

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Russell, Hilary. *Double take: the story of the Elgin and Winter Garden Theatres*. Toronto: Dundurn Press Limited, 1989. Pp. 158. Illustrations and colour plates. \$59.95 (cloth); \$29.95 (paper)

Adrienne Johnson Goodwin

Volume 20, Number 2, October 1991

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019260ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019260ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (print)

1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Goodwin, A. J. (1991). Review of [Russell, Hilary. *Double take: the story of the Elgin and Winter Garden Theatres*. Toronto: Dundurn Press Limited, 1989. Pp. 158. Illustrations and colour plates. \$59.95 (cloth); \$29.95 (paper)]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 20(2), 89–89. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019260ar>

All Rights Reserved © Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine, 1991

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

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

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Russell, Hilary. *Double take: the story of the Elgin and Winter Garden Theatres.* Toronto: Dundurn Press Limited, 1989. Pp. 158. Illustrations and colour plates. \$59.95 (cloth); \$29.95 (paper).

In 1913 the Marcus Loew theatre circuit of New York City began construction of a theatre complex in Toronto. Designed by Thomas W. Lamb, it boasted two proscenium stage theatres under one roof and cost approximately \$500,000 to build. The Loews Yonge Street (capacity 2149) and Winter Garden (capacity 1410) theatres opened in 1913 and 1914 respectively. The theatres entertained patrons with the same program of vaudeville acts and short movies booked by the New York office of the Loew circuit. The Loews Yonge Street, the lower theatre, ran continuous performances during the afternoon and evening. Its patrons were entertained in surroundings that included red brocade, plaster painted to look like marble, and extensive use of gold draperies and elaborate gilded ornamental plasterwork. In the Winter Garden, only one evening show was performed daily. For a slightly higher admission fee, its patrons were treated to reserved seats amid surroundings meant to imitate the outdoors. Plaster painted to look like tree trunks, a profusion of floral murals, and real beech leaves interspersed with cotton flowers and hung from wire grids created a garden atmosphere.

In *Double Take: the Story of the Elgin and Winter Garden Theatres*, author Hilary Russell describes the original Loews Yonge Street and Winter Garden theatres and their place in both theatre history and the empire of Marcus Loew. She concludes with their transformation into the Elgin and Winter Garden theatres of 1989.

The decline of vaudeville and the rising popularity of the sound film clearly influenced the history of these two theatres. The Winter Garden theatre closed and reopened periodically during the 1920s, and closed permanently on June 16, 1928. The Loews Yonge Street was wired for sound in April, 1929, and on October 3, 1930, it began to show films exclusively. From then on its fate was determined by the popularity of film. The advent of television and the concurrent movement toward smaller movie theatres thus meant hard times for this large capacity theatre that had prospered during the era of the movie palace.

The Loews Yonge Street was sold to 20th Century Theatres in August, 1969. It was renamed the Yonge in February, 1970, and the Elgin in March, 1978. Changes in ownership, name, and program direction failed to revive the faded theatre. It closed in November, 1981.

In December, 1981, the Ontario Ministry of Culture and Communications bought the Elgin and Winter Garden theatres and made plans to restore them. The government's aim was to add a mid-sized commercial theatre in Toronto. The federal government's designation of the complex as a National Historic Site confirmed the wisdom of the province's action.

At first glance, the quantity and quality of the illustrations lead the reader to think that this is a coffee-table book. However, a reading of the text alters that assessment. Nor is it a how-to guide to theatre restoration or a step-by-step description of the \$29,000,000 restoration. The few specific details of the restoration Russell includes and illustrates are, however, quite interesting. Rather, Russell thoroughly describes the original Loews Yonge Street and Winter Garden theatres and documents how developments in the entertainment industry affected them.

The book creates a desire for a personal tour of the restored Elgin and Winter Garden theatres.

Adrienne Johnson Goodwin
Ottawa, Ontario

Bush, Edward Forbes. *Engine Houses & Turntables on Canadian Railways 1850-1950.* Erin, Ontario: The Boston Mills Press, 1990. Pp. 160. Illustrations. \$35.00 (cloth).

This very attractive volume first reached the public in the limited role of a report for the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (Microfiche Report Series #209). In hardcover book form with lavish illustrations, black and white photographs, engineering and other drawings, it will appeal to all who cherish railway history, or the industrial archaeology of the age of steam power and iron. It is not an exhaustive account; for example, the Canadian Pacific Railway's Drake Street roundhouse, Vancouver, (which is preserved as an historical monument, with its turntable, both tidied up for Expo '86), is omitted because the author, in a limited time for research for the Parks Canada report, could not cover the whole country. But by and large he has succeeded in presenting a good historical account and a very representative survey of the types of locomotive "stables," from the smallest one-stall sheds with no facilities to the largest 57-stall roundhouse with machine and forge shops, wheel drops, and other facilities for locomotive maintenance and repair.

Mr. Bush has no information on his topic before the 1850s: perhaps some Maritime historian will tell us how the General Mining Association housed and cared for its 1830s locomotives. But beginning with the 1850s, he presents some most interesting