

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Turner, Larry. *Ernestown: Rural Spaces, Urban Places: Odessa, Ontario: Corporation of the Township of Ernestown*, 1993. Pp. 283. Bibliographical references, index, and black and white photographs. Can\$47.50 Hard

Stewart Renfrew

Volume 24, numéro 1, octobre 1995

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1019240ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019240ar>

[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

Renfrew, S. (1995). Compte rendu de [Turner, Larry. *Ernestown: Rural Spaces, Urban Places: Odessa, Ontario: Corporation of the Township of Ernestown*, 1993. Pp. 283. Bibliographical references, index, and black and white photographs. Can\$47.50 Hard]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 24(1), 65–66. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1019240ar>

ing studies of cultural conflict through relationships between a native woman and a white man. Johnson's heroine asks, when her husband questions the validity of her parents' native marriage, "Why should I recognise the rites of your nation when you do not acknowledge the rites of mine?"

In addition to revealing popular attitudes, the stories also provide insight into the women who wrote them. Sara Ann Curzon's mocking description of the stultifying atmosphere of a girls' boarding school provides insight into her work for women's rights. Agnes Maule Machar's description of a young girl's religious faith sheds light on her own motivations as a social reformer.

McMullen and Campbell tell us that the stories are mined from rich sources in nineteenth-century magazines and journals. The selections are well chosen. Many forgotten writers are given belated recognition, and well-known authors are represented by obscure works. Fans of poet Isabella Valancy Crawford, in particular, will be grateful for the publication of "A Rose in His Grace" from a holograph manuscript.

The retrieval of the stories, however, raises an important question: How were the writers chosen, and further, How were the individual stories selected from the range available? The editors do not tell us, and the reader is left with questions. Were these the most popular authors of the period, or are they those authors who most appeal to us today? Is the realism and critical stance of many of the writers typical of Canadian writers, or have the editors chosen exceptions from a pool of sentimental fiction? Who and what was left out?

Feminist critics of the literary canon have established that the selection of an an-

thology is a process fraught with questions of power. While there is no question that the editors have wielded their editorial scissors with intelligence and care, it would have been useful if they had made their choices more explicit.

The biographical and historical background to the stories is provided by a series of excellent biographical sketches. By setting the stories into the context of the lives of the writers, the editors have ensured that we are continually reminded of the intersections between the literature and the life of the nineteenth century. They have provided a fascinating introduction to the writers, their work, and their world.

Joanna Dean, Department of History,
Carleton University

Turner, Larry. *Ernestown: Rural Spaces, Urban Places: Odessa, Ontario: Corporation of the Township of Ernestown*, 1993. Pp. 283. Bibliographical references, index, and black and white photographs. Can\$47.50 Hard.

In my experience, a municipality usually takes one of two approaches when it decides to produce a local history. Either it relies on the services of one or a number of local citizens, or it turns to a professional purveyor of local histories. The first method can result in a couple of dozen poorly photocopied pages of questionable history or a truly fine effort such as William Patterson's *Lilacs and Limestone*, which documents the history of Pittsburgh Township. So-called "professionally" produced histories are usually more attractively packaged than the local efforts, but they can leave much to be desired as well. In fact, as history, they can turn out to be even worse than many of the poorest amateur efforts, which, at

their very worst, do give one something of the unique flavour of the locality. There are, however, very competent historians who have made a business out of producing local histories. Larry Turner is one, and his book *Ernestown: rural places, urban spaces*, is a good example of his work.

Turner understands that history, especially writing this kind of history, is both a science and an art. One must be objective, of course, and create a measured account of the municipality. After all, one must be able to face fellow historians with a clear conscience. But if one veers too close to the fashion of some of the more "advanced" forms of historical erudition, he or she is going to lose an intended audience.

In *Ernestown*, Larry Turner is very careful to provide his readers with the setting for his history. The first chapter, "Ernestown: Cultural Landscape," describes the geography, economics, and population that have dominated the township from the earliest Loyalist settlement in 1784 to the present. This is not a long chapter, and is interspaced with many photographs that help to illustrate the points Turner is making. Situated at the beginning, it is more likely to catch the attention of the casual reader than if it were placed further into the book. Once his setting has been established, Turner turns to more specific aspects. Generally, he follows a chronological pattern, from the earliest history to the most recent. Chapter 2 describes the aboriginal populations, chapter 3 the Loyalist populations, and so on to the twentieth century.

But the author knows that much of his audience is not likely to follow the book straight through from beginning to end. Nor is this history always best explained by following a strict chronological pattern. At various points in his account he

pauses to take a special look at aspects of township history, for example education 1859–1900, or the story of the first steamship on the Great Lakes and one of its builders, Henry Gildersleeve. In the sixth chapter Turner indulges himself in the luxury of turning aside for a whole chapter to show us the wonderful photographs that Fred Brown, an amateur photographer, took during his travels about the township during the latter part of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. This is history that casual readers can enjoy dipping into as the spirit moves them. Turner gives them much opportunity. There are plenty of photographs of places and, of course, of people. In fact, I did a very unscientific survey of long-time area residents: all liked the book, and all were quick to show me a photograph of themselves or a near relation, except one, and he turned up in a picture of the family milk stand.

The book has been handsomely produced by Dundurn Press, but, like all books, it has not escaped without a few flaws. For example, on page 22, the captions under the pictures of the Brick and the Wilton schools have been reversed. The photographs seem darker and a little less sharp than they should be. Finally, given modern mapping techniques, it would have been nice to have seen a few maps, produced for the occasion, that would illustrate in graphic detail some of the changes in Ernestown over the years.

Still, few if any could offer an alternative approach that would result in a better overall history of the township of Ernestown.

Stewart Renfrew, Archivist,
Queen's University

Wallace, C.M. and A. Thomson, eds.
Sudbury: Rail Town to Regional Capital.
Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1993, Pp. 303.
Illustrations. ISBN 1-550002-170-2.

As the title suggests, the general theme of *Sudbury: Rail Town to Regional Capital* is the transformation of Sudbury from a rail town of the late nineteenth century to a regional centre or what the editors describe as a "regional capital" of the late twentieth century. The process, as it is presented, begins with the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway, winds its way through the on-again off-again activity of various extractive companies, becomes increasingly focused on the distributional function of the community, capitalizes on the administrative opportunity provided by various levels of government and concludes with the more contemporary era of "Sudbury 2001." It is a fascinating story. Sudbury, like many Canadian communities, has been forced to deal with the peaks and valleys of economic growth and decline, and while the community has faced more than its share of boom and bust cycles, in general and over the long run, it has responded well to the community challenges. The Sudbury experience is one worth pursuing, not only as an intriguing historical study, but also as something of a model in community persistence.

Compiled in part in celebration of the centennial of Sudbury's incorporation (January 1, 1993), this volume offers a decade-by-decade overview of Sudbury's first one hundred years. This, as maintained by the editors, "is both the strength and the weakness of the book." While the decade-by-decade approach provides for a neatly packaged, conventional history of the community, it too readily dismisses the wide variety of issues, themes, or both, that demand more than such an approach can provide. History is seldom confined to ten-year peri-

ods. Although editors Wallace and Thomson have attempted to impose "some cohesiveness among the chapters," *Sudbury: Rail Town to Regional Capital* provides what urban scholars occasionally refer to as a "scattershot approach" to community and community analysis. That is not to say there is nothing of value in the collection. Indeed, Matt Bray's brief discussion of the local environment and the problems associated with sulphur emissions or Graeme Mount's overview of the wartime economy and the employment opportunities made available to women as a result of the labour shortage, or Oiva Saarinen's description of the Mine Mill (IUMMSW)-Steelworkers (USWA) conflict in the 1950s are all valuable. They provide insight into both the community and the larger issues of a developing society. Unfortunately, the potential for detailed analysis is too often thwarted by the urgencies of the next decade.

Sudbury: Rail Town to Regional Capital is composed of 11 chapters written by nine authors, each chapter an attempt to encapsulate the sense of community as it was discovered by the contributing author. Beginning with Carl Wallace's introductory chapter, "The 1880s," and closing with his concluding chapter, "The 1980s," the discussion documents changing government structure and activity, physical growth or decline or both, leisure activities, local economy, the demographics of community, evolving social institutions, and what the editors have termed "significant trends" pertinent to the history of the community. The result is, as one might expect, a mixed bag of interpretation and analysis. Some chapters are descriptive, while others are anecdotal, and still others are interpretative. Some of the discussion is narrowly confined in terms of place and time, while some of it is wide-ranging. Some of the chapters are entirely based on sec-