

Cuming, David J. *Discovering Heritage Bridges on Ontario's Roads*. Erin: The Boston Mills Press, 1983. Pp. 95. Illustrations. \$9.95

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description will not suffice for the subsequent decades when the original romantic assumptions underlying the North American pleasure ground movement came under assault from new park philosophies. The ideas of the City Beautiful movement, the playground advocates and the so-called "reform park" enthusiasts successfully competed with, and to a large extent displaced, romantic park concepts. So did the working class demands for activity-oriented neighbourhood recreational space. There is precious little in Wright's book as to how or why all these competing impulses reshaped the urban park landscape.

Punctilious readers may be prompted to hurl these books in fury across a room upon encountering the appalling number of errors of spelling, grammar, consistency (especially in the footnoting apparatus), and accuracy of fact. To describe the writing style in these books as pedestrian would be generous. Those responsible for the editing of these histories have badly failed the author, and in doing so, have sunk their profession to a new low. One is also left with a host of questions of an editorial nature. Why do these volumes lack indexes? Why are the illustrations so weakly annotated? Why were some of the illustrations included at all? Why was the author permitted to include in the second volume, material that logically belongs in the other volumes? Why are the margins so enormous as to leave over half of each page blank? Such extravagance is a waste of the taxpayer's money. Finally, why was this study allowed to appear as a trilogy when one book would have sufficed? Volume one is only 109 pages in length with a mere 40 pages of narrative. This material could have been readily reduced to one introductory chapter in a single manuscript. A fifth of the first volume is devoted to definitions of park terms. Is there really a need for a twenty page appendix compiled from nine selected dictionaries published from 1785 to 1978, to document the evolving meaning of words like "garden" and "picnic"?

Wright's approach to his subject is very traditional. He focuses on the ideas and basic cultural assumptions of landscape architecture and, where possible, on the role of influential landscape designers like Olmsted and Todd. Similarly, emphasis is placed on the upper and middle class origins of parks. Regrettably, Wright has not incorporated a third and broader social model increasingly evident in British and American park historiography, an approach which takes into account popular and working class attitudes to parks and recreation. One would have to conclude from Wright's study that wage-earners had no role in the social competition for recreational space prior to 1914 — an untenable proposition.¹

By the middle of volume one, this reviewer reached an unpleasant conclusion. Professor Wright has not mastered the craft of history. This is most evident in his lack of familiarity with the current state of the literature in Ontario and Canadian historical studies. There are no references to the

principal and relevant scholarly publications on the Canadian urban reform movement, the City Beautiful Movement, maternal feminism, Ontario political and natural resource history, and working class culture. It is difficult to believe that a study of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century urban park movement could be published without the context provided by these works. As an academic, Wright should not need reminding that before he attempts to contribute to historical knowledge, he must first master the existing literature in the field.

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Notes

1. For a splendid discussion of urban park historiography see Robert A.J. McDonald, "'Holy Retreat' or 'Practical Breathing Spot': Class Perceptions of Vancouver's Stanley Park, 1910-1913," *Canadian Historical Review*, LXV (June 1984): 127-53. McDonald's article is arguably the best single publication in Canadian urban park history and an outstanding example of the most recent social approach to the subject.

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A conservation officer with the Heritage Branch, Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, David Cuming is a professional town planner. He directs this book towards a very broad audience, and clearly its title is intended to engage the layperson. At the same time, Cuming's informed and systematic approach to his subject deserves the attention of urban scholars and especially heritage preservationists. Unfortunately, there is no index.

In the introduction Cuming presents his methodology. He sets out to establish the significance of heritage bridges in Ontario by considering their form, history and cultural importance, as well as the necessity to protect them. Cuming's study is clearly presented within the context of preserving the built environment. More specifically, he offers a thoughtful approach to understanding and managing an important and often problematic class of heritage structures. Unlike buildings, bridges are normally single-purpose structures. When a bridge becomes obsolete or redundant from a utilitarian standpoint, it is quite likely to be abandoned, dismantled or destroyed. Cuming's book should be required reading for preservationists who often face thorny problems about protecting such structures. It is also a very important source book for historians having to interpret the meaning and significance of early bridges.

The book is divided into four parts. Part One discusses the design and construction of bridges, including form, materials and the building process. If these topics do not seem particularly exciting they are still of utmost importance in helping understand the vocabulary of bridges. Similarly, Part Two "A Brief History of Road Bridge Building in Ontario" is straightforward and factual. Here, the author delineates three phases in the history of Ontario's bridges. The first phase lasts from 1780 to 1880, and includes some of the earliest public works in Upper Canada. This hundred-year period is characterized largely by simple devices but, coinciding, as it did, with the Industrial Revolution in Europe, it saw the introduction of wrought-iron structures. The second phase, from 1880 until 1914, witnessed the development of steel and concrete bridges in Ontario. It was also a period in which mass manufacturing techniques made possible standardized materials, parts, and even entire prefabricated structures. The third phase from 1914 to the present, includes many feats of modern engineering, not only in concrete and steel as one might expect, but in wood as well. Cuming describes the Sioux Narrows bridge of 1935, evidently the world's largest single-span wooden bridge at 210 feet in length. The author presents a fascinating juxtaposition of this quintessentially Canadian solution to bridge building and the influence of the German Autobahn on Ontario road and bridge building in the Thirties.

Part Three of *Discovering Heritage Bridges* describes the subtlest yet, to my mind, the most intriguing aspect of heritage bridges: appreciating them. Here, the author talks about "reading" a bridge, and understanding the symbolism of bridges. In the literal sense one can read bridges by looking for makers' plates and incised inscriptions, thus discovering much about them. The author presents some excellent examples. He does not, however, explore in depth the importance of bridges as civic monuments. One could elaborate greatly on another type of "reading," looking upon such structures as the Henley Bridge near St. Catharines or the masterpiece at Hamilton (both of which are introduced by the author) as metaphors of civic authority. As a result of the municipal reform movement and the advent of the City Beautiful planning movement in the first decades of the twentieth century in North America, engineers and planners gave significant institutional prominence to public works. Far beyond their utilitarian value, such works became associated with "civic art," and many examples, especially bridges, may be found throughout Canada: those in Vancouver, Calgary and Saskatoon are particularly fine.

Part Four, entitled "Caring for our Heritage" is of vital importance to preservationists everywhere. The author faces the problems of redundancy and obsolescence in a direct way, and provides a sound methodology for reaching solutions. Nor is the entire problem of bridge preservation abstruse. As I write this review, an unusual but disturbing advertisement in the "Historic Properties" section of the U.S.

Preservation News leers at me: "Greenwich, N.Y. Hegeman-Hill Bridge. Historic 162' Baltimore truss, iron and steel members. Built 1901. Architectural ornamentation well preserved. Free to preservationists. . . ." Cuming's book indeed provides a timely response.

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Lindsay, John C. *"Turn Out the Stars Before Leaving": The Story of Canada's Theatres*. Erin, Ontario: Boston Mills Press, 1983. Pp., 176. 97 black and white plates; 22 colour plates. \$35.00.

There is no romance in standing outside your local movie theatre waiting for the second show to be admitted. John C. Lindsay's *"Turn Out the Stars Before Leaving": The Story of Canada's Theatres* is written with an enthusiasm for the subject that recalls the romance of a bygone era, a time when a patron could retire to a theatre's writing room, or a plushly upholstered couch in the lounge.

Lindsay has taken on the monumental task of recording the development of Canadian Theatres. He takes us from their makeshift beginnings in rented storefront property through the grand palaces of the early 1900s to the construction of the functional multiplexes of the 1970s and 1980s.

As a history of Canadian theatres, it is made fresh with lavish illustrations, reminiscences of theatre personnel, assorted theatre trivia and an informative and lucid account of show business at the time. Indeed, the subject lends itself to the glossy treatment and fanfare associated with the entertainment business. Ironically, this is where the history periodically falls short. Save for a couple of post-card street scenes, Lindsay tends to concentrate on the awe inspiring details of theatre construction or the humorous backstage mishaps. Seldom are the theatres placed in a larger urban or social context. The buildings, by and large, stand apart from their environment. The development of theatres designed for mass entertainment cannot be separated from the social concerns of the period in which they were built.

In the early 1900s moving pictures were accorded little prestige by an educated public. Movies were not given a prominent place on the programs of existing theatres; and more often than not were shown at the end of vaudeville acts, as "chasers." Movies were, for the most part, shown by entrepreneurs in transient storefront nickelodeons.

Lindsay points out that by 1920 vaudeville's popularity began to wane. Audiences were becoming more attracted to the movies. "The theatre owner felt that his building must