

## Editors' Introduction: *Ontario History*

George Warecki et Thorold J. Tronrud

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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# Editors' Introduction: *Ontario History* Special Issue on Environmental History

This is the first—and hopefully not the only—time in the journal's history that an entire issue has been devoted to environmental history. We hope that the authors' diverse works will draw wide readership, and inspire subsequent scholarship. The field has grown tremendously since the early twenty-first century. It encompasses a wide range of topics, geographic regions, source material, methods, and scholarly approaches.<sup>1</sup> So large is this tent now that some authors may not even realize that their work fits under its canopy. Indeed, readers might be surprised that *Ontario History* has printed a modest number of articles in environmental history, scattered across the past decade or so.

In Spring 2010, the journal printed a piece of advocacy and planning history in northwestern Ontario by George Warecki, "Balancing Wilderness Protection and Economic Development." Three years later, the Spring 2013 edition featured Ryan O'Connor's revisionist work, "An Ecological Call to Activism in Ontario," situating Pollution Probe at the vanguard of environmentalism.

Tyler Wenzell's article in Spring 2014, "The Court and the Cataracts," revisited the establishment of Queen Victoria Niagara Falls Park, focusing on the expropriation process and the Ontario Court of Appeal.

Agricultural history occupies an important place within the broad spectrum of environmental work. One example is Christopher Martinello's article, "The 'Statistically Average' Early Haliburton Farm," a case study of the Kennaway Settlement, which appeared in Autumn 2015.

The following Spring, Warecki's "The Making of a Conservationist" tied biography and place theory to trace the intellectual growth of a farmer's son in southwestern Ontario to a university scientist active in nature protection.

Historical geography has long been recognized as a formative influence on environmental history. The two scholarly traditions continue to shape one another, and remain close cousins. One notable example of historical geography, published in Autumn 2016, is Thomas F. McIlwraith's "At Work in Meadowvale

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<sup>1</sup>For an introduction and a sense of breadth, see Laurel Sefton MacDowell, *An Environmental History of Canada* (UBC Press, 2012); Special Issue of *Canadian Historical Review*, "The Landscape of Canadian Environmental History," 95:4 (December 2014), 545-627; the webpages of the Network in Canadian History and Environment (NiCHE - <https://niche-canada.org/>); the American Society for Environmental History website (<https://aseh.org/>) and the society's international journal, *Environmental History*.

Village.” It documented how a “gem of traditional Ontario has withstood suburbanization.”

Another sub-field enjoying surging growth examines interactions between humans and animals, in both urban and non-urban settings.<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Ritchie’s “Cows, Sheep & Scots,” in Spring 2017, fits within this vein, analysing the crucial contributions of animals to “the success of backwoods farmers” in the developing colonial economy. In that same edition of the journal, Warecki explored the challenges of building “Environmental Coalitions” for wilderness protection during the 1970s, highlighting science as an ambivalent force. A third environmental contribution in 2017 appeared in the Autumn edition. “Sharing the Land at Moose Factory in 1763,” by John S. Long, Richard J. Preston, Katrina Srigley and Lorraine Sutherland, examined Indigenous peoples’ “modest sharing of land and a generous sharing of food and fur resources” with European newcomers “on terms congenial to its first inhabitants.”

Many historians would argue that scholarship exploring the transfer of land is part of the environmental field (we do—see below). The Spring 2019 edition contained two such important pieces: Gwen Reimer on “British-Canada’s Land Purchases” in the 1780s, and

“Chief of this River: Zhaawni-binesi and the Chenail Ecarté Lands,” by Rick Fehr, Janet Macbeth, and Summer Sands Macbeth. Reimer interpreted “the earliest land purchases in Ontario as phases in a single strategic plan by the British Crown to secure settlement lands and safe communication routes in the aftermath of the American War of Independence.” The second article focused on “an Anishinaabeg community and a regional chief in early nineteenth century Upper Canada,” documenting the “relocation of the community in the face of mounting settler encroachment.”

Finally, in Autumn 2019, David Bain provided another case study in his work on urban greenspace, “Recreation on Toronto Island, the Peoples’ Resort, 1793-1910.” Bain argued that “the island was a mix of the planned and unplanned, and, despite various government interventions, remained a unique blend.”

Current “debates about insecticides and their risks to honey bee health have a surprisingly long history,” writes Jennifer Bonnell. Her article, “Insecticides, Honey Bee Losses, and Beekeeper Advocacy in Nineteenth-Century Ontario,” argues that beekeepers were early environmentalists. They, and “supportive entomologists,” shaped attitudes, practices, and public policies for insecticide use. Bon-

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<sup>2</sup> North American works on fish and wildlife conservation—and resistance to state schemes—continue to emerge on a regular basis. For an entry to this enormous literature, see Tina Loo, *States of Nature: Conserving Canada’s Wildlife in the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), and David Calverley, *Who Controls the Hunt? First Nations, Treaty Rights, and Wildlife Conservation in Ontario, 1783-1939* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018). A new generation of scholarship is well-represented in Christabelle Sethna, Darcy Ingram, and Joanna Dean, (eds.), *Animal Metropolis: Histories of Human-Animal Relations in Urban Canada* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2017)

nell's work joins other recent studies that have uncovered evidence of environmental activity long before the post-WWII period.

Scott Miller's article, "'Who Killed Happy Valley?': Air Pollution and the Birth of an Ontario Ghost Town, 1969-1974," discusses "the first instance in which the provincial government financed the relocation of an entire community because of air pollution." After decades of suffering from airborne matter emanating from Falconbridge Nickel Mines Limited, residents of Happy Valley received compensation to move from Premier William Davis's Progressive-Conservative government. Miller cites a range of factors to argue that the government's "resolution was justified given the circumstances." His case study raises "questions about the nature of modern environmental politics, government-business relations, the role of journalists and the media, and corporate social responsibility."

David M. Finch's article, "Diminished Returns: The Registered Trapline System in Northern Ontario," also draws attention to the historical roots of present-day power issues affecting land and resources. Adapted from a 2013 master's thesis at Lakehead University, the essay explains how hunting territories "came to be regulated by governments" as traplines. This "history speaks to colonial dispossession and changing values regarding the land, wildlife, and Indigenous peoples." Finch argues that "since the 1940s a pattern of fluctuating agency" has emerged, "with shifting degrees of natural resource

management that recently has seen some (but perhaps not universal) benefits for Indigenous trapping."

Twenty years ago, Dean Jacobs guest-edited the Spring 2000 volume, "Continuity and the Unbroken Chain: Issues in the Aboriginal History of Ontario." His introduction offered definitions of key terms including treaty, treaty-making process, Aboriginal title, and rights and extinguishment. These concepts figure prominently in the article below by Jacobs and co-author Victor Lytwyn, "*Naagan ge bezhig emkwaan: A Dish With One Spoon Reconsidered.*" They argue that "The Dish with One Spoon Treaty has been incorporated into 'land recognition statements' that blur the territorial rights of individual First Nations," and that "This transformation of an important Treaty is damaging to First Nations who seek to protect their territories and resources." The geographic focus is Walpole Island, but the authors effectively broaden the context to much of southern Ontario. Readers will learn about the original context and meaning of the Treaty and its continued significance today.

Robert Armstrong's "The Smell of Air Pollution: Olfactory Senses and the Odour of Canadian Oil, 1858-1885," extends recent scholarship on the bodily senses. It highlights differing cultural contexts to explain varying responses to the "pungent odour" of oil from Enniskillen in southwestern Ontario. British communities were repelled by its smell, and sought to ban oil imports from Canada; municipal officials in Ontario cit-

ies tended to ignore citizens' complaints about the odour; and yet the locals in the Enniskillen region "seemed unbothered by the oil," despite its pervasive smell.

Finally, Mark Kuhlberg's article, "'A Forestry Program That Cannot Be Equalled in Canada': Kimberley-Clark's Extraordinary Silvicultural Project in Northern Ontario, 1928-1976," revises previous work that claimed business and government forestalled conservation measures, in the name of profit. Focusing on the progressive policies of Kimberley Clark in northern Ontario, and its subsidiary, Spruce Falls Power and Paper Company, Kuhlberg documents how the parent company began and funded "a comprehensive suite of silvicultural activities," in sharp contrast to the provincial government's wilful neglect of forest

regeneration. The author also suggests "the preconditions that could play a crucial role in tackling environmental issues" today.

Knowing how Ontarians in the past addressed such issues as resource management, wildlife protection, biological contamination, forest conservation, and pollution in Ontario will, we hope, lead to a better understanding of the relationships between humans and other components of the natural environment.

George Warecki  
Associate Professor of History  
Brescia University College

Thorold J. Tronrud  
Adjunct Professor  
Lakehead University

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