

Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Elizabeth Bloomfield, *Waterloo Township through Two Centuries*. Kitchener: Waterloo Historical Society, 1995. Pp. xiv & 466. Maps, illustrations. \$75.00 hard, \$85.00 with handling

Glenn J. Lockwood

Volume 27, numéro 1, octobre 1998

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1016617ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016617ar>

[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

Lockwood, G. J. (1998). Compte rendu de [Elizabeth Bloomfield, *Waterloo Township through Two Centuries*. Kitchener: Waterloo Historical Society, 1995. Pp. xiv & 466. Maps, illustrations. \$75.00 hard, \$85.00 with handling]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 27(1), 60–62.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1016617ar>

Violich, Francis. *The Bridge to Dalmatia: A Search for the Meaning of Place*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998. Pp. xvii. 351. Maps, black and white illustrations, bibliography and index. US\$ 49.95 (cloth).

The title of this book, *The Bridge to Dalmatia*, refers to the connection between Dalmatia on the Adriatic Sea and northern California on the Pacific, two regions which have much in common in terms of their relationships between land and sea and between environment and people. This connection or bridge is particularly significant for the immigrants who left Dalmatia three or four generations ago and settled in California. These immigrants maintained this bridge between their old and new homes over the years; so too did their descendants in California, one of whom is Francis Violich.

For Violich, professor emeritus at the University of California at Berkeley, the bridge represents both personal and professional connections. His personal connections come from family and friends who left Dalmatia to settle in California and who came to love their places in California but never lost their love for the places they left in Dalmatia. His professional connections come from his years as an academic involved in urban planning and environmental relationships and inclined towards a comparative approach to urban problems and solutions. In this book Violich weds his personal and professional interests to create a work that is sound in framework and attractive in presentation.

Fundamental to his framework is the concept of place and identity. Throughout the book the words place and identity come up over and over again as Violich guides us on a journey in *A Search for the Meaning of Place*, the subtitle of the book. While place is the key in a broad sense, the framework is actually based on a triad comprised of place, buildings, and people. Place in this latter and narrower sense is the natural environment of a particular area, the given characteristics of that area. Buildings include the structures, streets, and fabric of the city or town and the relationship of this built environment to the natural environment. And people is used to identify the "web of environmental decision making" that occurs in urban centers, a decision making that should be inclusive in terms of inhabitants that participate in the process and sensitive in terms of maintaining harmony between the built and natural environments.

After breaking down his tripartite framework into subunits, Violich uses it to assess two towns in Italy and two cities in California, and then several places in Dalmatia. Actually his assessments of the hill towns of Giove and Lugnano in Italy and the cities of Berkeley and San Francisco in California are used to familiarize the reader with his framework and to demonstrate his technique of "urban reading," a technique which includes walking a city or town in order to get a feel for its natural and built environments. Following this demonstration, Violich turns to his main task, an analysis and reading of urban areas in Dalmatia. These readings cover three mainland cities (Zadar, Split, and Dubrovnik), five island villages on the seaside, and four villages on the peninsula of Peljesac; included in this selection are Pucisca and Kuna, the village homes of Violich's grandparents.

In conducting these readings and analyses of Dalmatian places, Violich compliments the inhabitants of those urban centers where modernization is sensitively integrated with the given natural environment and the traditional built environment, that is, where a feeling of harmony between nature and people has been maintained; and, of course, he criticizes those who have harmed these environments by erecting inelegant and monstrous structures, often hotels for tourists, that jar the harmonious character of a village or a town. In addition to praise and criticism, Violich also offers a prescriptive plan consisting of ten characteristics that are basic to an urban area's identity and place. This plan may be used by urban populations to effect sensitive changes in their own cities and towns no matter where they are located. In this respect the book becomes a bridge that connects urban areas throughout the world. Thus, not only in Dalmatia and California, areas that mean so much to Violich personally, should people constantly heed their natural and built environments in preserving the past and building the future but inhabitants of urban places should do this universally.

Violich presents his case for rational and sensitive development of urban areas attractively, in a book that is well written and amply illustrated with photographs and sketches, many of them his own. His suggestions for urban development are reasonable and achievable, and therefore easy for most of us to accept. Though some readers may initially question his analyses or perhaps be uncomfortable with them because of his personal involvement with several of the places covered in the book, most readers will subsequently find, as did this reviewer, that Violich turns his integration of the personal and professional into a plus. If anything, the personal element makes his arguments even more convincing. In the end, then, he is very convincing in his argument that sensitive urbanization requires the consideration of the emotions of urban dwellers as much as it does the views of professional planners. He is convincing too in his metaphoric suggestion of urban connections or bridges throughout the world, bridges such as the one connecting the places of Dalmatia and California, bridges that simultaneously span geography and generations, bridges we should cross with Violich as concerned urban residents.

Stephen C. Markovich
Department of Political Science and Public Administration
The University of North Dakota

Elizabeth Bloomfield, *Waterloo Township through Two Centuries*. Kitchener: Waterloo Historical Society, 1995. Pp. xiv & 466. Maps, illustrations. \$75.00 hard, \$85.00 with handling.

This large book is about a rural municipality dismantled twenty-six years ago. Waterloo Township was the rural "doughnut or onion ring" surrounding Kitchener/Waterloo in the centre, increasingly eaten away by annexations. Elizabeth Bloomfield here has attempted "a computer-assisted historical/bibliographical approach" to its development to capture "the persisting and valuable essence of the township."

Instead of the topical arrangement of chapters that one too often finds in local histories, this book is thoughtfully organized into three broad periods. First we follow Waterloo's growth from 1800 to the 1850s when its rural population reached a peak. The second period, from 1860 to World War One, was marked by the emergence of towns and cities and rural population decline. The third period, World War One to 1972, was marked by intense urban pressures that led to the dissolution of this township.

Bloomfield walks the fine line between writing for a scholarly and a popular audience. This is a useful reference book, not only explaining developments in Waterloo, but also referring to provincial legislation affecting many Ontario townships. It should be mandatory reading for Ontario township clerks to enable them to understand the development of municipal legislation over the years. The digitized colour maps at the front are stunning, but the fifty black and white maps are no less superb and are easier to follow.

There is much insight in this volume, as shown by a text that ranges from discussing the key role of shopkeepers in financing the early economy to the challenge of teaching a one-room school. Bloomfield provides exhaustive, often plodding detail, whether it be about the waves of settlement from 1800 on, or about suburbanization, or yet again about the ethnic and religious profile of the township. She analyzes select aspects of Waterloo Township society to show the ethnic mix of tradesmen in villages and the dominance of a small number of early families in the township council, among others. Numerous tables are presented throughout the text, and there are a number of appendices including one on sources for the history of Waterloo Township. The detailed endnotes are impressive, even if they are printed in microscopic small print that will make them inaccessible for many readers.

Although there is much to commend this study, as shown by the first printing selling out, it does not add up to the sum of its parts. Bloomfield herself alludes to "the agonies of historical composition — organizing material by both theme and chronology, balancing generalizations and particular examples from all localities and communities, and relating Waterloo Township to larger processes of change." It is obvious to this reader that the author was swamped by available material, particularly the annual reports and volumes published by the Waterloo Historical Society since 1913, helping to yield a secondary resource base that alone amounted to 900 items. Despite imaginative use of the computer to provide some interesting maps and tables as well as insights into who comprised the economic and administrative elites, it is too bad the computer was not used to evaluate the entire social structure of the township. And this is precisely the central shortcoming of this volume's historical/bibliographical approach. The maps aside, there is nothing groundbreaking about this volume, although it can be commended for being a good summary of what previously has been published.

This is too bad, for Bloomfield has gone out of her way to make her book conversant with recent themes in Canadian urban his-

tory. She has had two additional hurdles in preparing this book. First, records of Waterloo Township proved difficult to trace; hardly any township accounts, by-laws, committee records, maps and plans could be found, and the deliberations and policies of the township council were located for fewer than half the years. Second, Bloomfield had only two years to fill these gaps, pull some kind of synthesis out of the mass of Waterloo Historical Society publications, and produce her manuscript. It is a remarkable feat. Hence the associated smaller problems of this volume: a lack of overall coherence and synthesis, occasional contradictions, plodding text, a surfeit of detail, a tendency to describe process rather than explain significance, among others.

In a township where so much of the nineteenth-century landscape has been obliterated by recent urban sprawl, reproducing paintings of local settings by Homer Watson — "the Constable of Canada" — especially on the cover, would seem mandatory. And to what purpose were the large size pages selected, leaving large areas of empty space in gutters and requiring period documents reproduced in the gutter, to be printed in microscopic text that few will have the patience to read? At the same time, there are too few quotes from documents and people to give a sense of the local voice of Waterloo Township. Instead, much of the text is taken up with lists.

Some generalizations are questionable. The book says Waterloo Township supported and underwrote the local telephone system to "provide a service not considered profitable by a commercial utility," and yet many rural localities with even fewer potential subscribers were served by private companies that operated in the black for over half a century. And there are contradictions to be noted. Plate 3 (p. 1) shows an idealized 200-acre farm captured in stages, only for this to be contradicted by the statement on page 71 that Plate 3 is a representative farmstead layout of 1840. Women didn't work in the fields on page 58, but on page 63 daughters drove yokes of oxen, on page 90 "girls were also involved in farmwork — hoeing and cultivating the fields and helping at harvest by sharing with the labourers the tasks of binding and stooking (or tying and stacking the sheaves to dry in the sun)," and on page 227 "On smaller and poorer farms women and girls worked in the fields." On page 188 the impression is given that windmills were new at the turn of the century, yet page 201 tells of windmills being sold at New Germany in 1886, photographs on pages 72 and 177 show wooden windmills on township farms before the turn of the century, and page 82 lists a local windmill maker at Berlin in 1837. It is perhaps sufficient commentary on the index that it contains no entry for windmills. We are told on page 273 that school fairs were not continued beyond 1939, yet on page 336 there is a photograph of what is purported to be the 1949 school fair.

There is a fine selection of illustrations in this book, but one showing a camp meeting of Mennonite Brethren in Christ in a wooded grove is rare in making use of the wide pages. Altogether there are 272 illustrations and maps in this book, and there was a fine opportunity for evidential use of the visual information presented. There are no dates or estimates of dates on

the illustrations, and while captions are used to identify people, they do not point out what is significant in the visual image, or how it relates to the text of the chapter. Apart from brief references to bank barns and Mennonite Georgian-style houses, there is no architectural assessment of buildings and no floor plans of buildings are presented. The fifty beautifully prepared black-and-white maps in the book are an antidote for the few surviving township maps. It seems a pity that none of the clearer maps from the past such as the Tremain map of 1861 were reproduced in their original form. The digitized translation of the 1861 map inside the front cover lacks the names of land-owners. On it modern symbols for churches, schools, post offices, hotels and mills are so large as to obscure their exact location, in contrast with the precision of the original map.

How well does Bloomfield succeed in capturing the persisting and valuable essence of Waterloo Township? In many ways she does establish the particularity of this township, citing the German language spoken, its unique land survey, the complexity of its cadastre, its large size, its irregular roads, the lack of road allowances, the lack of Crown and clergy reserves, its group settlement by Pennsylvania Mennonites, and so on to its demise in 1972 which she describes as "one of the most complex in Ontario." Bloomfield says "Waterloo Township is unique." She also claims that this "history illustrates also larger processes of change in southern Ontario during the last two centuries — from the acquisition of land from aboriginal peoples in the late eighteenth century, through the creation of a rural economy and society, to the transforming effects of industrialization and urbanization." Readers may be forgiven if they are confused as to whether Waterloo was a typical or unique township. In a sense it almost doesn't matter. In the midst of the present urban sprawl, hampered by the destruction of so many original township records, Bloomfield was obliged in part to re-create the reality of rural Waterloo township from provincial legislation and regulations. What partly emerges as her subject is not Waterloo Township specifically, but rather a more generalized biography of the township in Ontario, that is, *any* Ontario township.

There is surprisingly little drama for a book that opens with "Setting the Stage" and closes with "Last Act." Almost no coverage is given to the generic German identity of much of the population, other than listing family names, dates and paths of arrival. Bloomfield would have us believe that little evidence has been found of the effect of two world wars on the local German-speaking population, but a dozen or so references sprinkled through the text and notes effectively suggest otherwise. Had the "German" character of local society been more fully delineated, Bloomfield might better have succeeded in capturing the persisting and valuable essence of Waterloo Township.

Glenn J Lockwood
Ottawa

Groth, Paul, and Todd W. Bressi, eds. *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997. Pp. ix, 272. Maps, black and white illustrations, bibliography and index.

This volume is the product of a 1990 symposium held to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Berkeley Department of Landscape Architecture. It was intended to be an interdisciplinary forum on subjects, methods, and philosophies of that ever-expanding term, landscape studies. In an attempt at focussing the predictable eclecticism that threatens such an approach, contributors were urged to focus on two principal issues: the reliability of visual and spatial information in understanding past and present cultures; and the ways in which the social and cultural pluralism of landscapes are best understood.

The volume is organized in three parts. First, the editors present an efficient "capsule history" of the traditions and practice of landscape study. Secondly, ten practitioners demonstrate their specific approaches to interpreting landscapes. Finally, six chapters are devoted to scholarly critiques of the earlier contributions and reflect on the future of landscape studies. The essays range from comprehensive surveys and critiques, through empirical case-studies, to detailed expositions of preferred methodology.

Several of the contributors set up the straw-men of the limitations of superficial analysis of a culture's external features, or else tilt at the windmill of a Sauerian fetish concerned solely with material "stuff." And all too often, the mantra is the same: *certainly*, visual analysis does yield important insights; *however*, reliance on visual analysis alone is dangerous; *therefore*, visual evidence must be accompanied by the scrutiny of other historical documentation; *finally*, it is only through these that social processes underlying material things may be exposed. Thus, Deryck Holdsworth's thorough investigation of landscape and archives as texts pays obeisance to all the stations of the theoretical-cross along his Via Delarosa that laments the shortfalls of naive vision and the neglect of "broader issues of social, cultural, and economic change" (p. 54).

But there are others. Rina Swentzell's essay on conflicting landscape values in the Santa Clara Pueblo breathes life into the power of the visual engagement with place. She demonstrates how the materiality of this particular setting is imbued with the people's relationship with the land, their community, and the cosmos. It was/is/will be a world where everything is "touchable, knowable, and accessible" (p. 57). In this way, Swentzell applies the power of the visual to contrast the holistic, natural world of the pueblo with the alien imposition of the Bureau of Indian Affairs school. Dolores Hayden also addresses "sense of place," but from a more explicitly theoretical perspective in which urban landscape history is informed by the "politics of space." For her, a sensitive history of urban landscapes must combine an appreciation of the aesthetics and politics of distinctive spaces and the part they play in economic and social reproduction. Hayden's visuals accompany a lucid argument