that people complained when it was abused by bathers. As a speaker quoted in the *Daily Mail* in 1887 grouched, “You know the number of boys, some of them, indeed, more than boys—young men, in fact—that live an amphibious life on the Don River, bathing, it would seem all the day long. I don't object to the bathing; there may be nothing wrong in that, but what I do object to—and this is my grievance—is that these youngsters impose on the passers-by, and sometimes, as I have said, give them very much annoyance.”⁸⁵ His specific complaint was that the boys—or young men, in fact—were crying wolf whilst they were in the Don and luring would-be—and often still dressed—rescuers into the stream only to surface a few feet away and laugh.⁸⁶ The boys in the Don were committing several sins; the first was drawing attention to themselves when their behaviour should be ignored, and the second was disrespecting the reciprocal safety system.

Bathers were also responsible for educating each other about the fluid nature of the river, creating a distinct oral culture.⁸⁷

This collective knowledge of the swimming spaces created a degree of safety but only for those to whom the knowledge had been passed on. When eight-year-old William J. Buchanan of Todmorden climbed up on the lower mill dam, fellow bathers warned him that it was a dangerous space—warnings that went unheeded.⁸⁸ And when Goddard dove into the Don near the Don Valley Brickyards, or Michael Foley, twenty-five, a recent immigrant from the United States and described by onlookers as a “stranger in a bathing suit,” drowned by the old beltline train station in 1908, their newness to the river was flagged as a warning sign.⁸⁹ Not yet members of the Don's collective experience, these new people had failed to learn, or couldn't yet read, the embodied language of its space.⁹⁰

But could the Don River ever be known? It was a hybrid environment; the bathers faced dangers from the hydrological behaviour of the Don and from its industrial manipulation. The drowning death of “little” Albert Francis North, twelve, who lived just east of the river at 73 Lewis Street and had gone to the paper-mill dam with neighbours Gordon and John Baker on a Monday afternoon in July, 1906, kicked off a discussion about the safety of the river.⁹¹ While the chief coroner saw no reason for an inquest, the *Star*, reflecting public concern or trying to stir it up, felt otherwise and published an article the same day as it covered North's death.⁹²

City and county police officers argued the Don was an inherently dangerous space because it was unmappable. “I know the Don thoroughly,” Sergeant of Detectives Duncan told the *Star*, in a turn of phrase that meant he understood its unknowability. “It is the most dangerous bathing spot in the neighbourhood of Toronto. Just above Winchester Street Bridge is the worst. There the river is full of deep holes scooped into the bank of the spring freshets. The water around is shallow, and boys slip suddenly into these deep spots, and are sucked down in an eddy.” As Inspector Johnston pointed out, the Don rewrote its environment every year: “The trouble is that the character of the river bed is continually changing. Each spring old holes are filled up and new ones are created. Boys go there one summer and think they know the river. The next year there are deep holes where there were shallows the previous summer.” The physical environment could change easily, but the social use of the river, sedimented into familiar spaces, was slow to adapt. The hybrid industrial/natural nature of the Don was accepted and hardly mentioned by police. One officer flagged the river as “foul,” but the sewage that must surely have been in the water wasn't listed as a concern in 1906. As police and civic officials debated security within the Don, they agreed on one point: signage, which had been tried at the lower mill dam, whether intended to warn or restrict, would be universally ignored.⁹³

The city attempted to implant the logic of the beach on the terrain of the Don when it included the river as one of three new free bathing stations in 1897. The *Star* announced the new area, located between Bloor and Winchester, near the traditional bathing space, and promoted the surveillance and life-saving equipment the site would offer.⁹⁴ But at best the city

could control time on the Don: offering a window of surveillance and security when a lifeguard would be on hand to watch the bathers. The river itself could not be controlled. As Street Commissioner John Jones said when he investigated the site for the new program, “No part of that river is so level and free from holes as to be safe swimming ground for the boys.”⁹⁵ And bathers continued to swim elsewhere or outside the free bathing station's official hours. The city, in the opening years of the program, also refused to require that bathers wear bathing suits, and the space remained a male-only civic bathing space until the 1920s.

Free-bathing attendance records demonstrate the popularity of the Don; in 1902, when there were 134,030 visits to the city's stations, the Don beat out Sunnyside, Fisherman's Island, and Toronto Island's western sandbar as the most popular space.⁹⁶ And the Don pulled in 44,497 of the city's 130,000 free-bathing visits in 1913—only slightly less than Fisherman's Island.⁹⁷ Those numbers only include visits recorded in the city's registry. The actual number of people who bathed in the Don would have been substantially higher. Some middle-class boys would have made use of the Don's free bathing station, but press, pictures, and regional histories display the bathing as a working-class experience.

Myth-Making in the Don

Bathing in the Don carried powerful symbolic meaning for middle-class and working-class Torontonians. For the middle class, it represented a gendered and nostalgic wellspring for resisting the industrializing city. For the working class, trips to the Don were remembered as formative and fortifying in a space where they could hold themselves up against an effete middle class. The physical environment required communal behaviour to create security, but it was conscious myth-making from middle-class and working-class people that created a “folk” within the Don.⁹⁸

The middle-class gaze upon the Don was demonstrated as the lower Don was being straightened in 1887. The *Globe* sent a writer down to watch the progress. The writer was fascinated by the industrial transformation happening around him and described how the new channel chewed through land and old buildings alike, the future rewriting the past. But within the chaos of construction, the writer noted, “All around are numerous small boys in the costume which antedated fig leaves, diving out of scows or jumping off the piles, regardless of dirt-dumpings or sun-skinned backs, laughing, shouting, swimming and spluttering.”⁹⁹ The diversion of the river's flow made it even more appealing by creating a series of pools and diving platforms.¹⁰⁰ The *Globe*'s deliberate insertion of the bathing boys also had discursive value; they were a symbol of the past and a presence that would be erased by a modern Don. But the boys and their youthful bodies were also a soothing comfort in the midst of the disruption. The phrase “in the costume which antedated fig leaves” suggests how they represented a timeless element within the chaos; even though the old order was being

torn apart and replaced with something new, the simplicity of a boy bathing remained. The complexity of the boys' lived experiences was distilled down to symbolic meaning.¹⁰¹

Vernacular bathing was described as constructive of masculinity. "Observer" wrote, "In what utter contempt we would have held a bathing suit in the days of our free, exuberant boyhood on the farm" in an August 1889 *Globe* column, and described bathing in a mill race, "with its obstructing saw logs and its sawdust bottom" or swimming out to the dam and challenging others to follow. "Observer" believed that little had changed: "Canadian summers are hot, and Canadian streams inviting, and Canadian youth full of spirit and strong in self-reliance and not overly-disciplined."¹⁰²

The naked boy symbolized spring and the breaking of winter's cold. As the *Star* reported in late April 1906, "Bathing in the Don River has begun already, as far as the small boy is concerned. Numbers of them took their first dip of the season yesterday, and they didn't bother about bathing suits."¹⁰³ When the *Globe* imagined a summer idyll in 1925 it looked towards the Don River for inspiration, arguing, "Boys seek water as inevitably as water seeks its own level," and the "swimming holes" in the Don and elsewhere needed to be maintained "as reservoirs of civic health."¹⁰⁴

The Don bathers provided a discursive other to be held up against the acculturation within the rest of the city. The *Globe* tracked the annual parade of spring fashion on the boardwalk at Sunnyside on 17 April 1927, an event that amounted to a heterosocial promenade of men and women.¹⁰⁵ But across town, the city's East End boys were more interested in a dive in the Don: "Passersby watched them from the Danforth viaduct as they splashed one another beneath an old bridge half a mile farther north. Of course, there was not a bathing suit in the party. The water was cold; it took quite a little courage to go on, but, knowing the punishment of the shirker, he would indeed have been brave who stayed out."¹⁰⁶ Spring was here, the latest fashions were on display, but the naked boy and an old swimming hole were eternally pure. The site was easily viewed for those who chose to look. The bathing boy provided a gloss of health to the swimming hole as much as the swimming hole did to the boy.¹⁰⁷

Photographs of bathing within the Don River demonstrate how the naked body was allowed to be displayed, but only in a particular way. Timing matters: nude bathing had been popular along Toronto's industrial waterfront in the nineteenth century, but technology advanced enough to capture active outdoor scenes emerged only in the 1880s, and taking pictures of popular activities such as bathing became common only after 1900. So our photo record tilts towards the Don, where nude bathing remained popular well into the twentieth century.¹⁰⁸ But the Don photographs displayed a careful narrative. Men appear at a distance, if they appear at all. John Boyd Jr. gives us a rare image of men bathing by the lower dam on the Don River in 1915 and captures the full circuit from men in a state of undress to a group gathered on the side of the river either completing

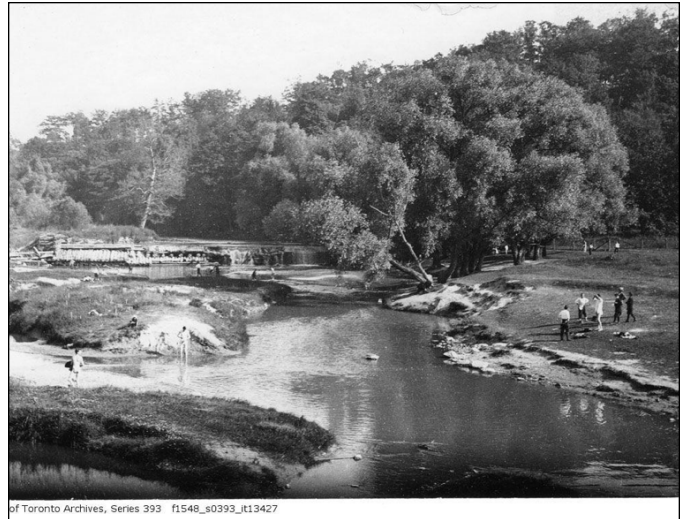


Figure 4. Don Valley—paper mills dam, 9 July 1915. Source: Item 13427, John Boyd Sr. photographs, series 393, Alan Howard Fonds 1548, City of Toronto Archives.



Figure 5. "Old swimmin' hole," between 1920 and 1934. Source: File 22, folio 22, M.O. Hammond Fonds 298, City of Toronto Archives.

or about to begin their swim. They're even potentially getting roused out of the site by police, though it's hard to tell from the photo, and media coverage at the time doesn't mention a raid (see figure 4). But Boyd's photograph is the exception; most of the pictures are of boys, and many of them position the boys in an artistic fashion, highlighting their youth and idyllic relationship with nature (see figures 5 and 6).

Blending the bathing boy with nature was an articulated trope that circulated throughout North Atlantic countries. But the bathing body was caught in the turn-of-the-century tension around masculinity and sexuality. British artist Henry Scott Tuke's artwork, which focused on boys, bathing, and boats, captures this discursive tension. Tuke's clientele were predominantly homosexual, but by keeping the boys chaste he was

able to open “a space in Victorian aesthetic culture in which the nude male figure could become the subject of a homoerotic discourse” and avoid the proscription that figures such as Oscar Wilde had faced.¹⁰⁹ Capturing a familiar bathing moment, combined with artistic positions that limited the presentation of nudity—the boys were never seen from the front—ensured the chastity of the bathers. Tuke and other artists were able to attach youthful masculinity to Greek artistic tradition and represent “the nude boy as no mere boy, but a kouros; a representation of the imperishable glory of the human spirit.”¹¹⁰ In late nineteenth-century romanticism, the nude boy was tethered to nature and represented chastity in contrast to the clothed female body, which represented culture and control.¹¹¹

Our Don River photographs follow that trend by desexualizing the boys to ensure their innocence. William James snapped pictures around the Don River that vacillated between the humorous, pictures of naked boys on bikes, or the artistic, a lineup of boys watching swimming instructors at work (see figures 7 and 8). The photographs essentialize the experience to boyhood, innocence, and nature; despite the industrial infrastructure around the Don, it's only the Prince Edward Viaduct that sneaks into the pictures.¹¹² They were also popular and appeared in the *Toronto Star*. James took multiple versions of bare-bottomed boys sitting along the Don over a number of years (see figure 8). As someone who made his money through photography, he knew a money shot when he saw one. The James photographs have become iconic in Don River mythology, and a stock image in regional histories, such as *Cabbagetown in Pictures* and *Cabbagetown Remembered*, formalizing the boyhood image of the Don and erasing a more complicated reality.¹¹³ Bathing boys were also included in postcards of the Don River, illustrating how they pervaded the public view of the Don; “Scenes from the Don,” dated between 1906 and 1913, shows two boys skinnydipping in the Don.¹¹⁴

Regional histories and autobiographies of the Don and adjacent Cabbagetown canonize the bathing boy and construct the experience as integral to working-class youth. Writers such as Hugh Garner and Gordon Sinclair faithfully remember the Don River as a bathing space for children.¹¹⁵ And historians of the space such as Colleen Kelly and George Rust-D'Eye repeat and embellish those recollections, making them a mark of resistance and a formative part of working-class experience.¹¹⁶ We can read Garner's experiences, in particular, as a conscious act

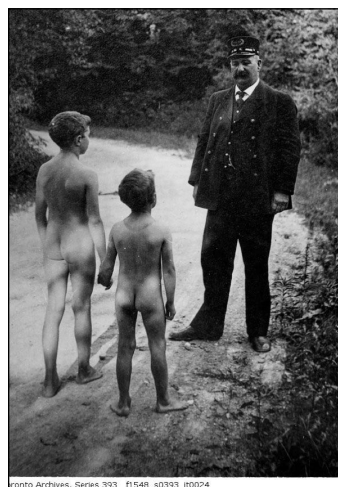
of looking back at the middle-class gaze and using vernacular bathing as a critical component of identity formation. Garner recalls how the free streetcars, part of the free bathing program, transported youth in the west to Sunnyside, while in the east, youth on the Danforth were taken to the “Bloor Street viaduct where they rushed down the hill to the Don Valley to swim naked at the old Red Bridge over the Don.” (This was the same bathing space the *Globe* was gazing on in 1927.) Garner added, “We Cabbagetowners and Riverdaleites didn't need a streetcar; we hiked up the Don Valley to the Red Bridge.”¹¹⁷

Garner also recalled trips to the western sandbar on Toronto Island via the Queen Street streetcar and the SS *Luella*. Here the link between skinnydipping and class is even more explicit, as he notes, “We underprivileged kids, who felt nothing but pity for the Rosedale private schoolboys who had to wear bathing suits, used to disembark from the free car after a slow, song-filled ride.”¹¹⁸ Clothing in these stories was an artifice that the middle class had to endure, but one the working class could throw off. Rust-D'Eye uses the experience of Sinclair to argue



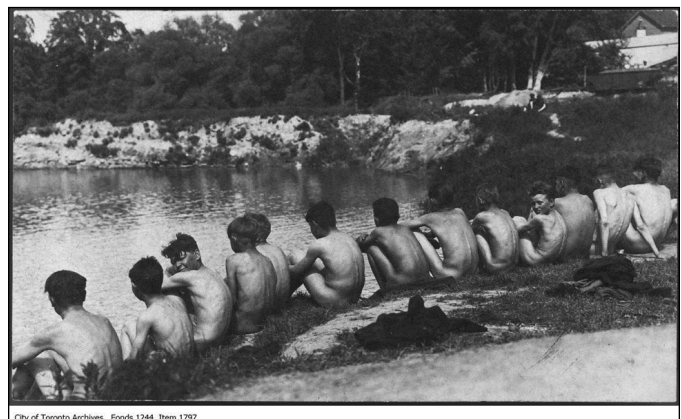
City of Toronto Archives. Fonds 1244, Item 8156

Figure 7. Cycling beside Don River, between Don Mills Road and Leaside. Source: Item 8156, William James family Fonds 1244, circa 1912, City of Toronto Archives.



Toronto Archives, Series 393, f1548, s0393, i0024

Figure 6. Police officer and (naked) boys on road, before 1940. Source: Item 0024, John Boyd Sr. photographs, series 393, Alan Howard Fonds 1548, City of Toronto Archives.



City of Toronto Archives. Fonds 1244, Item 1797

Figure 8. Skinnydipping on the Don River, circa 1909. Source: Item 1797, William James family fonds 1244, City of Toronto Archives. See also “Skinnydipping in the Don River near Bloor Viaduct,” item 7339, William James family fonds 1244, 1912, City of Toronto Archives. For another, similar James photo, see picture, *Toronto Star*, 10 August 1922, 11.

that for Cabbagetown “the most popular summer activity for boys was skinny-dipping” in the Don, even as he noted that “everyone who lived in Cabbagetown in those days was poor.”¹¹⁹ Colleen Kelly gives us a similar interpretation, with the Don serving as a “natural playground” for kids in the neighbourhood.¹²⁰

The Limits of Innocence

People shed their clothes to enter the Don River, but they never entirely shed the expectation that they should be wearing clothes. Even while they bathed, they were still tethered to the clothes on the bank. For example, a “lad” named Daley nearly drowned when he was bathing with a number of boys in the Don on an August afternoon in 1867.¹²¹ Wading cautiously into the river, Daley looked back to see his companions tying knots in his clothes. Rushing back to stop them, he tumbled into a hole and nearly drowned before his friends managed to pull him out.¹²² The vulnerable moment of stepping into the water undressed was expressed by the often-repeated political trope that the opposition had caught the government in bathing and stolen their clothes.¹²³ Clothes, left behind or found along the river bank, could also symbolize people who drowned.¹²⁴

Mythologizing bathing in the Don River also meant policing identity and sexuality. Despite a visual legacy of the Don focused on boys engaged in innocent play, there were men there as well. Descriptions of people bathing often flitted between calling them men and boys. When the *Star* quizzed police about whether bathing on the Don should be maintained, it stated the “majority” of those “who meet death in its treacherous root-meshed deep holes are youngsters ranging from 8 and 16”: a silent acknowledgment that not everyone was a boy.¹²⁵ When a speaker groused to the *Daily Mail* about bathers crying wolf in the Don River, he made the same slippage, complaining about “the number of boys, some of them, indeed, more than boys—young men, in fact—that live an amphibious life on the Don River.”¹²⁶ And when Coroner Young questioned CNR conductor James Campbell at the inquest into the death of Willie Wildbore, he asked, “Have you had much trouble up on the Don flats with boys?”¹²⁷ To which Campbell replied, “Young men and boys are accustomed to bathe in the river near the scene of the accident.”¹²⁸ The answer was a subtle correction; there were more than just boys in the Don. These slippages were part of the effort to write men out, essentialize the innocence of the naked boy, and, from the mid-twentieth century on, retroactively question the sexuality of the men who swam in the river.¹²⁹

Looking at the newspaper records of people who bathed in the Don, we see some differentiation of ages by time and space. People over eighteen, with jobs, were typically swimming on weekends or in the evening, which means that while people of different ages swam in the same spaces, they often did so at different times. Men claimed the river near Rosedale Station, for example, on the weekend.¹³⁰ Youth claimed the area north of the Winchester Bridge. The river near Todmorden saw a mix of men and boys, but the men often came out in the evening and weekends, leaving the river to the boys the rest of the

time.¹³¹ But even these trends had exceptions: William Goddard and George Andrews nipped over to the Don River for a swim at noon on a Friday. Cristo Tonny and Vasil Nikola Poleff were beating the heat when they took to the Don on a Thursday afternoon. Temperature blurred boundaries in the urban environment.

Distilling the Don experience down to the chaste bathing boy helped structure the swimming hole, but there were also practical reasons for referring to the Don bathers as boys or sometimes as “young men, in fact.”¹³² Teenagers did not exist as a distinctive social group with its own behaviour patterns and expectations in the early twentieth century. Writers such as Mary Louise Adams and Cynthia Comacchio argue the modern usage of adolescence, what we think of today as teenagers, didn’t emerge until the 1920s.¹³³ This lack of language made it difficult to get a linguistic grip on males who fell between man and boy.

Marital status and class played a role in separating men from boys at the turn of the century. The people who bathed within the Don environment were almost entirely young unmarried men.¹³⁴ Bathing in the Don with the boys represented an activity for men who sat in the prolonged bachelorhood before marriage.¹³⁵ Looking at Hamilton, Craig Heron has noted working-class men usually didn’t marry until their mid-twenties and spent the intervening years between childhood and marriage in a “a vibrant leisure-time culture of young bachelorhood.”¹³⁶ The Don River was part of that culture. While we see middle-class teenagers and boys bathing in the Don, nearly all the men bathing in the river were working class. Lack of affordable recreational activities elsewhere likely helped drive them to the river.¹³⁷ But their presence in this boyhood space blurred the line between men and boys, and their continued participation in a homo-social culture that eschewed the presence of women also raised questions about their sexuality, particularly in retrospect.¹³⁸

The mingling of men and boys was problematized in the twentieth century as the visibility of the bathing areas increased and governance over gender and sexuality became more rigid. Mixed-age groups that had been normal, now became suspect. There are hints of efforts to patrol this mingling of men and boys with the emergence of civic involvement and the free bathing spaces, which were officially limited to boys under sixteen years old. Free bathing also created a social space for youth; the dense proximity of youngsters was probably as discouraging to men as the steady glare of a city worker looking over them.

Don River conservationist Charles Sauriol demonstrates how men could be othered from the Don setting, with a casual reference to his own youth. On the back of a picture of the Clay Banks Swimming Hole, Sauriol wrote, “After an hour in the water we would run along the bank to the tents and stand in front of the cooking fire to warm up—no bathing suits, everyone nude—but when a ‘dirty guy’ showed up, the boys ran him out.”¹³⁹ The caption was probably jotted down one day when Sauriol was leafing through his photo collection. It suggests a sexual threat within the mixing of boys and men in the Don River. But we’re

also seeing shifting views on homosexuality. Sauriol made a conscious effort to retroactively write in this policing effort and attach it to the bathing space; it's an effort that reflected mid-twentieth-century views on male nudity, views that argued that a homosocial space might also be a homosexual space. It may well be that Sauriol and the boys did chase out any "dirty guys" Who showed up. But in stating that they did, Sauriol retroactively ensured his own heterosexual performances were unblemished. In doing so, he turned every adult male who might be around the Don into a potential homosexual predator.¹⁴⁰ The narrative becomes even more complex because Sauriol, by his own recollection, would have been at least fifteen when he was warming up around the fire.¹⁴¹ Today we would call him a teenager. But looking back at the experience decades later, Sauriol mythologizes the experience to boyhood, just as photographs of the period have, and just as news media at the beginning of the twentieth century did.

Sinclair also treats the presence of men bathing in the Don as aberrant. "Once or twice each summer men would come among us," Sinclair writes, "some wearing bathing suits down to their knees and some wearing none. But when the men began to mingle with us hairless boys, the police would usually come and tell them to go away. We had never heard the word homosexual, but thinking back on it now, I suppose that is what was on the police's mind."¹⁴²

The concern over homosexual encounters might well have been on the mind of the police. As Steven Maynard has shown, criminal case records in Ontario indicate that men seeking sex with boys did seek them out in the ravines and parks of the city at the turn of the century.¹⁴³ Authorities would have known of the possibility of sexual encounters between men and boys. Sinclair doesn't specify where he was swimming, but if he is recalling swimming in the free bathing area, boys under sixteen were officially discouraged from entering the space.¹⁴⁴ But Sinclair is also implanting his contemporary interpretation of homosexuality onto his early twentieth-century experiences in the Don. While he hadn't heard the word *homosexual* in 1910, he certainly had by 1966 and was ready to apply it retroactively to the men, all the men, who swam in the Don, labelling them as potential homosexual predators, on the basis of their nudity and proximity to children.

Women have been all but removed from these vernacular bathing spaces. The dearth of female drownings in the Don (the first I came across was in the late 1920s) suggests they were in the river far less often than men. But this was also a discursive effort: conceiving the Don as a distinctive space for undressed male bodies depended upon a successful effort to erase the presence of women. Women and girls were moving in and around the river: it was not a purely masculine space. Artistic works of the Don River, such as *Lady Pellatt Fishing*, tell us they were there, as both artist and subject.¹⁴⁵ Pictures tell us they were there.¹⁴⁶ Postcards tell us they were there viewing the valley. In a postcard entitled "The Race, Don Valley," writer "WRS" commented, "One of our honeymoon scenes, and typical of the

beauty spots of the Northland," in note to Mrs. L.H. Saunders in New Jersey.¹⁴⁷ And Gordon Sinclair recalls the presence of girls in the Don: "Once a group of girls about our own age or even younger came swimming as we were ... in the raw. They caused a measure of interest but not really a stir, until their parents came to take them away."¹⁴⁸ We can take Sinclair at his word and accept that sometimes girls did swim in the river.¹⁴⁹ But he's also, once again, de-sexualizing the experience of being in the Don: the boys were too young and innocent to think anything of girls being among them.

The introduction of the free bathing system and the surveillance that came with it set the stage for the emergence of a heterosexual bathing culture in the Don River; but it was still an incremental process. The free bathing program started in 1897 as a male-only endeavour and continued to allow nude bathing. The Don was still listed as boys-only space in 1910, though bathing suits were now required.¹⁵⁰ James's photos taken through the teens and early 1920s show that swimming lessons were still done in the buff.¹⁵¹ By 1925 the *Globe* was pointing out that the "girls share equally with the boys in this daily adventure."¹⁵²

Conclusion

Vernacular bathing in the middle Don relied on a precarious balance between nature and industry, visibility and invisibility, men and boys. If the Don had been too environmentally pristine, middle-class excursionists would have continued to paddle or stroll up its length, and their gaze would have penetrated these isolated swimming holes and revealed the men within them. Instead, the Don remained at the edge of their vision, occluded enough that it was possible to imagine the innocence of the swimming hole within its reaches, people it with the chaste bathing boys, and create a rich mythology around bathing in the river, albeit one that relied on excluding men by age and females entirely. If the Don had been too isolated, vernacular bathing and the reciprocal safety regime that underpinned it would never have been able to look after the bathers within the river. The Don needed to be visible enough that people strolling along its banks, crossing its bridges, or working next to it could dive in and rescue people. Finally, if the Don had been as despoiled as declensionist narratives of it suggest, the bathers, fully capable of moving and working around polluted spaces, would never have been in the river to begin with.

Pollution, new expectations of safety, and hygiene conspired to peel bathers out of the river from the 1920s on. The *Globe* fretted in 1925 that the city's swimming holes were under threat from pollution, and city council faced increasing calls during the 1920s to clean up the river.¹⁵³ But as the city's commissioner of works pointed out succinctly in 1924, 1927, and again in 1928, without an interceptor sewer line to pull waste away from the river, its condition could not be improved, or put more bluntly, "I see no possibility of making the Don a beauty spot similar to the Humber."¹⁵⁴ The city's free bathing station in the Don was closed in 1928.¹⁵⁵ Bathers were pushed up the river, as bathing spaces closed and once-popular infrastructure, such as the

Don Valley Paper Mill dam, was removed for safety reasons.¹⁵⁶ Semi-treated sewage from the growing suburban population around Toronto was the greatest threat to the river, and by 1949 the amount of semi-treated sewage flowing into the river was nearly double the normal summer water flow.¹⁵⁷ The upper river remained popular with bathers well into the 1950s, and memories of bathing in the river remained part of the mythology for people such as Charles Sauriol, who worked to “reclaim” the Don.¹⁵⁸ The potential for the river to return as a bathing space was even floated in the Don Watershed Regeneration Council and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority *Turning the Corner* report card in 1997, which asked, “Will children swim in the Don again?” and used the embodied memories of bathing in the river as part of a call for environmental action.¹⁵⁹

The loss of the free bathing station in middle Don in 1928 was keenly felt, as a letter writer “SALOP” told the *Star*: “I am a working woman with a family of five boys and have been four years in Toronto out from the old country. For the first two summers during the holidays I packed the kids off each day to bathe in the Don at Red Bridge.” But that space was closed to bathing in 1927, and while there was another bathing space further up, sewage had put a stop to that by 1928. “Is there any other place the kids can go?” she asked. “What I want is a place on the streetcar line where they can spend the afternoon stripped and playing in and out of the water. It is a great health to them and a great relief to me.”¹⁶⁰ For parents like SALOP, the river had represented a safe communal space to send their children; the Don and the people along it would care for them.

Notes

- 1 *Toronto Daily Star*, “Albert Petrie Was Drowned in the Don,” 16 June 1913.
- 2 And for another railway/bather interaction see *Toronto Daily Star*, “William Franklyn Drowns,” 27 June 1913.
- 3 Vernacular bathing requires both a cultural production of space, as Rob Shields suggests, and an embodied relationship with the physical environment, as Joy Parr suggests in her work. See Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 57, 63; Joy Parr, *Sensing Changes in Technologies, Environments, and the Everyday, 1953–2003* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 8–9.
- 4 Joy Parr, “Notes for a More Sensuous History of Twentieth-Century Canada: The Timely, the Tacit and the Material Body,” *Canadian Historical Review* 82, no. 4 (December 2001): 733 (emphasis mine).
- 5 Parr sees the same relationship with the St. Lawrence River and the community of Iroquois: Parr, “Notes for a More Sensuous History,” 725. Richard White captures the same embodied relationship between gillnetters and the Columbia River: Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), 41.
- 6 On how “noise” can be read as a mark of cultural distinction, see Peter Bailey, “Breaking the Sound Barrier,” in *Hearing History: A Reader*, ed. Mark M. Smith, 23–35 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004). And see Murray Schafer, “Soundscapes and Earwitnesses,” in *Hearing History: A Reader*, ed. Mark M. Smith, 3–9 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004).
- 7 Parr, *Sensing Changes*, 9–12, 20. Geographers use the term *lay geography* to describe how people create intimate understandings and meaning around

place. See David Crouch, “Places around Us: Embodied Lay Geographies in Leisure and Tourism,” *Leisure Studies* 19, no. 2 (2000): 63–76.

- 8 Anthony Giddens, “Time, Space and Regionalisation,” in *Social Relations and Spatial Structures*, ed. Derek Gregory and John Urry (London: MacMillan Publishers, 1985), 271–2.
- 9 Jennifer Bonnell, *Reclaiming the Don: An Environmental History of Toronto's Don River Valley* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), xxvi–xxvii. Bonnell gives a useful nod to Richard White's work, which looks at the middle ground as a space of negotiation and accommodation. See Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires and Republics in the Great Lakes Region 1650–1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
- 10 Bonnell, *Reclaiming the Don*, 24–5.
- 11 William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (1996): 13–15. The curative role of the natural environment suggested that such spaces needed to be preserved for their ability to uplift people and drove the parks movement in the nineteenth century. For more on that, see S.B. Sutton, ed., *Civilizing American Cities: A Selection of Frederick Law Olmsted's Writings on City Landscapes* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 2–13, 21, 35–7; Nancy Pollock-Ellwand, “Rickson Outlet: Bringing the Olmsted Legacy to Canada. A Romantic View of Nature in the Metropolis and the Hinterland,” *Journal of Canadian Studies / Revue d'études canadiennes* 44, no. 1 (Winter 2010): 143–4; Peter J. Schmitt, *Back to Nature: The Arcadian Myth in Urban America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), xv.
- 12 Cronon, “Trouble with Wilderness,” 17.
- 13 Industry moved out to intertwine with the environment: see William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), xv, 7–8, 46–7. I use *borderlands* to describe the urban edge rather than the romanticized space of the suburbs: see John R. Stilgoe, *Borderland: Origins of the American Suburb, 1820–1939* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 9.
- 14 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 5, 10–13, 34, 47.
- 15 Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 52–3, 57. See also Mariana Valverde and Miomir Cirak, “Governing Bodies, Creating Gayspaces: Policing and Security Issues in ‘Gay’ Downtown Toronto,” *British Journal of Criminology* 43 (2003): 102–21; David Bell and Gill Valentine, eds., *Mapping Desire: Geographies of Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
- 16 Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), 4. On the ability to define the individual, see Michel Foucault, “Questions of Geography,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, 63–77 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980); and Foucault, “Prison Talk,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, 37–54 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).
- 17 On attachment to nude bathing, see John Travis, “Continuity and Change in English Sea-Bathing, 1730–1900: A Case of Swimming with the Tide,” in *Recreation and the Sea*, ed. Stephen Fisher, 3–35 (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997). And see John K. Walton, “Respectability Takes a Holiday: Disreputable Behaviour at the Victorian Seaside,” in *Unrespectable Recreations*, ed. Martin Hewitt (Leeds: Leeds Centre for Victorian Studies, 2001), 184–5.
- 18 See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990); and Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (New York: Routledge, 1993), for a discussion of the potential and limits of looking at gender as being produced through performativity.
- 19 Butler is suggesting we look to Michel Foucault's theory of power to consider how gender is produced. See Judith Butler, Lynne Segal, and Peter

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- Osborne, "Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler," *Radical Philosophy* 67 (Summer 1994): 32–3, <https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/interview/judith-butler>.
- 20 John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 170–3. For a discussion of folklore traditions, see Graham Seal, *Inventing Anzac: The Diver and National Mythology* (Perth: University of Queensland Press, 2004), 3–7.
- 21 Ian Milligan has suggested that targeted digital searches narrow the scope of historical research. I have attempted to mitigate that problem by using a variety of keywords and individual names when required, and searching by page rather than merely story. Online databases allow research over decades that would not be possible otherwise: see Ian Milligan, "Illusory Order: Online Databases, Optical Character Recognition, and Canadian History, 1997–2010," *Canadian Historical Review* 94, no. 4 (2013): 540–69.
- 22 The Toronto police filed annual reports with Toronto City Council each year from 1859 to 1955, including an address from the chief of police outlining areas of concern.
- 23 For a similar narrative, see Nancy B. Bouchier and Ken Cruikshank, "The War on the Squatters, 1920–1940: Hamilton's Boathouse Community and the Re-Creation of Recreation on Burlington Bay," *Labour/Le Travail* 51 (Spring 2003): 17, 22. Australian scholars argue the nude body had to be clothed as part of colonization: see Cameron White, "Picnicking Surf-Bathing and Middle-Class Morality on the Beach in the Eastern Suburbs of Sydney, 1811–1912," *Journal of Australian Studies* 27, no. 80 (2003): 101–10; and Christine Metusela and Gordon Waitt, *Tourism and Australian Beach Cultures Revealing Bodies* (Toronto: Channel View Publications, 2012). On photography, see Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 106.
- 24 Eric Kaufmann and Oliver Zimmer, "In Search of the Authentic Nation: Landscape and National Identity in Canada and Switzerland," *Nations and Nationalism* 4, no. 4 (1998): 495–6. On pictures overtaking reality, see Stuart Ewen, *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 25.
- 25 See Gordon Sinclair, *Will the Real Gordon Sinclair Please Stand Up* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966); Hugh Garner, *One Damn Thing after Another* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1973); George H. Rust-D'Eye, *Cabbagetown Remembered* (Erin, ON: Boston Mills, 1984); and Colleen Kelly, *Cabbagetown in Pictures* (Toronto: Toronto Public Library Board, 1984).
- 26 Graeme H. Patterson describes a regional myth as a complex of symbols and images embedded in larger narratives with predictable rhythms. See Graeme H. Patterson, *History and Communications: Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, the Interpretation of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 166. For government documents describing the swimability of the Don River, see "Turning the Corner: The Don Watershed Report Card," The Don Watershed Regeneration Council and the Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, May 1997, 1, 3.
- 27 Wayne Reeves and Christina Palassio, eds., *HTO: Toronto's Water from Lake Iroquois to Lost Rivers to Low-Flow Toilets* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2008). See Ontario Department of Planning and Development, *Don Valley Conservation Report* (Toronto: ODPD, 1950), chap. 1, p. 2. It pegs the age of the Don at about 20,000 years. The valley is 100 feet deep at York Mills.
- 28 Bonnell, *Reclaiming the Don*, 20. Postcards portray an agricultural or idealized natural Don. For the agricultural Don, see item 540031, file 54 "Views of the Don River and Don Valley," series 330, fonds 70, City of Toronto Archives (CTA). For a more natural setting, see item 540020, file 54 "Views of the Don River and Don Valley," series 330, fonds 70, CTA.
- 29 Simcoe notes, "I take no sketches of a place I never wish to recollect," and she made many sketches of the Don River. John Ross Robertson, *The Diary of Mrs. John Graves Simcoe, Wife of the First Lieutenant-Governor of the Province of Upper Canada, 1792–6* (Toronto: W. Briggs, 1911). The quote is on page 91. See Don trips on 223, 308.
- 30 Henry Scadding, *Toronto of Old* (Toronto: Adam, Stevenson, 1873), 227.
- 31 Bonnell, *Reclaiming the Don*, 25–6, 35; C. Pelham Mulvany, *Toronto: Past and Present. A Handbook of the City* (Toronto: Ontario Reprint, 1970), 246 (originally published: Toronto: W.E. Caiger, Publisher, 1884); Rust-D'Eye, *Cabbagetown Remembered*, 121; Gunter Gad, "Location Patterns of Manufacturing: Toronto in the Early 1880s," *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine* 22, no. 2 (1994): 125, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016713ar>.
- 32 *Goad's Atlas of the City of Toronto and Suburbs*, 1884, vol. 1 plate 28, CTA.
- 33 *Toronto Daily Star*, "The Northeast Barriers," 24 September 1924.
- 34 A. Douglas Ford, city surveyor, City Annexation map, 1 January 1967, fonds 2032; Toronto Planning Board fonds, series 727; Toronto Planning Board maps and plans, box 200777, CTA.
- 35 Bonnell, *Reclaiming the Don*, 189.
- 36 *Globe*, "Bathing," 24 June 1874. For "questionable waters," see *Globe*, "Public Baths," 28 June 1876; Charles Pelham Mulvany, G. Mercer Adam, and Christopher Blackett Robinson, *History of Toronto and County of York* (Toronto: C. Blackett Robinson, 1885), 1:53. The hospital and the jail were singled out as the largest sewage polluters in the Don in 1878, rather than the upstream community of Yorkdale—a telling example of how the city failed to see the impact that suburban pollution would have on the Don. Item 67, report no. 19, city engineer, 25 February 1878, 89, Toronto City Council Appendix, 1878, CTA.
- 37 And we have evidence of settlers bathing there as early as 1802: John Ross Robertson, *Robertson's Landmarks of Toronto: A Collection of Historical Sketches of the Old Town of York from 1792 until 1833 and of Toronto from 1834 to 1914* (Toronto: John R. Robertson, 1914), 292. Robertson draws this from *Oracle* 12, no. 15 (7 August 1802). We can see this as a form of ex-corporation, with the working class taking up cultural tools for their own use: see Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 15. For bathing examples, see *Globe*, "City News: Inquest," 3 October 1877; *Globe*, "Suburban News: Bathing in the Don," 22 July 1880.
- 38 *Globe*, "Suburban News: Bathing in the Don."
- 39 Bonnell, *Reclaiming the Don*, 55.
- 40 Redmond J. Brough, city engineer, report no. 35, Committee on Works, item 781, 24 September 1881, 665, Toronto City Council Appendix, 1881, CTA.
- 41 Bonnell, *Reclaiming the Don*, 64.
- 42 Item 1018, no. 186, President's Message, *Report on the Accommodation for Railways*, C. Sproatt, city engineer, 21 June 1889, 1122–5, Toronto City Council Appendix, 1889, CTA.
- 43 And this is stated explicitly by city council as it is launching the project: item 1026, 3 October 1881, 290, Toronto City Council Minutes, 1881, CTA. Bonnell, *Reclaiming the Don*, 25. Mulvany uses the term *cloacal*: see Mulvany, *Toronto: Past and Present*, 246.
- 44 Don Improvement Vote: no. 148, item 992, 809, Toronto City Council Appendix, 1886, CTA. Interceptor sewage project vote: John Blevins, city clerk, no. 151, item 995, 8 October 1886, 821, Toronto City Council Appendix, 1886, CTA.
- 45 Item 788, 14 November 1898, 250, Toronto City Council Minutes, 1898, CTA.
- 46 There are examples in 1890: *Globe*, "Life Saving," 11 July 1890, 5; *Globe*, "General Local News," 10 July 1890, 8.
- 47 Committee on Works, report no. 25, Don Improvement, item 1313, 5 October 1887, 1311–12, Toronto City Council Appendix, 1887, CTA.
- 48 Spaces where the weak might carve out their own places. See Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 32–6.

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- 49 Don Valley Conservation Authority (DVCA), *Cardinal* (Summer 1953), Charles Sauriol Fonds, file 14, series 104, fonds 4, CTA. The *Cardinal* was launched by Charles Sauriol in 1951 and was a quarterly publication published by the DVCA.
- 50 White, *Organic Machine*, 13–22.
- 51 Shields, *Places on the Margin*, 52–3.
- 52 Morgan Baldwin, chair, report no. 16, Committee on Property, item 495, 16 June 1879, 369, Toronto City Council Appendix, 1879, CTA.
- 53 No. 75. No. 1004, A bylaw, Robert Roddy, city clerk, 31 May 1880, 320, Toronto City Council Appendix, 1880, CTA. Nude bathing officially continued to be allowed in Toronto during evening hours until 1929, although in practice was driven out of most public areas in the first years of the twentieth century: See *Globe*, "12,000 City By-Laws May Be Consolidated," 8 January 1929; *Globe*, "City Is Growing Up According to News from Our Town Hall," 14 June 1929, 16.
- 54 *Globe*, "Bathing Fatalities," 17 June 1892.
- 55 Scadding, *Toronto of Old*, 242.
- 56 *Toronto Daily Star*, "Bathing Spot in Don," 14 July 1908.
- 57 See 13 August 1831, 53; 21 August 1831, 43; 6 July 1833, 222, in William Helliwell, *The Helliwell Diaries: The Diaries of William Helliwell from 1830 to 1890*. Toronto: City of Toronto Museum Services. See Guthrie, *Don Valley Legacy*, 29, for a picture of Todmorden Mills.
- 58 Guthrie, *Don Valley Legacy*, 102.
- 59 For more on the family, see Guthrie, *Don Valley Legacy*, 15, 190–6.
- 60 Guthrie, *Don Valley Legacy*, 98, 102–3. Charles Sauriol, *Remembering the Don: A Rare Record of Earlier Times within the Don River Valley* (Scarborough, ON: Consolidated Amethyst Communications, 1981), 55.
- 61 DVCA, *Cardinal* (Summer 1953), Charles Sauriol Fonds, file 14, series 104, fonds 4, CTA. Charles Sauriol has a list of "swimming holes" in the *Cardinal* that match the primary research I've completed in the newspapers.
- 62 *Globe*, "Dynamite Removes Old Swimming Hole," 27 May 1933, 13. Sauriol, *Remembering the Don*, 57.
- 63 *Toronto Daily Mail*, "Fatal Drowning Accident," 15 June 1881, 8.
- 64 *Toronto Daily Mail*, "Fatal Drowning Accident."
- 65 While we'd assume the deep water lay behind the dam, news coverage suggests the deep pool might have been below, or at the base of the dam.
- 66 *Globe*, "The Don's Victim," 5 July 1902, 28.
- 67 *Toronto Daily Star*, "Drowned while Bathing in Don," 5 July 1902, 17.
- 68 *Globe*, "Don's Victim."
- 69 *Globe*, "Don's Victim"; *Toronto Daily Star*, "Drowned while Bathing in Don."
- 70 *Globe*, "Drowned at the Mill Dam," 12 August 1902, 12.
- 71 *Globe*, "Drowned in the Don," 3 September 1900, 12. Petrie lived at 78 River Street but was walking along the riverbank at the time.
- 72 Don Valley, abatement of smoke nuisance, item 807, 17 July 1914, 351–2, Toronto City Council Minutes, 1914, CTA.
- 73 Sauriol, *Trails of the Don*, 29, 86, 234.
- 74 Sinclair, *Will the Real Gordon Sinclair*, 11.
- 75 Famed muckraker Christopher St. George saw similar innocence and chastity when he looked at boys bathing. See Clark C.S. Clark, *Of Toronto the Good, a Social Study: The Queen City of Canada as It Is* (Montreal: Toronto Publishing, 1898), 113. See also Rust-D'Eye, *Cabbagetown Remembered*, 26.
- 76 *Toronto Daily Star*, "Would Fence In Railway Tracks," 13 August 1907, 10. This was a traumatic accident; Wildbore's body was cut in two by the wheels of the train.
- 77 The story used the names CNR and Canadian Northern Ontario Railway interchangeably: the companies were likely sharing tracks in 1907. *Toronto Daily Star*, "Would Fence In Railway Tracks."
- 78 *Globe*, "Drags Comrade to Watery Grave," 23 June 1911, 9. The heat had topped out at 33 degrees on 22 June 1911: *Globe*, "King's Coronation Cause of Rejoicing: Heat Was Oppressive," 23 June 1911, 8.
- 79 *Globe*, "Drags Comrade to Watery Grave."
- 80 Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 172–3. Seal, *Inventing Anzac*, 3–7.
- 81 *Globe*, "Drags Comrade to Watery Grave."
- 82 Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1993).
- 83 *Daily Star*, "Albert Petrie Was Drowned in the Don"; *Toronto Daily Mail*, "Fatal Drowning Accident."
- 84 See, for example, *Globe*, "General News of the City: A Small Boy Drowned," 6 July 1897, 10.
- 85 *Daily Mail*, "Current Chit-chat," 4 August 1887, 6.
- 86 *Daily Mail*, "Current Chit-chat."
- 87 Oral culture is part of creating a folk experience. See Seal, *Inventing Anzac*, 3–7; Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 173.
- 88 *Globe*, "Drowned at the Mill Dam."
- 89 *Globe*, "The Don's Victim," 5 July 1902, 28; *Globe*, "Was Drowned in the Don," 20 July 1908, 12.
- 90 On Folk, see Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 172–3. On learning a language of space, see Shields, *Places on the Margin*, 63.
- 91 The city also clamped down on bathing on the island and targeted sunbathers on the eastern waterfront in 1906. Temperature in the later part of July likely played a role with daytime highs hitting the high 20s and low 30s: See climate data: *Globe*, "Got beyond His Depth," 24 July 1906, 12; *Toronto Daily Star*, "Small Boy Drowned in the Don River," 24 July 1906, 7.
- 92 For the extended conversation, see *Toronto Daily Star*, "Shall the Bathing in the Don River Be Prohibited," 24 July 1906, 1.
- 93 *Toronto Daily Star*, "Shall the Bathing." For efforts to use signage, see *Globe*, "Drowned at the Mill Dam."
- 94 *Toronto Daily Star*, "Delayed by Red Tape," 20 July 1897, 2.
- 95 Board of Control Report No. 30, 22 July 1897, 543, Toronto City Council Appendix A, 1897, CTA. *Globe*, "City Hall Small Talk," 13 July 1897, 8.
- 96 *Globe*, "At Free Bathing Stations," 12 August 1902, 12; "Local Briefs," *Globe*, 4 September 1902, 14.
- 97 The Sunnyside free bathing station was officially closed in 1913 as the result of construction along that beach, though people continued to use it. *Globe*, "Multitude of Bathers Used Public Stations," 5 September 1913, 5.
- 98 Rob Shields has suggested how different social groups can create antithetical place-myths within a space, but here we can see how the working class and middle class combined, though for different reasons, to shape the image of the Don: see Shields, *Places on the Margin*, 60–1.
- 99 *Toronto Globe*, "A Scene at the Don," 14 July 1887, 5.
- 100 And perhaps the ultimate example of space being co-opted for new purposes: see Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 15, 32–6.
- 101 Shields, *Places on the Margin*, 262.
- 102 *Globe*, "Swimming: In the Old Mill Race in the Country," 3 August 1889, 16.
- 103 *Daily Star*, "Happenings in Toronto: Bathing in Don," 30 April 1906, 3.

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- 104 *Globe*, "A Summer Idyll Urbanized," 25 August 1925, 4.
- 105 *Globe*, "Colorful Fashion Parade Attracts to Boardwalk Dense Throngs of People," 18 April 1927, 10.
- 106 *Globe*, "Boys of East End Hold Fashion Parade," 18 April 1927, 10.
- 107 For a similar treatment of boys bathing, see Bouchier and Cruikshank, "War on the Squatters," 17–22.
- 108 Photography became cheap enough and popular enough to capture public scenes after the late 1880s, and we see it being taken up by newspapers, including in Toronto, by the start of the twentieth century. See Gerry Badger, *The Genius of Photography: How Photography Has Changed Our Lives* (London: Quadrille Publishing, 2007), 38–41; Mary Warner Marien, *Photography: A Cultural History* (New York: Harry N. Abrahams, 2002), 167–70.
- 109 For quote, see Julia F. Saville, "The Romance of Boys Bathing: Poetic Precedents and Respondents to the Paintings of Henry Scott Tuke," in *Victorian Sexual Dissidence*, ed. Richard Dellamora (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 254, 272; Jane Stevenson, "Nacktlben," in *Changing Bodies, Changing Meanings: Studies on the Human Body in Antiquity*, ed. Dominic Montserrat (New York: Routledge, 2003), 205.
- 110 Stevenson, "Nacktlben," 206.
- 111 Stevenson, "Nacktlben," 207.
- 112 For an example of the photograph not simply capturing an event, but creating it, see Ulrich Keller, "Photojournalism around 1900: The Institutionalization of a Mass Medium," in *Shadow and Substance: Essays on the History of Photography in Honour of Heinz K. Henisch*, ed. Kathleen Collins, 293–5 (Bloomfield Hills, MI: Amorphous Institute, 1990).
- 113 Shields, *Places on the Margin*, 47; Kelly, *Cabbagetown in Pictures*, 20. Rust-D'Eye, *Cabbagetown Remembered*, 25.
- 114 Item 540015, file 54, Views of the Don River and Don Valley, series 330, fonds 70, DOC circa 1906–13, CTA.
- 115 Sinclair, *Will the Real Gordon Sinclair*, 11.
- 116 On resistance, see John Fiske, *Reading the Popular* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 7.
- 117 Garner, *One Damn Thing after Another*, 10.
- 118 Garner, *One Damn Thing after Another*, 13–14.
- 119 Rust-D'Eye, *Cabbagetown Remembered*, 26–8.
- 120 Kelly, *Cabbagetown in Pictures*, 5, 18.
- 121 *Globe*, "Nearly Drowned," 15 August 1867, 2. No age given.
- 122 *Globe*, "Nearly Drowned."
- 123 The trope comes from a specific statement in the British Parliament but was used often in the late nineteenth century. For more on political tropes around bathing, see Julia F. Saville, "Nude Male Alfresco Swimmers: The Prehistory of a Nineteenth-Century Republican Trope," *Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry* 25, no. 1 (2009): 56–74.
- 124 See, for example, *Globe*, "Find Boy's Clothes on Banks of Don," 2 August 1922, 13.
- 125 *Toronto Daily Star*, "Shall the Bathing in the Don River Be Prohibited," 24 July 1906, 1.
- 126 *Daily Mail*, "Current Chit-chat."
- 127 *Toronto Daily Star*, "Would Fence In Railway Tracks."
- 128 *Toronto Daily Star*, "Would Fence In Railway Tracks."
- 129 I'm borrowing the term *slippage* from Mariana Valverde; see Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885–1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).
- 130 *Toronto Daily Star*, "William Franklyn Drowns," 27 June 1913, 1.
- 131 *Globe*, "Was Drowned in the Don," 20 July 1908, 12.
- 132 *Daily Mail*, "Current Chit-chat."
- 133 Cynthia R. Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth: Adolescence and the Making of a Modern Canada, 1920–1950* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 2. Mary Louise Adams, *The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 43.
- 134 George Lang, twenty-four, was an exception that proves the rule; though married, his family was still in Scotland: *Globe*, "Feat Cost Him His Life," 26 June 1905, 12.
- 135 Craig Heron, "Boys Will Be Boys: Working-Class Masculinities in the Age of Mass Production," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 69 (Spring 2006): 19–20. For more, see Woody Register, *The Kid of Coney Island: Fred Thompson and the Rise of American Amusements* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- 136 Heron, "Boys Will Be Boys," 20.
- 137 Alan Metcalfe, "Working-Class Physical Recreation in Montreal 1860–1895," *Working Papers on the Sociological Study of Sports and Leisure* 1, 2 (1978).
- 138 Heron, "Boys Will Be Boys," 15.
- 139 Photographs of the Clay Banks swimming hole near the Bill Hill 1939, file 96, folio 61, series 80, fonds 4. Caption contained with photo.
- 140 And in this I agree with George Chauncey when he argues that in early twentieth-century New York, boundaries around male sexuality were not as thickly set as they would be by the mid-twentieth century. See George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).
- 141 Sauriol, *Trails of the Don*, 16, 23.
- 142 Sinclair, *Will the Real Gordon Sinclair*, 11.
- 143 Steven Maynard, "Horrible temptations": Sex, Men, and Working-Class Male Youth in Urban Ontario, 1890–1935, *Canadian Historical Review* 78, no. 2 (1997): 216, 233.
- 144 *Evening Star*, "Bathers in a Tug," 14 July 1897, 2.
- 145 See *Lady Pellatt Fishing*, watercolour by Lena [Colleyna] Morgan, 1906, call no. E 5-109f, TPL (TRL): Baldwin Collection.
- 146 See, for example, "Humber River: Alice under tree near mill," item 3416, John Boyd Sr. photographs, series 393, Alan Howard fonds, 20 September 1913, CTA. My thanks to Rudy Limeback for drawing my attention to this photograph.
- 147 Item 540001, Views of the Don River and Don Valley file 54, series 330, fonds 70, circa 1906–13, CTA.
- 148 Sinclair, *Will the Real Gordon Sinclair*, 1.
- 149 There are similar recollections of girls bathing in the Humber River: see Marjorie Mossman, "Weston," in *The Villages of Etobicoke*, ed. Etobicoke Historical Board (Weston, ON: Argyle Printing, 1986), 108.
- 150 *Toronto Daily Star*, "Time Table for Free Cars to the Swimming Holes," 2 August 1910, 10. (And no mention that bathing dresses were required for the western sandbar.) *Globe*, "Excellent Opportunity," 13 August 1910, 14.
- 151 See figure 8 and *Toronto Star*, "He Who Would Swim Must First Learn on Shore," 10 August 1922, 11.
- 152 *Globe*, "Free Fares Handed to 50,000 Children in Bathing Season," 29 August 1925, 47.
- 153 *Globe*, "A Summer Idyll Urbanized," 25 August 1925, 4.
- 154 Report no. 3 of the committee on works, 10 February 1928, 252, Toronto City Council Appendix A, 1928, TCA.
- 155 The closure gets little mention in Toronto's City Council Minutes. The Don simply ceases to be included as a bathing station in 1928: see report no. 12

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of the committee on property, 11 June 1928, 1170–1, Toronto City Council Appendix A, 1928, CTA.

156 *Globe*, "Dynamite Removes Old Swimming Hole."

157 Bonnell, *Reclaiming the Don*, 122; Ontario Department of Planning and Development, *Don Valley Conservation Report* (Toronto: ODPD, 1950). part 6: 15.

158 On swimming in the 1950s, see Charles Sauriol, "Swimming Holes in the Don," *Cardinal* (Summer 1953), Charles Sauriol Fonds, file 14, series 104, fonds 4, CTA. On Sauriol, see Bonnell, *Reclaiming the Don*, 114. For Sauriol's relationship with the river, see Jennifer Bonnell, "An Intimate Understanding of Place: Charles Sauriol and Toronto's Don River Valley, 1927–1989," *Canadian Historical Review* 92, no. 4 (December 2011): 607–36.

159 "Turning the Corner: The Don Watershed Report Card," The Don Watershed Regeneration Council and the Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, May 1997, 1, 3.

160 *Toronto Star*, "Bathing Places," 14 June 1928: item 36, Bathing General 1916–1958, no. 101.G.1, vol. 1, RG 313, folder 10, box 53, TPAA. Today the biggest threat to the river is from stormwater runoff: see "Don River Watershed Plan: Beyond Forty Steps," Toronto and Region Conservation,

2009, v. As Bonnell notes, Metro Toronto had removed a number of overburdened sewage treatment plants from the river between 1956 and 1965. See Bonnell, "An Intimate Understanding of Place," 625.

Dale Barbour recently completed his PhD in history at the University of Toronto. His previous work includes *Winnipeg Beach: Leisure and Courtship in a Resort Town, 1900–1967* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2011). Prior to joining the world of academia he worked in journalism and communications.

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