

Thomas F. Mcllwraith, *Looking for Old Ontario, Two Centuries of Landscape Change*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997. xiv + 400 pp. b&w illus., appendices, index

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photographs of the town and some of the individuals discussed. Urban historians might also be interested in a discussion of how industrialisation and middle class formation affected the spatial patterns of class-based residency within the town.

Despite these criticisms, this is an important book that offers a fresh look at class formation and business culture during the industrialisation period.

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Thomas F. McIlwraith, *Looking for Old Ontario, Two Centuries of Landscape Change*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997. xiv + 400 pp. b&w illus., appendices, index.

Thomas McIlwraith has been observing, and reflecting on, the rural landscape of southern Ontario for several decades. In a contemplative style, and using about two hundred of his own photographs, he has now summarised the results of his extensive reading and field work. *Looking at Old Ontario* interprets the ways in which European, and especially British, settlers shaped rural Ontario up to the early twentieth century.

McIlwraith's book invites and bears comparison with the work of W. G. Hoskins whose masterly *The Making of the English Landscape* (1955) has inspired several generations of scholars. Like Hoskins, McIlwraith is fascinated by the quotidian scene. He writes about, and illustrates, some 'historic' houses and communities, but it is the typical dwelling, farm, fence, barn, and road that usually catches his eye, and which he especially commends to our attention. It is these landscape elements that tell us most about the lives, skills, living standards, and tastes of the majority of people. For the most part Hoskins organised his original narrative chronologically; in later work he constructed vignettes using specific places, a Devon lane, a Northumberland castle, and so forth. McIlwraith prefers a more systematic treatment. An opening cluster of chapters deal with general themes, including place names and building materials. This cluster is followed by a group of chapters each of which describes specific landscape features (houses, 'revealing details', community buildings, barns, fences, power and mills, graves and monuments), and then a smaller group that discusses landscape assemblages (farms, roadsides, transport systems, and townscapes). Rounding these out are some reflections on boundaries, and on historic preservation. As a general framework, this approach makes sense in a region with less visible history than England, and with fewer regional variations. Still, regions do differ, notably in building materials and agricultural land use, and it is a pity that McIlwraith did not include a chapter that sketched them out. In a similarly comparative vein, the book is also limited in that it rarely makes explicit the differences among the landscapes of southern Ontario and adjacent parts of Quebec or upstate New York.

The glory of the book is the wealth of observation, reflection, and information contained in each chapter. McIlwraith has an eye for telling juxtapositions, a taste for thoughtful asides, and a cast of mind that has encouraged him to accumulate interesting details. In the chapter on graves and monuments, for example, I learned about "doddy-house" extensions on nineteenth-century homes built to accommodate elderly parents and also discovered that one of the reasons thirsty weeping willows are popular in graveyards is that they soak up moisture, thereby extending the digging season. In a rare comment about a modern landscape feature, he points out that since most of North America's communications satellites are positioned over Chicago, the orientation of satellite dishes provides a good indicator of direction (69). Familiar with the history of nineteenth-century Ontario, McIlwraith has the knack not only of interpreting landscape features but also of bringing them alive. Speaking of roadside trees, for example, he notes how from the 1880s farmers were encouraged to plant hardwoods. Apart from the beneficial effects of trees on soil erosion, "shade benefitted churchgoers, weary travellers, and sweaty kine on sultry August afternoons" (251). One can imagine the scene.

McIlwraith, again like Hoskins, is mostly interested in those features of the landscape that pre-date World War I. In both cases the focus reflects a personal preference. Hoskins was repelled by the urban landscapes of the twentieth century. He was blunt: "especially since the year 1914, every single change in the English landscape has either uglified it or destroyed its meaning or both." McIlwraith seems to feel much the same. The most urban of settings that he considers is the country town, the edges of which, he suggests "are among southern Ontario's least attractive places today. Fringed with fast food restaurants, propane fuel depots, 'garden centres,' lumber stores, and the local Ontario Provincial Police detachment, they are ragged places. ..." (280). It is difficult not to sympathise with his judgement, but the fact remains that most of us live in landscapes that are largely, if not entirely, a product of the twentieth century. To make sense of them we must turn elsewhere, for example to the work of McIlwraith's colleague at the University of Toronto, Ted Relph. Relph has written — in an unusually open-minded way — about those generic modern landscapes that can make Toronto seem more like Melbourne, Australia, than Milton, Ont. (Though these days Milton itself is looking increasingly like Melbourne, too.) Together, *Looking at Old Ontario* and Relph's *The Modern Urban Landscape* provide an excellent primer on how to read almost any landscape in the province.

The chief limitation of *Looking at Old Ontario* is that McIlwraith does not try to make strong connections between his reading of the landscape and the work of other observers and historians of rural and small-town Ontario. Statistical evidence of property ownership, and social inequality in nineteenth-century Ontario has been provided by writers such as David Gagan and Gordon Darroch. These could usefully inform our reading of these first European landscapes in Ontario. Similarly, more recent changes in the appearance of many rural Ontario communities

have been illuminated by the work of sociologists like S. D. Clark, for example in *The Suburban Society* (1966) and by anthropologists like Stanley Barrett, notably in *Paradise* (1994). By failing to connect his vision with the insights of these other scholars, McIlwraith has weakened his argument that landscape is an important element in social life.

Since the time Hoskins was writing there has been a steady growth of interest in landscapes, both urban and rural. Especially in the past decade, this trend has been accompanied by a new theoretical sophistication, by debates about the meaning and even the objective existence of landscapes. McIlwraith has not been troubled by such debates. A believer in patient observation and clear prose, he subscribes to the traditional view that cultural landscapes can themselves reveal how they were made, and by whom. His book is a testament to the continuing relevance of such a view. Anyone who is interested in the landscape of rural, and small-town Ontario will read it with profit and enjoyment.

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Ward, Robin. *Echoes of Empire: Victoria and its Remarkable Buildings*. Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 1996. Pp. xxvii, 362. Ninety black and white illustrations. \$32.95 hardback.

No other Canadian city has so consciously cultivated its own image as Victoria has. As Vancouver artist, writer and architecture critic Robin Ward notes, Victoria's "urban fabric" has been "enthusiastically embroidered" ever since the days of HBC Governor James Douglas. In 1862, the city's first mayor, Thomas Harris, for instance created a Committee of Nuisances to prettify the city. The instinct was perpetuated by image promoters as varied as railway companies and candy makers. In all their minds, Ward notes, "history had little value unless it could be edited and repackaged to suit a different time and purpose." Above all else, the city dedicated itself to "an exaggerated Britishness," an image that flattered the pretensions of its political and commercial elite while at the same time making the city an alluring destination for tourists. Robin Ward's *Echoes of Empire* sets out to explore the "myths" that constitute this venerable image by wandering through the city's architecture and using his journey to reveal Victoria instead as a city of "compulsions, contradictions and cultural nostalgia."

This is an immensely readable book. It is organized much like a walking tour that guides the reader from the city core—the Inner Harbour with its signature buildings like Francis Rattenbury's Empress and Legislative Buildings—to sites on the city's periphery like the Fisgard Lighthouse and Butchart's Gardens. Each stop along the way is in fact a pastiche of history, architectural commentary and local lore. The research is thorough, the architectural evaluations free of jargon and accessible to the in-

telligent layman and the writing is lively and yet never florid. Ward casts a wide social net, stopping to comment on the plutocratic Union Club and then proceeding to the Songhees Indian Reserve and Chinatown, where we learn that in the 1880s fourteen opium factories flourished. Ward is expert at mingling his architectural analysis with detail that amplifies the late nineteenth century history of Victoria. There is, for instance, a vivid portrait of Confederation booster Amor de Cosmos and his boisterous newspaper, *The British Colonist*. For the general reader, this approach provides the context in which to appreciate the "remarkable" buildings selected by Ward. Cameo appearances by Victoria sojourners like the poet Robert Service or the British naval explorer Robert Scott enliven the narrative at this level.

Urban history specialists can winnow their own grain from the book; we learn, for instance, that soon after Oak Bay, Victoria's posh seaside suburb, incorporated in 1906, it pioneered the use of a "Beauty Committee" and then a Town Planning Act to groom the nascent community to a high English aesthetic. The Uplands estate adjacent to Oak Bay was a pure garden city experiment, landscaped by Charles Olmsted. Ward has thus furnished Victoria residents and visitors alike with a very usable and handsomely illustrated introduction to the city that Princess Louise once described as "halfway between Balmoral and Heaven." Given this utility, why, oh why did Ward not provide his readers with a map of the city (beyond the grainy military survey map of the endpapers) which pinpointed his remarkable buildings and enabled readers to map out their own approach to the city?

For all his enterprise and solid narrative, Ward shies away from any really probing analysis of Victoria. *Echoes of Empire* is much like a series of fascinating photographs laid out serially, each intriguing in its own right but only loosely connected to what came before or follows. The book is rich in colour and focused detail, but poor in conveying any sense of urban growth. There is talk of the pulse of commerce in the Inner Harbour—fish and timber exports, shipbuilding and repair—but little cohesive sense of what pushed the city forward. Ward suggests that by the 1890s, the end of "empire", Victoria's "metropolitan veneer was cracking" and that economic decline provoked the city to capitalize on its past as a base for tourism. Similarly, Ward's brief concluding epilogue avoids any sweeping conclusions about Victoria.

The rich evidence of his book invites us to draw our own conclusions. Victoria, for instance, emerges as a polyglot community, a mishmash of largely imported influences. Architecturally, the city was a stew of varied styles—eastern Canadian banking architecture, Tudor revival, Gothic revival. Socially, the mix included everything from English remittance men to participants in Chinese Tong Wars. What is striking is how consistently this west coast community-in-the-making eschewed indigenous values. When Emily Carr chose to depict and celebrate the local landscape and native folklore, her work was shunned by the provincial government because it was "too