

Thesis Abstract

Frances N. MELLE. "The Development of the Toronto Waterfront During the Railway Expansion Era: 1850-1912". Ph.D. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1976

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Frances N. MELLEN. "The Development of the Toronto Waterfront During the Railway Expansion Era: 1850-1912". Ph.D. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1976.

Toronto's waterfront during the nineteenth century was an area noteworthy for its contradictions. It was gateway to a growing city but backyard for its storage; a centre for trade and transport but a barrier for land and water traffic. It was also the location for the city water works and the outlet for its sewage, an area with many large parks, but one with concentrations of air polluting industries. These contradictions arose from the assets of site and situation which made the waterfront attractive for multiple usage, while the many agencies which acquired control precluded the possibility of coordinated development.

The major agents of change were the railway companies. Between the Don River on the east and Old Fort York on the west, six companies tied their lines to the waterfront within twenty years and threatened to turn the area into a giant railway terminal. Promoting the entry of the railways were many private entrepreneurs who were in favour of public ownership of the waterfront as a means of controlling access and preserving space for a variety of activities. To protect these interests, the City Council took on the role of landowner and developer on a scale unprecedented for any Canadian city in the 1850's. From the outset of its involvement, it was unclear whether Council would even obtain control over the waterfront in contest with the railway companies. Another, more difficult question, concerned the overlap of public and private interests and whether City Council had the ability to act for anything more than the wishes of the most powerful private interests.

In order to understand the patterns of control and development which emerged on the waterfront under the impact of the railways, this

study examines the processes of land exchange and land use. The relations of the railway companies and the municipal government who became the ultimate owners of the waterfront are examined in detail, while private entrepreneurs are included for study insofar as they were associated with the railways and the City. There is much evidence to suggest that the actions of private businessmen in the formation of political policy, development decisions and land use went far beyond the limits of this inquiry, and their role deserves examination in future work.

Secondary themes of this study concern the impact of the railways on the development of waterfront activity, and the consequences of divided control for the integration of waterfront functions. The area in which this development occurred is roughly delineated between Front Street and the Harbour, and from Bathurst Street on the west to the Don River in the east. In this area, the major transshipment functions of the commercial port area were concentrated. However, these boundaries are not absolute since port transfer facilities were extended beyond the Don River after the landfill of Ashbridge's Bay, and functions on the waterfront included an admixture of types, some of which were not related to transshipment and distribution.

The proposed entry of the railways and their dealings with the City brought about the southward extension of the waterfront, and successive shorelines were built beginning in 1853, 1893 and 1912. As each stage of landfill progressed, some of the property was taken by or turned over to the railways. Their new lines and terminals attracted wholesale and manufacturing activities, and stimulated growth by providing access to new markets.

However, the proliferation of railway facilities and the growth of waterfront activity also created problems of spatial allocation and blocked accessibility. The location and development of some firms were hindered by public and railway policies, while functional linkages within the area were broken by the large numbers of railway tracks. It became apparent before the turn of the century that a waterfront under the divided control of public and private agencies had

produced the spatial and functional consequences of destroying the access which had been the basis for the area's development.

To understand whether this unfortunate course of events could have been avoided, this study examines the waterfront development between 1850 and 1913, when the major patterns were set for land exchange and land use to accommodate the railways. Chapters II and IV cover the years in which the railway companies established links with Toronto and reveal the pressures that they applied in the bargaining processes to control the first two extensions of the waterfront. Chapters III and V deal with the evolution of the waterfront environment, the land use changes in the port area, and the conflicts that emerged due to the divided control of public and private agencies. Chapter VI presents a summary of the third extension of the waterfront, with the crises and the changes in control that precipitated the additional landfill. In this chapter, and in the review of modern development plans, a repetition of confused control patterns, delayed development and land use conflict becomes apparent. To complement the written study, changes in the waterfront environment are presented in 104 maps and photographs, which give a more complete visual impression of what was gained and lost on Toronto's waterfront during the railway expansion era.