

Bell, John, ed. *Halifax: A Literary Portrait*. Lawrencetown Beach, Nova Scotia: Pottersfield Press, 1990. Pp. viii, 228. \$14.95 (paper)

Sandra Campbell

Volume 20, numéro 1, juin 1991

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1017567ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1017567ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Campbell, S. (1991). Compte rendu de [Bell, John, ed. *Halifax: A Literary Portrait*. Lawrencetown Beach, Nova Scotia: Pottersfield Press, 1990. Pp. viii, 228. \$14.95 (paper)]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 20(1), 50–52. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1017567ar>

tings." As a textbook, Nadel's work would serve as a fully adequate example of how to move toward that goal. Perhaps the major criticism of the book is only that Nadel does not adequately and deliberately define his concept of ethnicity until the last chapter, which, entitled "Particularism, Class Consciousness, and Community," is a masterful weaving together, in the manner of Fernand Braudel, of the level of "social time," or the social construction of reality, and the level of *l'histoire événementielle*, or the history of events.

Glen E. Lich
Multicultural and German-Canadian
Studies
University of Winnipeg

Saddlemeyer, Ann, ed. *Early Stages: Theatre in Ontario 1800-1914*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990. Pp. xiii, 413. 105 photographs & drawings. \$40 (cloth); \$17.95 (paper).

Referring to playwrights in her short introduction, Saddlemeyer observes that "[t]hen, as now, acceptance at home was achieved only after success abroad." I wonder whether the 'as now' really applies—any more than 'no one a prophet at home' ever and always applies. Maybe it does with TV and cinema, but with theatre? Have French, Freeman, Pollock, Fruet, Bolt, Walker, and a dozen more, had to be approved by London or Los Angeles before becoming draws in Canada? I think not. I think we turned that corner about twenty years ago.

Theatre in Ontario between 1800 & 1914, however, did have, in spite of the efforts of the essayists in *Early Stages* to paint a lively picture, a bleak time of it. It was perhaps no bleaker than theatre in, say, Australia or New Zealand 1850-1914, but bleak nevertheless. J. M. S. Careless, in his essay,

points out once more that Ontario began really to exist only after the United States' War of Independence; and Robertson Davies, in his piece, strongly implies, if he does not state, that theatre is an urban event: small towns and the long distances between them conspired against theatre in Upper Canada at least until the coming of the railways.

One of the results of keeping the tie with England was the constant looking toward "home" to find the tone to set, even in the case of stage entertainment. When plays did begin to be put on, they tended to be pieces by Goldsmith and Sheridan, Tom Taylor and T. W. Robertson, Jerrold, Jones, and Bulwer-Lytton—and Shakespeare. These, and plays by frothier writers as well, were put on often by regimental companies: the amateur British garrison troop-shows that formed a surprisingly large part of the Ontario theatre-scene during the last century, a large enough part to merit a chapter here devoted to their history.

Inevitably, when the railways came in, contact with the United States grew stronger. Plays by such United States writers as Boucicault and Denman Thompson began to be performed; and such United States entertainments as minstrel shows gained popularity here—not altogether understandably.

Early Stages has eight chapters by eight different writers. Three of the eight are much better than the others: Saddlemeyer's Introduction, Careless' chapter on the cultural setting in Ontario to 1914, and Davies' chapter on the 19th-century repertoire are all, in one word, excellent. It's not easy to write on theatre. Theatre is very much of the moment. The crowd, lights, mood, the alternating roars and hushes, make up theatre-atmosphere and it is hard to bring these into a serious history while still dis-

persing all the necessary information. The other five chapters here do not really try for atmosphere. They stitch together names, titles, dates, and recorded comments. The eighth chapter is a chronology, by Richard Plant, that does not pretend to be anything other than a list and it turns out to be more readable than the other four on variety, travelling-shows, regimental theatricals, and the theatre-buildings themselves.

I wish, by the way, that more had been made, by one or two of the essayists, of Graves Simcoe Lee. Lee, born in 1828, was "perhaps Ontario's first native playwright" and the author of, in 1853, *Fiddle, Faddle and Foozle*, the first indigenous play "on the Toronto stage." There are two portraits of Lee in the book, one when young and looking like Edgar Allan Poe, and one when old, but nothing is said of his life and career.

Casual readers interest in most aspects of the history of Canada probably will enjoy only the *Early Stages* chapters by Saddlemeyer, Careless, and Davies. A theatre-buff will find everything in the book worth knowing.

Charles Haines
Department of English
Carleton University

Bell, John, ed. *Halifax: A Literary Portrait*. Lawrencetown Beach, Nova Scotia: Pottersfield Press, 1990. Pp. viii, 228. \$14.95 (paper).

As befits a port city with one of the finest natural harbours in the world, John Bell's anthology, *Halifax: A Literary Portrait*, is freighted with a rich and varied cargo. The anthology, with thirty-one selections in prose and poetry, presents glimpses of Halifax as "garrison town, naval station, major East Coast port, and centre of

commerce, government and education." For a seaport that has seen so many travellers and transients, Bell has wisely chosen to offer not only the impressions of well-known writers native to Nova Scotia, but also the comments of famous birds of passage. Here is the Halifax of Thomas Moore, Charles Dickens and, of course, Rudyard Kipling, whose 1896 "Song of the Cities" originated the phrase "Warden of the North." Indeed, Bell cleverly includes one writer who never came to Halifax at all: Israel Zangwill, who conjured up an entirely imaginary Halifax for his 1895 novel *The Master*.

Bell's excerpts begin with the French fishing station of Chebooktook, seen desolate in 1699 by Sieur de Dièreville fifty years before the arrival of British colonists under Edward Cornwallis. Bell's selections are well-balanced and the social history of Halifax is readily apparent. The naval culture of Halifax emerges in Captain Frederick Marryat's novel *The Naval Officer* (1829), the fruit of the author's naval service in the first four decades of the nineteenth century, some of it on station in Halifax. In many of the selections, the narrowness and dominance of a mercantile and administrative elite with a population eighty percent of British origin is clear. Thomas C. Haliburton's satirical sketch "A Ball at Government House" (1847) mocks the pretensions and graft of the local worthies who were his peers. The poverty, vice and squalor of a port town infuse the journal of American novelist and lawyer Richard Henry Dana, Jr., who on an 1842 visit to Halifax visited the dens of vice that lured soldiers and sailors. The excerpt chronicles his sincere yet sanctimonious efforts to reform a young prostitute. His descriptions of the brothels recall *Jack in Port: sailortowns in Eastern Canada* (1982), Judith Fingard's study of sailors ashore in Halifax, St.

John and Quebec. So infamous were the dives in Barrack Street that, Fingard tells us, they found their way into song: "I met a girl in Water Street; she asked me to a dance. I drank my own destruction; I'm stripped from head to feet, I'll take my oath I'll go no more to a dance in Barrack Street," ("Barrack Street").

Bell avoids offering the stale or the predictable. For example, rather than giving us an excerpt from *Barometer Rising*, he offers instead Hugh McLennan's fine Christmas tale of the Halifax of his boyhood, "An Orange from Portugal," which once again touches on the poor of Halifax. The Halifax Explosion is seen through the eyes of a young boy in Thomas Raddall's haunting autobiographical story "Winter's Tale": "Blinds and curtains flapped lazily in gaping window frames. Clothing, silverware, all sorts of odds and ends were littered over hallways and doorsteps, dropped in the sudden flight. There were bloody hand-prints and splintered doors, and splashes on floors and entries. The slush on the sidewalks was tinged a dirty pink in many places, where the hegira had passed."

If Halifax was hell in December 1917, Archibald MacMechan's essay "A Day in Dolcefear" (1927) offers us mellow weather and a paradise of bobbing sailboats and the gracious homes of the Northwest Arm. Some were never meant to be Haligonians: Irving Layton's memoir *Waiting for the Messiah* chronicles the purgatory of his brief career as a Fuller Brush salesman and prospective candy store owner in the city. We also encounter lost Halifax: An Africville now razed is the object of lament in George Elliott Clarke's "Campbell Church Road."

No anthology can carry all the literary freight of a city, and Bell offers a reading

list for those who wish to go beyond his judicious selection. There is much to praise and little to regret in Bell's choices. The novelist Alice Jones (1853-1933), daughter of Halifax mercantile grandee Alfred G. Jones, wrote a novel now largely forgotten, based on her family's rise to fortune in the West Indies trade—*Bubbles We Buy* (1903). An extract from Alice Jones's diary, now in the Public Archives of Nova Scotia, penned during her father's tenure as lieutenant-governor (1900-1906)—those raucous sailors outside her windows at Government House kept her awake—would have been a good match for the Haliburton essay. She observed acridly in October 1902: "It is part of the weariness of Halifax life, this constant explaining it to new people and apologising for its deficiencies—for of course, in contrast to the comfort of English life, there are no deficiencies. In the summer one explains it to Americans, in the winter to English, and I think it says a good deal for us that we retain our stolid, behind-the-times complacency."

The anthology mentions, but does not include, Charles Ritchie's shrewd vignettes of his natal town in *An Appetite for Life* and in *In My Grandfather's House*. In the twentieth century, Halifax has been a major port of entry for thousands of immigrants, their first experience of the new country. My one real regret is that *Halifax: A Literary Portrait* does not offer one such a glimpse of the city. Although not himself an immigrant, writer Norman Levine has given us a melancholy yet unforgettable account of the welcome to one such group of arrivals in *Canada Made Me* (1958): "I entered a large drill hall. I was marched with the others to inside a tall wire cage that was open at the top and told to sit down on a wooden bench. Around the walls of the drill hall hung the shields of the various provinces. Four Union Jacks hung down from the walls. They were all faded, two had moth

holes. The drill hall was divided by toilets into two squares. A sign in between the toilets said WELCOME TO CANADA in seven languages. I told the nearest standing official that I was a Canadian. He told me, in German, to sit down."

John Bell has, however, succeeded in conveying the social particularity of Halifax, strikingly anticipated in the cover painting, Elizabeth Nutt's streetscape *Winter, George St., Halifax, N.S.* (1935). *Welcome to Halifax: A Literary Portrait.*

Sandra Campbell
Department of English
University of Ottawa

Richardson, Douglas with J.M.S. Careless, G. M. Craig and Peter Heyworth. *A Not Unightly Building: University College and its History.* Toronto: Mosaic Press for University College, 1990. Pp. ix, 174. Index, notes, black and white and colour photographs, maps, plans, construction drawings. \$29.95.

In my first year of Architecture at the University of Toronto I had to write a critique of a building. Rashly, I chose University College and unwisely neglected to condemn it with vigour. In the mid-fifties, eclecticism was not in favour and only the most vivid scholarship could gain a serious hearing. Douglas Richardson et al have not given us the kind of comprehensive critical account that would have commanded respect even in those dark heroic days. With this handsome volume, University College surely is now the most comprehensively treated individual work in the whole corpus of Canadian architecture.

In two short initial chapters, historians J.M.S. Careless and G. M. Craig outline the cultural and political cross-currents in

which the proposed non-denominational university evolved from a highly contradictory enterprise of the 1820s to become, in the 1850s, the centrepiece of Toronto's civic pride and accomplishment. The building of University College, as the home for the University of Toronto, somehow overcame deeply entrenched sectarian self-interest, the peculiarly Canadian suspicion of extravagance in public building, and the mine fields of political convenience, to emerge as a symbol of cultural and urban aspirations. By some magic, University College became a temple, the building of which assured the future of the city in much the way Aldo Rossi, in *The Architecture of the City*, insists ancient Greek temples established Attic cities. When it burned in 1890, there was no question of its reconstruction, and scarcely less resolve to maintain the high standards of workmanship, materials and embellishment that had miraculously materialized in the original.

Chapters Three, Four, and Five, by architectural historian and College Archivist, Douglas Richardson, make up the heart of the book. Chapter Three reviews ambitious Neoclassic projects commissioned prior to the 1850s, presenting this work in numerous drawings never previously published. The first of these, Charles Fowler's scheme of 1829, was very conservative, dry and academic in character, planned on a grand scale, but utterly disregarding any consideration of local site conditions. He supplied an alternative, and equally gaunt gothic idiom for the same rigidly symmetrical quadrangles. His pavilion layout echoes Jefferson's earlier University of Virginia, but with none of the latter's muscular body, inventive detail and subtle adjustment to terrain. A later version of Fowler's classically-costumed proposition was developed by Thomas

Young in the late 30s, and one residential unit of this scheme was actually built. In archive photos it looks strangely anachronistic, like the later Classical Revival of the 1920s.

Chapter Four deals with the evolution of Cumberland and Storm's design for University College more or less as we know it today. Interestingly, to judge from preliminary schemes discussed in this chapter, decisions regarding materials were side-stepped until the design had reached a high level of resolution. The vigorous Romanesque of this design was greatly influenced by Governor Head, Chancellor Langton, and senior faculty; it was not merely Cumberland's personal project. Nor can it be discounted as mere pastiche. The design was innovative, unprecedented, and demanding. More than thirty sheets of drawings were prepared for the south front alone, and drawing dates show that many details were revised repeatedly up to the last possible minute. In the end, construction began in haste and secrecy to forestall compromising the high standards envisaged.

Subtitled "A Manly, Noble Structure," Chapter Five provides a critical account of architectural substance, ideas and issues active in the design. These include such things as the unprecedented richness and variety of detailing, the lavish use of brilliant colour in windows and floor tiles. These respond to late 19th century Ruskinian ideals, and were contentious issues at the time, not so inevitably part and parcel of a Romanesque stylistic option as we frequently assume. Elaboration in Storm's design was driven by the Ruskinian command that "even the smallest detail should have a meaning or serve a purpose." Ironically, this ideal underlay mid-20th-century modernism which completely rejected these very