

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Kloppenborg, Anne; Niwinski, Alice; Johnson, Eve with Robert Gruetter. *Vancouver's First Century A City Album, 1860-1985*. Introduction by David Brock. Vancouver/ Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1985. \$24.95.

Donegan, Rosemary. *Spadina Avenue*. Introduction by Rick Salutin. Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1985. \$29.95

Lilly Koltun

Volume 15, numéro 1, juin 1986

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1018913ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018913ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Koltun, L. (1986). Compte rendu de [Kloppenborg, Anne; Niwinski, Alice; Johnson, Eve with Robert Gruetter. *Vancouver's First Century A City Album, 1860-1985*. Introduction by David Brock. Vancouver/ Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1985. \$24.95. / Donegan, Rosemary. *Spadina Avenue*. Introduction by Rick Salutin. Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1985. \$29.95]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 15(1), 111–113. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1018913ar>

All Rights Reserved © Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine, 1986

Cet document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter en ligne.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

érudit

Cet article est diffusé et préservé par Érudit.

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche.

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

We all make our own choices, and no one is completely happy with those of others. But this collection could be so much better and I wanted it to be. It had so much going for it; the grants for its completion were decided by people who obviously felt the need for a book to help celebrate Vancouver's centennial, to remind others that Vancouver has its own individuality as a city. The senior editor of UBC Press, Jane Fredeman, is the best there is but rarely do I see her fine hand here. And I would like to have seen some additional bibliographical information where readers could go not only for more fiction but also for some biographical/critical information, for example a reference to Betty Keller's invaluable book on Pauline Johnson, *Pauline*.

For me the most impressive things about Vancouver are the mountains and the sea, and the sense that people can get lost in a wilderness only minutes away from, and within sight of, the city. A great city Vancouver is, a beautiful city, and its urban sprawl is on the edge of the darkness initiated and contained by the ocean and the mountains. Both are mysterious and selfish, wanting no one to venture too close. Living in Vancouver produces an awareness of edges, edges where people walk precariously, enjoying that precipitousness. That is the city, and I am afraid that *Vancouver Short Stories* gives none of that away. The book is edited without flavour. I won't say anything about the cover.

Donald Stephens
Department of English
University of British Columbia

Kloppenborg, Anne; Niwinski, Alice; Johnson, Eve with Robert Gruetter. *Vancouver's First Century A City Album, 1860-1985*. Introduction by David Brock. Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1985. \$24.95.

Donegan, Rosemary. *Spadina Avenue*. Introduction by Rick Salutin. Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1985. \$29.95.

To the browsing reader these two books published by Douglas & McIntyre, seem a lot alike: both use historical photographs to rummage around the nostalgia attic. But only one, *Vancouver's First Century*, sinks into the soft quilt of historical dilettantism. The other, *Spadina Avenue*, shows real signs of cracking the entertainment barrier which restricts most popular historical photo books to the mere exploitation of amusing detail.

It is becoming a common occurrence to see books similar to these crowding the gift book shelves of stores. Most have been patched together by researchers who have visited the impressive and growing collections of Canadian archival

photography and have made personal selections of dramatic and disparate "squealers": photos which provoke delighted squeals at the outmoded bathing suits, the quirky automobiles or the endearing three-legged race that nobody finds fun anymore. *Vancouver's First Century* is in this mode. The introduction by David Brock, rendering his gift-wrapped memories as a lifetime Vancouver lover, just misses the cloying. The spiritual antecedents of this volume, which roams through Vancouver chronologically from 1860 to 1985 without returning to the same spot often enough to assess any changes critically, are the "booster books" which cities published early this century to display their attractions and to encourage commercial and population growth. The brief quotations reproduced from contemporary written sources, such as newspapers, which do refer to unpleasantnesses like the history of racism and Depression poverty in the city, as well as the photographs which illustrate these events, provide only rhythm and the interest of variety. They do not alter the underlying mood of proud nostalgia. The book knows its audience — the lucky people of Vancouver's locality — and it indulges them.

In doing so, the historical integrity of the photographs, ostensibly the rationale and backbone for the book, is compromised. Each photograph is considered of value only for its minutiae; while the context for its creation, its all-important provenance, the selection of framing and timing which first determined the minutiae, is ignored. No indication is given of why these photos, spanning so much time and so many places, were ever taken; nor for whom; nor to whom they were originally addressed; nor how they were used and valued nor why they have survived. What were the intentions of the photographers and clients who opened these windows on their present? If this was their present, what impertinence to think that we, outside their time and culture, can ignore the origins of their photographs by pursuing vicarious and usually picturesque imaginings of the way things seemed to have been.

The book designer apparently felt he knew better than the original creators and participants what the photos should have looked like: many are blown-up, cropped and bled to the edges of the pages. The advertisements, reproduced to give a more period air to the whole, are equally unfortunate in lacking captions and dates. Consequently, better reproduction which does not slur their words, sometimes to illegibility, would have been of material aid. In addition, the quality of the reproductions of the historical photographs — in prestigious duotone — is lacking in highlight detail while at the same time choking the darkest areas. Possibly, in reprinting this book from its first 1977 edition, new plates were made which were underexposed and the balance between the two plates for the duotones was altered. In trying to regain the intensity of the fine original printing, the reproductions were over-linked. The resulting reproduction quality, although harsher, will probably not be criticized by the general readership for which this book is intended.

Smaller errors mar the volume which might easily have been corrected in the reprint. A quick check of the acknowledgements for example, reveals at least eight photographs whose source credits have been omitted, as well as four or five mis-credited items. The photograph on page 37 (top) for example, is credited both to the Provincial Archives of British Columbia and the City of Vancouver Archives, mis-named the Vancouver City Archives. Wherever a Notman studio or William McFarlane Notman (fils) photograph appears in the book, it is given to William Notman (père), who never visited British Columbia in his life.

Initially, *Spadina Avenue* seems a pendant piece to *Vancouver's First Century*; it too has a quixotic personal introduction followed by a text drawing heavily on quotations from contemporary sources and pages packed with historical photographs and advertisements. The introduction here, by Rick Salutin, is also a stroll down memory lane, with a little more allowance for the possibility of unhappy memory, to deal with the fact that inhabitants of Spadina Avenue tended to move out as soon as they could.

But there, the similarities end. It is arranged not chronologically but spatially, as though the reader were taking a walk up Spadina Avenue. Along the bottom of each page runs a strip of photographs, taken by Peter MacCallum, showing the addresses as they appear now. On the body of the pages are views of some of these addresses over the years. Captions detail the construction history of selected buildings or try to name every person photographed, and, almost not to be hoped for, each caption includes both the photographer when known and the source of the photograph, together with the repository's code number or location for the original.

What is so important about these differences? They represent an awareness of the crucial need for historical context. They reach beyond the minutiae of the image content to direct attention at finding an explanation for what the images display. At the back of the book (surely it should have been at the front?) are a few paragraphs drawing attention to the questions which the study of photographs as historical documents raises: who created them, when and why? Who kept them and used them? Unfortunately, few answers are even postulated and the statement that public institutions (such as archives?) collect mainly "as a record of public works . . . and advertising" would be incorrect for many of them. But the relevant questions have at least been asked. And the key importance of referring to the original, wherever it might be held, has received a nod which even few historians would recognize as inseparable from a true understanding of the content of a photograph. Many originals, for example, are parts of series which can authenticate or throw light on specific photographs through the history of their provenance. Their historical techniques and inscriptions, invisible in reproduction, add a further context for study purposes. Attention and access to such context is proffered

by this book simply in giving these location codes with the captions, possibly initially at the repository's request.

Beyond that, the book's design allows the leap from viewing the images for the sake of detail to viewing them in specific comparable groups over a long period of time, including the present. Such visual comparison supplements the context provided by the quotations from oral histories and written documents and represents the putative stage of true historical analysis of photographs. Details of photographs examined individually suddenly reveal new importance when contrasted with earlier or later images; indeed, some details such as the use of sets, lighting, posing or a deliberate emphasis or viewpoint might be invisible until revealed by their alteration or absence in other images. Experience in looking at and comparing photo techniques quickly spots the manipulation that marks the newspaper photographs of demonstrations on pages 18 and 19. And the closer a comparison can be made in location, the more significant can a difference in date become. It is this fascinating truth that *Spadina Avenue* exploits in matching several specific addresses over time.

There is a further subtlety which such comparison can reveal; that is, the way in which simple juxtaposition can colour our own judgments about the content of images and the intentions of the image-makers. Two examples can show this: pages 93 and 94 reproduce three views of Labour Day parades, two from 1950s and one from 1977. Lorne Fromer, the photographer of the modern view, stresses the regimentation, (and perhaps inhumanity?) of parades by angling his composition on an uneasy diagonal, deliberately decapitating most of the majorettes in favour of a view of their legs. Can we now look at the two 1950s views by the Toronto Telegram and see the self-satisfaction or pride of the participants, instead of the regimentation, particularly when combined with the text of the volume as a whole which reviews the violent and unhappy history of labour relations played out on Spadina Avenue? Whose comment are we "reading" in this visual comparison? The photographers'? The author's? Or is this objective History? Again, on pages 110 and 111, the fleshy Victory Burlesque stripper "Angel Eyes" appears opposite the page showing Shopsy's famous delicatessen with a description of Corned Beef Madeleine. Deliberate? If chance, these two still make a revealing cultural comparison. Photo books are full of such potential for visual comment; few authors know how to take advantage of it.

Having stressed the laudable qualities of *Spadina Avenue*, it remains to say that it still suffers from some lack of discipline. Despite our allowance for remembered injustice in the immigrant experience, there is a jarring note in Rick Salutin's implication in his introduction that all Britons in Toronto were members of a non-ethnic, ruling-class, homogeneous mass. He appears unaware of example, that the Scots, Welsh and Irish often came to Canada speaking their

own distinctly non-English languages, nor could they, as new arrivals or later, necessarily be considered the blessed of Victorian children.

Regarding the book's production, there are far too many images shoe-horned onto the pages for all of them to make effective impact. They are reproduced in mediocre halftone, (the photo of Knox College on page 182 is unforgiveably marred by the graffiti of a production note), and are sometimes made more confusing than revealing by the bottom strip of modern street photos. This is because the same strip of addresses has been reproduced on several pages, presumably to maintain continuity. Actually the repetition tends to be distracting and the idea is further confused by running the addresses at times left to right, at other times right to left.

As comparison with the present addresses is so stressed, the author lays on herself the onerous burden of absolute accuracy in identification. Consequently the reader is disconcerted to find numbers 332 to 338 are all shifted over one, particularly since two of those addresses are featured with larger photos. In addition, the famous Crest Grill is given the address of the equally famous Waverly Hotel and Silver Dollar lounge, while the Pickford Theatre (its address was actually 380 Queen St. West) is inattentively moved several blocks uptown, from the corner of Queen and Spadina to 382 Spadina.

However these and a few other minor imperfections (Ontario Archives for Archives of Ontario, M. Micklethwaite for the photographer Frank Micklethwaite) cannot deny the basically sound and inventive research and presentation on which this book is to be congratulated. Originally created as a photo exhibition shown at A Space Gallery on Spadina Avenue in 1984, for which many people's effort was responsible, it well deserves this more permanent record of the searching, thinking, analysis and new photography that brought the idea into existence.

Lilly Koltun
Chief, Acquisition and Research
National Photography Collection
Ottawa

Boyer, Barbaranne. *The Boardwalk Album: Memories of The Beach*. Erin, Ontario: The Boston Mills Press, 1985. Pp. 72. Photographs. \$9.95.

The Boardwalk Album, as its sub-title indicates, is chiefly memorabilia, dealing with the heyday of a "recreational suburb" of Toronto.

It is worth noting because of the thin literature on the subject, and to express the earnest desire that the authors

and publishers of such material would take the small amount of effort necessary to document their sources. In doing so, such local histories could become important historical building blocks. Work done to build up the material presented here, for example, would not be lost, and at some future date have to be researched once again. The acknowledgments given at the beginning of the book are helpful, but not adequate.

Perhaps a minimum of scholarly apparatus should be required by the granting agencies that subsidize such publications. In this instance financial assistance is acknowledged from The Canada Council, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Office of the Secretary of State. All of them should be insisting on some sort of long-term gain, and not assist what, unnecessarily, is pure ephemera.

The author, in this case, was clearly committed to the subject, and had privileged access to local, usually oral sources. By not documenting them properly, there is no way to tell what in the text is representative and what is fantasy. Those who follow cannot simply take her word on it. The book is well produced. But clearly an opportunity has been lost. Again.

John H. Taylor
Department of History
Carleton University

Armstrong, Frederick H. *Handbook of Upper Canadian Chronology: Revised Edition*. Toronto: Dundurn Press Ltd., 1985. Pp. 278. \$29.95.

The first edition of this book was prepared in 1967 "... because of the difficulties that inevitably seem to arise in finding answers to even the simplest of questions. ..." It was immediately useful then, and in revised form should be even more so.

The tables in the original publication, including those on "Local and Municipal Government, 1788-1849," have "been checked for corrections and amplifications" and where necessary have been reorganized.

Parts VI and VII — "Special Government Departments and Commissions" and "Supplementary Information" — contain largely new information or complete revisions of tables. In these sections can be found information on the customs department, the emigrant office, the post office, special commissions, surveyors, corporate legislation, corporate officers, ecclesiastical information, and population statistics.