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STUDY OF THE URBAN PAST: APPROACHES BY GEOGRAPHERS

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The interdisciplinary convergence of work on thematic areas such as our own, historical urban, has been a striking development in academia over the past decade. We have progressed so far in the historical urban area that we hardly need to make distinctions among disciplines; our departmental affiliations are pretty much reduced to administrative inertia. This coming together is the result of a number of developments. A concern for the ordinary, the vernacular, is shared by a variety of people in research and in the public world, and so the distinction between town and gown is not so clear. A former separation of time for the historians and place for the geographers has been closed up; significantly it is the reader of theology cum activistorganizer-politician John Sewell who has very clearly brought the two together in his Sense of Time and Place1. In doing so he has captured the imagination of many in Toronto and the historical approach has become very respectable. Many economists have turned developmental. The concept of change in the social sciences generally underline the importance of historical sequence. "Process" is a watch word in both the academy and the city. The present cannot make sense unless we understand where our hopes extend in the light of the past.

If I am to take the above statement seriously, I have to admit that the convergence in historical urban studies cannot be complete. There are traditions from our disciplines, ways of looking at the world and of asking questions that are not quite the same. Geographers, owing to their past emphasis on places, areal connections and environment are more likely to raise issues in these arenas than are historians. But we are learning that the really interesting issues go beyond these since life cannot easily be divided up. What I have to say, then, is more about what "geographers" are doing than about geography.

A central struggle among geographers now is between the ecological/behavioural perspective and the planning/political view. By ecological I mean a tendency toward reductionist view of human existence, an uncritical acceptance of processes operating below the surface of consciousness, notably competition². This connotes "economic man" who defines self-interest in the narrowest of terms. Behaviouralism, a more recent development, while more subtle, says much the same: man the manipulator. Society is made up of a bunch

of individuals who adapt and sort themselves out by competition. This may overstate the position of Robert Park and Edward Burgess, the classical writers of urban ecology³, but it has been the basic thrust of most studies on urban geography. A rejoinder to my proposition, namely that the ecologist's view of North American cities fits the American ideology, can be countered by another proposition that the students of ecology not only describe conditions, but imply a normative state. Everybody has to adjust if we choose to follow them. Besides, North American cities have not always followed the ecologist's descriptions.

The alternative approach is that of politics and planning. This view cannot deny the dominance of competitiveness in our society, and so there can be a continuity with the ecological/behavioural, but it brings out conscious stances. This view may be seen as a continuation of the decision making and process concern of behaviouralists, vet it is a jump beyond them. It does make conscious what is assumed. The political position parallels the new developments in city politics itself where planning by neighbourhood groups is becoming more widely accepted. This was foreshadowed in the work of Walter Firey4 who in an analysis of Boston was able to show that, based on custom and sentiment, the rich held their own on Beacon Hill, not being moved by the winds of competition. Today, we have to go beyond him and talk of the power of groups in the planning process. And in the historical context we must understand who planned cities in the past. That this means "bias" and participation in the events, is in fact no less biased than the ecologists, whose politics is; whatever is is good. But through a Collingwoodian stance empathy with the enemy as well as friends is needed to approach historical truth. So what the others say is valuable, whether they be speculators or urban ecologists. What is going on now with historical geographers reflects both the ecological and political tendencies. To consider trends we can separate the studies into two groupings: first, the urbanization process and urban system, and second, patterns within cities.

Urbanization Process and the Urban System

At this macro-level, the regional, the national, even continental scales are the focus. The central question is: Why and how have cities grown? This cannot be answered without asking about how particular cities connect with one another in a hierarchy or some arrangement of sizes and functions, and how they are distributed over regions as nodes of activity. Also important here historically are the demographic problems of rural/urban differentials and of mobility; rural to urban; urban to urban; and international movements.

Much has been written on these matters. Among historians the classic study by N.S.B. Gras⁵ was mostly ignored until a decade or so ago, when Eric Lampard in particular published his call to action in the study of urbanization⁶. Both set general frameworks that have been followed since then by a variety of scholars. Among geographers, Walter Christaller's central place model of the 1930's gained much ground in the fifties with urban geographers and finally was used in the sixties by historical geographers⁷. His work certainly helped to break historically-orientated geographers away from simple minded and dull discussions of the sites of cities at bridging points and the like, yet remained weak in comprehending the process of change.

In his classical work, Christaller attempted to explain variations in the size and the areal distribution of towns. In theory, given a homogeneous regional environment and economy, central places would be evenly distributed over space. But they would differ in population and occur in a hierarchical pattern of several orders with the higher the order the fewer the cities: one metropolis but many hamlets (1st to 5th order). Hinterlands of circular (or more strictly hexagonal owing to overlap) zones fall around each town, their areas depending on the population of their centre. The hinterlands of large towns would cover those of small places.

The basis for understanding this pattern is functional. Types and range of activities would be more complex in larger than in smaller places. For example, in the nineteenth century the larger the place the more likely the proportion of specialty shops would be greater. While Christaller most strictly based his work on centralized retailing, he himself added transportation and administration to later models and it is obvious that many activities can be seen in a hierarchical way — particularly in the western world where economic exploitation has had strong sanction.

Christaller's view has been criticized as static and as unable to incorporate towns with special interests such as mining, or manufacturing cities. He does in fact have a dynamic element, that of threshold. A city would "move" from one rank to a higher rank when it was able to support or reach a threshold of more specialized higher order activities when it expands its population and its range or hinterland. But given that Christaller's work was on rather stable rural southern Germany, it is not surprising that he lacked a strong developmental perspective, and also has nothing to say of newly-settled areas.

Much of the recent studies by geographers⁸ have been on creating a developmental framework while based in part on Christaller's pioneer work. Many of the statements lack the conceptual rigour of Christaller's theory, but that may be just as well since they allow more flexibility. Nor are the "stages" of development as temporally linear as the sequence developed by Gras for metropolitan growth, being based on wholesaling, industry, transport and finance in that order. The present work on models ignores none of these factors but rather recognizes that they are all involved at all times. To these factors, however, must be added public administration and population movements.

Following Gras, innovations in material technology and organization of society are of critical importance. Dynamic concepts have been introduced especially in the work of Allen Pred. This centres on circular and cumulative causation which in turn provides a multiplier effect on growth and on innovation. This idea has been drawn from Gunnar Myrdal. This emphasis on change utilizes the concepts of specialization and integration stressed by Lampard. (Few writers want to look at decline, so we have little about stagnating models). Finally, we have to recognize that the idea of the urban system refers in fact to regions with nodal centres from the continental scale to local areas. In other words, the metropolitan theme of Harold Innis, Donald Creighton and Maurice Careless has become a central organizing principle for geographers and historians. I suspect Americans came late to this view because the "frontier" myth had a greater hold on them than it did on Canadians. The open relatively featureless west provides sharp contrast to the dendritic pattern of the fur trade and to the Canadian Shield in Ontario which has hindered agricultural settlement.

In the long sweep, the central social question is centred on the organizational question of who runs society. If American historians in their populist bias have given too much power to small farmers, it is fair to say that most students of urban systems have almost totally ignored the political processes in the city setting. It is only now being widely recognized that the United States government has for over a generation shown an increasing interest in macro-regional planning. And it is only now that regional planning is being fixed in the public and academic mind. The Toronto-Centered Region plan — an explicit if vague government programme — is very much in the political arena. After three hundred years of almost unconscious regional planning, mostly privately fostered by merchants, corporations, and certainly innovative entrepreneurs, we should be able to take a tougher look at our future and our past.

Internal Patterns and Processes

Until recently, geographers working on differentiation within the city have stressed the sorting out by ecological processes pretty narrowly

based on demographic characteristics and socio-economic status. The current trends are to broaden the base of analysis by introducing behavioural categories or by going beyond these to explicitly political views. Sam Warner, in his *Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of its Growth*⁹, if inadequate in techniques of analysis and some concepts, has helped us to establish the new outlook. In Philadelphia the politics of privatism were responsible for the form and style of the city. Some of my own students are moving in this direction. Francis Mellen, working on Toronto's waterfront started out interested only in port morphology, later picked up behavioural decision-making with its introduction in my department, and then found that the really interesting questions are political ones¹⁰.

Geographers have mostly followed the path laid out by the Chicago sociological school of the 1920's, though with increased sophistication. Burgess' concentric zones of the central business district, followed by the deteriorating zone of transition, then working mens' homes, better residences, and finally the commuters' zone, modified by Homer Hoyt's sectors based on class and real estate values, and subsequently further altered by Chauncey Harris' and Edward Ullman's multiple nuclei¹¹, has been shaken down by Chicago geographers through a number of techniques such as factor and regression analysis into a pattern of concentric zones reflecting family structure, sectors of status as in Hoyt and nuclei of ethnic groups¹². Such is the state of the major thrust in the contemporary Canadian urban geographical scene, at least in general outline and as it relates to urban differentiation.

In historical studies using the ecological approach, the chief distinction of the pre-industrial and industrial city, identified by Gideon Sjoberg¹³ has been undergoing rough treatment lately. Sjoberg argued that the transition from pre-industrial to industrial reversed the rings of affluence and poverty. In contrast to Burgess' rings with poverty at the centre and affluence at the edge, Sjoberg sought to show nearly the reverse. It seems odd that Peter Goheen should persist in the vein of Sjoberg, especially when in using factor analysis he has followed his Chicago peers14. Recent urban geography as cited above, has proceeded to question and even discredit the concentric rings of affluence of the Burgess model. The work of Michael Doucet and Ian Davey on Hamilton in the early 1850's suggests that the pattern is more like the modern than the pre-industrial. In other words, considerable sorting out had occurred already in that small place of 14,000 and ecological factors of family structure, class and ethnic groups resembled the present-day model much more than the pre-industrial

one¹⁵. Possibly one of the difficulties in understanding such centres is the scale differences. Small places seem more jumbled because the areas of relative homogeneity are tinier.

Another attack on the simple reversal model has been Martyn Bowden's study which has been based in part on the works of James Vance¹⁶. The commercial or mercantile city was a distinctive type. though with strong elements of continuity to the present, and certainly not fitting Sjoberg's pre-industrial model. In fact, mercantile is a more apt title than pre-industrial, the latter implying that all urbanization should be understood by industrialization or its absence. (The designation of its absence, (The designation) nation of today's cities as post-industrial also is inadequate. The decentralized multi-noded citizen city is a way to describe our emerging situation). Beginning with London in the 1640's and ending with San Francisco in the 1850's, Bowden argues, the mercantile city was replicated across the world of Western European expansion. In this model, the merchant, particularly the wholesaler, was dominant, and city form followed his basic decisions. Bowden notes that the spatial pattern in Boston and San Francisco of the mid-nineteenth century was like London's earlier, though they achieved this at much smaller population levels¹⁷. Undoubtedly, Toronto showed some of the same patterns when its wholesale merchants dominated its society after the mid-nineteenth century18.

Creative linkages through matching personality and environmental types is another way of differentiating the city. Sherry Olson¹⁹ has analyzed combinations of six personality types (realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, conventional) in three areas of Baltimore to show how these districts were sources of innovation or stagnation. Like Jane Jacobs she argues that segregation of types of people leads to atrophy and that mixing of certain types enhances opportunity for change, and in the case of Baltimore leading to spurts in its growth. This work can thus be used to interpret the growth of cities noted above, and particularly ties in with Pred's notions of innovation. This psycho-behavioural approach is worth pursuing, and certainly opens up possibilities for understanding politics by isolating power groups.

Some parts of the city have been scrutinized fairly carefully, others not. The central business district or the core area has been intensively studied by Davey, and by Bowden as noted above, and by David Ward. Ward's study of Boston²⁰ (1840-1920) suggests increasing differentiation with expansion and movement of the centre and the strengthening of some subdistricts over others. Manufacturing, partly through increasing scale of production under one roof, is sloughed off

to suburban towns, though clothing manufacturing is pushed only to the periphery of the city where sweat shops are established. Gradually fewer people live in the core, and wholesaling and warehousing after rising in prominence, decline and are pushed to the edge. Finance and larger scale department store retailing come to dominate the core with public administration also becoming more apparent. Bowden's21 very detailed analysis of San Francisco shows remarkable stability in the core even after it has migrated over a mile and even when some sectors of it have expanded at the expense of others. He finds that finance — banks and the like — increase in importance and also lead the movement of the core to the south. Women's clothing is also a leader. His chief quarrel with Ward is over the relative importance of retailing. By measuring the number of establishments, Bowden suggests that retailing declined in importance between 1850 and 1930 though not nearly as dramatically as wholesaling. Unfortunately, by just counting firms, he may be underplaying the economic power of the rising department stores of which Ward speaks. A study of employment generation by stores and sales, if we had the data, could help to solve the difference between Bowden and Ward. Certainly an analysis of Toronto's core would not only be a check on Bowden and Ward, but also provides us with evidence on how different we have been from the United States.

The development of residential areas and neighbourhoods is becoming a large area of concern. One suspects that ecology, though focussing on residential differentiation, could not come to grips with the neighbourhood because of a basic disbelief that "neighbourhoods" existed in the city. The orientation developed from Max Weber, Robert Redfield and Louis Wirth²³ stressed alienating secondary relationships as typical in the city and contrasted them to rural intimacy. Studies of rural mobility in sixteenth century England and in eighteenth century Pennsylvania²⁴ clearly raise questions as to the presumed degree of stability in the countryside. On the urban side, studies of the "ghettos", ethnic communities and upper class areas have kept alive the possibility of considering neighbourhoods²⁵. Today it seems likely we can consider again the neighbourhood as a central concept 26 even in middleclass areas. Certainly this does not necessarily imply tight little communities but does suggest that some neighbourhoods do provide and have provided some measure of primary contact²⁷.

This is not to say that previous ecologically-orientated work is useless. Goheen's study of Toronto has given us a great deal of knowledge on status, tenancy-ownership, denomination, journey to work patterns and the transformation of the commercial town to the modern

city, though not telling us very much as to why he subscribes to the view that Toronto was "a British town on American soil"²⁸. Michael Katz' massive project on the social structure of Hamilton has opened up many issues, particularly in regard to family structure²⁹. Ward's study of ethnic group differentiation in late nineteenth-century New York has laid to rest a widespread view that "ghettos" were clearly defined entities which were universally overcrowded, disease ridden and crime infested³⁰. Jews lived more densely but lived longer and with remarkedly little disease. The Irish were more scattered but more inclined to maladies, and so on.

In recent years movements within cities have been receiving a great deal of attention though it is technically difficult to handle changes. Doucet's simple study of a few Yorkville families perhaps has told us as much as some complex analysis and a number of historians, such as Peter Knights at York, have been chasing people around the continent³¹. All such studies point to a high degree of movement.

The housing of North Americans has received less attention recently than that of the British, I suppose because of a more general acceptance there of housing as a public social good. The concern for analyzing working peoples' housing possibly springs from the British intellectuals' sympathy for labour³². Certainly the housing of the poor in North America has received persistent contemporary concern, as shown by Ames in pre-1900 Montreal and a plethora of studies today. Ward's comparative study of building cycles in Boston and Leeds³³ has opened the way for comparisons, and Sam Warner's excellent Streetcar Suburbs³⁴ shows what can be done with building permits and similar data. Doucet is launching into a thesis on the building of housing in response to Hamilton's and Toronto's rapid late nineteenth-century growth. Perhaps we will know more about speculators and developers — those villains of the current Toronto scene!

Suburbanization has normally been analyzed from the perspective of the expansion of internal transport network from the omnibus (1830's-1850's), commuter rail lines (1830's-present), the horse car (1850-1890), the electrified streetcar (1890-present), interurbans (1890-1940) and cars, trucks, and buses (esp. 1920-present)³⁵. Undoubtedly these had a marked effect on growth. The transition from the walking city to the car was marked by decreasing densities which gradually extended spatially the persistent toleration limit for the journey to work to about 45 minutes. The clearest break came with the auto as a way of getting to work. In what is now inner Toronto 16 2/3 and 25 foot lots for substantial housing were superseded by 50 foot lots for even lower

status people in the past World War II suburbs and we know that urban sprawl is the legacy of that process. We need a thorough study of changing transportation systems within Canadian cities, though a number of my undergraduate students have worked on specific issues. It may be that slower development of streetcar lines after 1900 here may have held up densities more than in United States cities³⁶. The effect of the intrusion of rail lines, including commuter lines, has been explored somewhat in the United States and Britain but Frances Mellen's study of railroads on Toronto's waterfront is the major North American effort³⁷.

Other issues have received only marginal attention. Spelt has given us some sense of the development of the distribution of manufacturing in Toronto where large operations sprang up in the suburbs along new rail lines³⁸. Outlying commercial areas have not been studied except slightly in connection with streetcar/suburban expansion³⁹. As well, one of my students has just finished a piece on Toronto parks in part to learn what planning programmes have been undertaken in the past particularly to supply neighbourhood playgrounds. The interest seems to have been concentrated only in large parks and parkways, rather than in neighbourhood facilities and this former feature appears to have been a product of the "City Beautiful" movement.

As I said at the outset, planning is now firmly in the public consciousness and Toronto's planners this year are to receive 100 per cent more in 1974 from the public purse than they did in 1972. We should now take advantage of this wide interest in the planning process and the revival of the neighbourhood as a real and viable entity. We should consider how social values and the very special actions of speculators, developers, innovators, merchants, and politicians formed our cities. Obviously, this will be an interdisciplinary task.

NOTES

Note: All works by geographers marked*. As well I wish to thank Michael Doucet for reading the first draft of this article.

- ¹ Toronto, City Pamphlets, James Lewis and Samuel, 1971.
- ² Peculiarly in man-environment studies to think ecologically is something quite different: cooperation with nature. When used earlier in biology it did refer to competition. Times have changed but urban geographers still follow the earlier view.
- ³ See discussion in Peter Goheen*, Victorian Toronto, 1850-1900 (Chicago: University of Chicago, Department of Geography, Research Paper 127, 1970), pp. 21-28.
 - ⁴ Land Use in Central Boston (Cambridge, Harvard, 1947).
 - ⁵ N.S.B. Gras, An Introduction to Economic History (N.Y. and London: 1922).

- ⁶ Eric Lampard, "The History of Cities in Economically Advanced Areas", Economic Development and Cultural Change, 3 (Jan. 1955), pp. 81-136. This is a seminal work in developing a model, and discussion of various countries.
- ⁷ Walter Christaller*, Central Places in Southern Germany, trans. Carlisle W. Baskin (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1966). See also Brian J.L. Berry and Allan R. Pred, Central Place Studies: A Bibliography of Theory and Applications (Philadelphia, Regional Science Research Institute, (Bibliog. Series 2, 1961). See Brian J.L. Berry, Geography of Market Centres and Retail Distribution (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1967), esp. pp. 59-73.
- 8 The following are helpful: David Ward*, Cities and Immigrants: A Geography of Change in Nineteenth Century America (New York, 1971). First Chapter deals with stages of growth. Core-periphery model. C.F.J. Whebell*, "Corridors: A Theory of Urban Systems", Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 59 (March 1969), pp. 1-26. Stages model using North America. Uses Southern Ontario as example. John Borchert*, "American Metropolitan Evolution", Geographical Review, 57 (July, 1967), pp. 301-332. An excellent discussion basing periods on major technological facts, as well as using hierarchy. Good introduction to urban growth and systems in the United States. M. Careless, "Frontierism, Metropolitanism, and Canadian History", Canadian Historical Review (1954), pp. 1-21. Edward J. Taafe, Richard L. Morrill, Peter R. Gould, "Transport Expansion in Underdeveloped Countries", Geographical Review, 53 (1963), pp. 503-529. This is a useful starting point to see settlement patterns in a new area. A Pred*, The Spatial Dynamics of U.S. Urban Industrial Growth, 1800-1914 (Cambridge, 1966). Chief concepts are initial advantage and innovation. Discusses mercantile city and industrial city. E. Lampard, "The Evolving System of the Cities in the U.S.", in H. Perloff and L. Wingo, eds. Issues in Urban Economics (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1968), pp. 81-140. Heavy, but very useful. Ecological theory obscure in places. L. Schnore and G. Peterson, "Urban and Metro Development in U.S. & Canada", Annals American Academy Political and Social Science, 216 (March, 1958). Compare population data with Borchert and Stone. Below. Some problems. F. Lukermann*, "Empirical Expression of Nodality and Hierarchy in a Circulation Manifold", East Lakes Geographer, 3 (August, 1966). A rather esoteric model, using geog. concepts. James Simmons*, "The Evolution of the Canadian Urban System", paper at Historical Urbanization in North America Conference York University, Jan. 1973 (HUNAC). Preliminary statement of ongoing work which is demographically based. Hierarchies based on Montreal and Toronto. Will be basic work for Canada though techniques hard to comprehend. Leroy O. Stone, Urban Development in Canada (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1968). Very heavy on figures, but useful. Jacob Spelt*, Urban Development in South-Central Ontario (Toronto, 1955). Structure parallels Gras. F. Armstrong, "Metropolitanism and Toronto Reexamined, 1825-1850", Can. Hist. Assoc. Report 1966, pp. 29-40. D. Kerr*, "Metropolitan Dominance in Canada", chapter 8 in J. Warkentin, ed., Canada: A Geographical Interpretation. (Toronto & London, 1968). Recent data J. and R. Simmons*, Urban Canada (Toronto: 1969). A. Burghardt*, "The Origin and Development of the Road Network of the Niagara Peninsula, 1770-1851", Annals Assoc. Am. Geographers, 59 (Sept. 1969), pp. 417-440. Jean-Paul Martin*, "Le Developpement du Reseau Urbain Quebecois, 1830-1910", Paper at HUNAC, Jan. 1973. Carville Earle* and Ronald Hoffman, "The Evolution of Colonial Urban Systems: A Perspective", HUNAC paper, Jan. 1973. Very good statement on periods and regions. J. Lemon*, "Urbanization and Development in Early Pennsylvania", William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Ser., 24 (1967), pp. 501-542. Revised version in The Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania (Baltimore, 1972), pp. 118-149. R. Albion, Rise of New York Port, 1815-1860 (New York, 1939). A very fine original work. Jean Gottman*, Megalopolis: The Urbanized Northeastern Seaboard of the United States (Cambridge,

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- 11 R.J. Johnston*, Urban Residential Patterns, An Introductory Review (London: 1971), chapter 3.
- 12 Brian J.L. Berry*, "Internal Structure of the City", Law and Contemporary Problems, 30 (winter 1965), pp. 111-119. See also Robert Murdie, Factorial Ecology of Metropolitan Toronto, 1951-1961 (Chicago, Univ. of Chicago, Department of Geography, Research Paper 116, 1969).
 - 13 The Preindustrial City (New York, 1960).
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- ¹⁵ Doucet*, "Spatial Differentiation in a Commercial City: Hamilton, 1951-52", in Michael Katz, ed., *The Canadian Social History Project Interim Report No. 4* (Toronto, OISE, Dec. 1972), pp. 308-351; Davey, "The Central Area of Hamilton in 1853", in *Ibid.*, pp. 218-249.
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- ²⁰ "The Industrial Revolution and the Emergence of Boston's Central Business District", *Economic Geography*, p. 42, (1966).
 - ²¹ See "Downtown through Time", Ec. Geog., p. 47, (1971).
- ²² Donald Kerr* and Jacob Spelt*, *The Changing Face of Toronto* (Ottawa, Queen's Printer, 1966), Chapter 7. A new edition by Spelt has appeared, entitled *Toronto*.
- ²³ For example, Wirth, "Urbanism as a Way of Life", American Journal of Sociology, p. 44 (July 1938), pp. 1-24. Reprinted a number of times.
- ²⁴ Lawrence Stone, "Social Mobility in England, 1500-1700: Conference Paper", Past and Present, no. 33 (April 1966), pp. 29-32. Lemon*, Best Poor Man's Country: Pennsylvania, Chapter 3.

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- ³⁷ Ward, Cities and Immigrants, 92. Mellen thesis in preparation dwells on impact of railways.
 - 38 Kerr* and Spelt*, Changing Face of Toronto, pp. 74-78.
- ³⁹ Warner, Street Car Suburbs; James W. Simmons, Toronto's Changing Retail Complex: A Study in Growth and Blight (Chicago: University of Chicago, Department of Geography, Research Paper 104, 1966).