

## *Kensington Market: Collective Memory, Public History, and Toronto's Urban Landscape* by Na Li

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in devastating these fish stocks.

Seven chapters in this section describe matters such as fishing for food or profit, the involvement of various white entrepreneurs between 1831-56, the rise and fall of numerous fish companies, legal issues between local First Nations, governments and white fishermen, and the rise of Southampton as a commercial fishing hub. The final chapter also provides intriguing details about regulating the fishery, encroachment, Native loss of control over their fishing grounds, a fishery decline by the 1850s, and the survey and eventual sale of the Fishing Islands after 1900. A very brief epilogue serves as a conclusion.

Positive attributes of this book include a good use of mainly high quality graphics, maps, photos and drawings that compliment the text, the inclusion of an extensive bibliography of 320 titles (many available in digital format) used in the research and writing of this study, and an useful and thorough fourteen page index, which of-

ten is neglected in other local histories.

The author has chosen to invent his own method of identifying sources, including footnotes, image credits and bibliographic references. I find that Hilborn's personal creation is somewhat confusing, and strongly believe that a more familiar, standard and recognized format should have been used. In addition, the Epilogue=Conclusion, is very brief and should be expanded upon and made more substantive in future editions of this work.

When all is said and done, Robin Hilborn has done an excellent job of writing a *good* local history, an example that could be used as a model for other aspiring local history authors. In the future, I look forward to him producing an additional volume, which will chronicle Southampton's history from 1850 to the present.

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## *Kensington Market*

### *Collective Memory, Public History, and Toronto's Urban Landscape*

by Na Li

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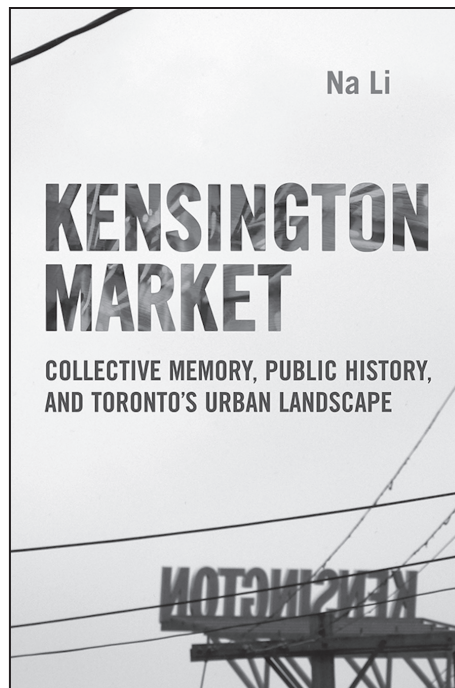
For over a century, Toronto's Kensington Market has served as a receiving area for successive waves of immigrants to the city. Unapologetically scruffy and eclectic, the market holds special value for Torontonians as an early site of inclusiveness and diversity. It is remarkable both for the changeability of its storefronts, and its persistence as a distinct and clearly-bounded commercial district within the city.

These themes of continuity and change

receive detailed exploration in Na Li's *Kensington Market: Collective Memory, Public History, and Toronto's Urban Landscape*. Li applies her training in urban preservation planning to examine the resilience of the market neighbourhood through decades of internal change and external development pressures. Drawing upon a wide body of research, including interviews conducted over three years with market business operators and residents, Li ex-

plores intersections between immigrant settlement patterns, changing cultural diversity, and the architectural history of the market. More methodological case study than detailed urban history, *Kensington Market* calls for a more community-engaged approach to planning in an effort to create more socially inclusive interpretations of places and their pasts.

Concisely framed over five chapters, the book links the success and continuity of the market to its history as an “unplanned” neighbourhood, one in which a strong sense of community solidarity and activism have kept both unwelcome development pressures and intrusive planning initiatives at bay. Chapter 1 outlines what Li describes as a “culturally-sensitive narrative approach” (CSNA) to urban landscape planning, differentiated from more conventional planning practices by its cultivation of a “shared authority over urban space” (7). Public historians will recognize the influence of American urbanist and architect Dolores Hayden in Li’s approach, with its emphasis upon the use of oral histories and photographic records in order to “elicit insiders’... collective memory of place” (7). Chapter 2 charts the historical evolution of the market as a staging area for immigrants from the early twentieth-century to the urban renewal initiatives



of the 1960s. Here Li argues convincingly that failed attempts at urban renewal were in the end a success for the market, allowing it to evolve “on its own terms” (85).

Chapters 3 and 4 explore the collective memory of the market with reference to four sites: the Kiev Synagogue, the United Bakers Dairy Restaurant, Hyman’s Bookstore, and the market as a whole. For each Li gives an overview of the construction and architecture of each site

and the changes it experienced over time, punctuating her text with reflections from market business operators and residents. Chapter 5 returns to CSNA approaches as a means of destabilizing the power imbalance present both in planning practices and historical scholarship. Here Li aims to bring what James C. Scott would call a sense of “métis” to the planner’s perspective of the market: to take the planner’s map—in Li’s words, a document “stripped of human stories” (80) and bring to it the depth of human experience over time.<sup>1</sup> Individual narratives that capture “how people [feel] about places” (81) become, through this method, the raw material for preservation planning maps. This values-based approach to planning, Li argues, jettisons the bird’s eye view planning map in favour of documents that embrace the scale of the urban streetscape.

The book is strongest in its central

chapters, where Li weaves together excerpts from her interviews with market business owners and residents to illuminate the deeply felt connections to place and community that the market continues to inspire. Black and white photographs throughout illustrate the vignettes that Li constructs in these chapters; too many of these photographs, however, are dark and difficult to decipher.

Elsewhere in the book, the frequency of references to related scholarship has the effect of constraining the author's voice, making the book read in places more like a thesis than a stand-alone work. With regard to sources, Li clearly prioritizes expressions of vernacular history such as oral recollections and personal photographs over official records. Early in the book, for example, she dismisses "planning minutes, city directories, census data, and historic records" as "bland, dimensionless, and utterly boring" (10). A more detailed analysis of the intersections between the two kinds of records may have produced a more nuanced understanding of change in the market over time.

Other problems are more structural in nature. The author does not describe her methodology, for example, until the final chapter of the book, leaving the reader to puzzle over the scope and nature of her study until then. I wondered, too, about the usefulness of the CSNA acronym: the approach Li describes shares much in common with the participatory, community-based mapping initiatives popularized by geographers and anthropologists in the 1990s.

*Kensington Market* will doubtless serve as a source of inspiration for planners seeking more socially-inclusive approaches to

their work, and for students seeking case studies of unconventional urban development. While Li doesn't fully implement the CSNA method she proposes in this book, her contribution clearly lies in the possibilities she identifies for a more nuanced and narrative-based approach to urban preservation planning. Her identification of public history as a mechanism for community-based planning is an especially important contribution, providing as it does a useful bridge between professions that have much to offer each other.

Historians will be drawn to the discussion of urban reform initiatives in the 1960s and Kensington's successful resistance to these efforts (18-20), and the detail Li provides on the market's evolving streetscape. Much of the narrative about the market's history, however, has been told elsewhere, in works such as Jean Cochrane's *Kensington*.<sup>b2</sup> While urban and public historians will find in the central chapters some interesting commentary on the relationship between place, private and collective memory, the book's primary focus on method rather than historical content limits its contribution to historical scholarship.

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<sup>1</sup>Scott, James C. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999.

<sup>2</sup>Cochrane, Jean. *Kensington*. With photographs by Vincenzo Pietropaolo. Erin, Ontario: Boston Mills Press, 2000. The early history of the market is detailed in Stephen A. Speisman's *The Jews of Toronto: A History to 1937*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1979.