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In the Nature of Things:
Integrating the History and Archaeology of
Nineteenth-Century Canada and Australia

Alan Mayne

This special issue of Urban History Review resulted from three con-versations I had recently, in Québec City, Vancouver, and Hamil-ton. I am an Australian, a visitor to Canada, and my hosts were making me welcome.

William Moss, Principal Archaeologist for the City of Québec, stood with me on Place-Royale, in the heart of the Lower Town be-low the Citadel. Animated, he contrasted the archaeological and historical attention that has been lavished there on the material sur-vivals of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New France,[1] with the hesitant engagement to date (excepting Moss's own collabora-tive work with CELAT at Université Laval) with the eroding nine-teenth-century cityscape.

In Vancouver, I spoke with John Atkin[2] and Jeannette Hlavach, a Heritage Planner at the City of Vancouver. They led me a stone's throw away from Gastown, the central-city district where History is protected by city statute and marketed by tourist promoters, and showed me Canton Alley — hedged all around by new construc-tion projects — where pioneering archaeological excavations in 1996 had stirred media and community interest.[3] These underlay-ers of Vancouver's past, they worried, were being obliterated by the deep-delving foundations of new office blocks and condomin-ium towers.

In Hamilton, as I waited in the bus station at the end of my visit, Richard Harris reflected upon what I had said to students and staff at McMaster University about the integration of historical archaeol-ogy and urban history. Richard's questions were coloured by his involvement with Urban History Review: his intervention to set re-search agendas in urban history, his attention to regional and township history as well as that of the metropole, his interest in lo-cating Canadian experience in comparative perspectives. He threw me a challenge: write me an article on historical archaeol-ogy, he said, or pull together a special issue. I've done both.

The issue begins with a study of nineteenth-century township for-mation. It ends by working backwards in time from the disintegra-tion of a big-city neighbourhood during the mid twentieth century. In the first paper Phil Hobler tells the story of Old Bella Bella, a Heiltsuk township on the central coast of British Columbia. Bella Bella sprang up under the shadow of Fort McLoughlin, a fur-trad-ing post that the Hudson's Bay Company built in 1833.[4] The fort was abandoned in 1843, but Bella Bella persisted. It was relocated to a nearby townsite at the end of the nineteenth century.

Hobler's narrative, written engagingly albeit quirkily in the present tense, takes us to the fascinating margins of early township forma-tion in western Canada. His interpretation of the interplay between fort and urban "take off" is not dissimilar to that observable at Fort Langley, in British Columbia's Lower Mainland. Fort Langley is now a well-known National Historic Site within the Greater Vancou-ver region. The sites of Fort McLoughlin and Old Bella Bella are forgotten (although for Heiltsuk people, the sense of place still runs deep).

On one level — methodology — Hobler's analysis is a useful case study in changing vernacular housing styles: from the large tradi-tional plank homes of early nineteenth-century Native settlements such as Bella Bella to the small milled-lumber houses of late-cen-tury Bella Bella. On another level — conceptually exciting — Hobler's narrative extends and confirms arguments made by Cole Harris, and by Peter Ennals and Deryck Holdsworth, that fur-trade forts were crucial waypoints in a two-way process of cultural ex-change between European intruders and First-Nation peoples.[5] As waypoints, Hobler argues, "trading forts serve[d] as focal points for a process of Native settlement nucleation."

Such interpretations contradict colonisers' representations — widespread in European settler societies — of indigenous peoples as quintessentially pre-urban, and of urban development as a key measure of the colonisers' modernity. These representations, and the historical interpretations that have flowed from them, necessar-ily marginalise indigenes. They are assigned a fringe status in an ever-urbanising world.[6] Yet Hobler's study of Bella Bella's continu-ing development, long after Fort McLoughlin had closed, refutes contemporary assertions of wholesale Heiltsuk relocation following the fort's abandonment.

In Hobler's view, settlement nucleation — epitomised by Bella Bella — transformed long-standing Native settlement practices. Permanent settlements replaced a fluid pre-European pattern of seasonal camps and quasi-permanent central villages. Enduring urban forms thus predated the Europeans' coming (though not, apparently, on the actual site of Fort McLoughlin). The post-con-tact spatial realignments of Heiltsuk society bespoke the funda-mental changes that European contact triggered within long-established and complex aboriginal economic and cultural systems. Yet persistence and selective adaptation, as well as dis-location and imposed change, characterised these evolving sys-tems. Heiltsuk carpenters at Bella Bella modified European construction methods and recycled European materials. Heiltsuk traders capitalised upon European demand for furs, potatoes, and firewood. European missionaries and traders were bewildered when in 1898 the people of Bella Bella decided — in accordance with tradition — to relocate their town.

The second article in this issue continues the theme of early nine-teenth-century township formation on the margins of European set-tlement. In so doing, it introduces a comparative international perspective. British settlers built Fort McLoughlin in 1834. On the other side of the world, in the following year, British settlers built a village and called it Melbourne. Historians of migration often men-tion the "cultural baggage" that emigrants take with them from homes old to new. They mean the belongings, and the associa-tions of ideas and beliefs that mediated their selection, with which immigrants remade their lives in new lands. What things did the in-habitants of new towns most want? Merchants in London and Montréal gambled that they knew the answers, when in 1841 they loaded the trading ship William Salthouse with goods for sale to the shopkeepers of Melbourne. Mark Staniforth traces the context

of that voyage: Melbourne's early years, the expanding commerce of Montréal, and the long-haul passage of the *William Salthouse* from London to Montréal and Québec City, to Cape Town, and finally to Melbourne. Almost. The *William Salthouse* was wrecked as it neared its goal.

Staniforth's paper is about the thrill of discovery: the wreck site was located by recreational divers during the early 1980s. It is about retrieval: the pilfering, and later the conservation and recording, of the *William Salthouse*'s remains.[7] It delves into clues about possible smuggling. But it does not deal with the ultimate drama of sunken treasure. The ship's cargo was extensive (and expensive in total), but mundane: flour, salted fish and meat, building timber, nails, and alcohol. Staniforth's main research interest is obscure: the analysis of casks as historical evidence. The study of such things, however, is important for urban history. It provides additional evidence about the mass consumption choices that were available to urban communities. And, as the volume and range of such products, and their distribution across regions, classes, and races, increased massively during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, case studies of time capsules such as the *William Salthouse* document this circulation of things — and the transmission thereby of common ideas and styles — throughout the towns and cities of the expanding world trading system.

Hobler and Staniforth are both archaeologists. They study material culture.[8] Frequently, the things and places that historical archaeologists study have been deemed by others to be mundane and obscure. But those material things, those particular places, had an immediacy and potency to past lives that are otherwise remote to us. To study material culture therefore has the potential to uncover threads of significance that enable us to unravel otherwise alien systems of meaning: to "hit upon a valid point of entry into an alien mentality. And once we have puzzled through to the native's point of view, we should be able to roam about in his symbolic world."[9] I am reminded of a display in the McCord Museum's "Simply Montréal" exhibition. It shows a simple unadorned rolling pin, with a card that briefly gives its provenance: wooden, early twentieth century, lent by Carol Pauzé. Nearby, a folder contains Carol Pauzé's explanations of the associations the rolling pin has for her:

> This rolling pin is one of the few objects I have that come from my mother's family. At either end there are grooves, worn by three generations of magic fingers. My grandfather, Omer Bourret (1879–1931), made it for his wife Adéline Larivière-Bourret (1879–1956). My grandmother left it to my mother Lucette Bourret-Pauzé (1917–1974) and I inherited it from her when she died. It reminds me of Sunday afternoons when I was young. We peeled, sliced and ate the fruit to fill the pies, while Mummy briskly rolled out the pastry. It was also a time of confidences, of childhood memories. She told us about the grandparents I had never known and the lively family of sixteen children, of whom she was one of the youngest. The rolling pin is still famous for making the best apple pies ever, according to Lucette's special recipe!

Many scholars have argued that artefacts connect past and present.[10] A huge research agenda unfolds as this approach is applied comprehensively to urban history. In British Columbia, for example, Fort Langley and its place in the threshold phase of early European settlement on the New World frontier, are receiving sustained attention by historical archaeologists.[11] In eastern Canada, archaeologists from the City of Québec and Université Laval probe the complexities of large eighteenth- and nineteenth-century city sites.[12] The power of artefacts to connect past and present depends, however, upon our ability to provide rigorous and compelling contextualisations for these material relics from the past. That difficult task, necessarily, is cross-disciplinary in scope.

The greatest excitement that derives from blending archaeological and historical perspectives in urban studies is that it promotes integration of data, methods, and ideas. It is a strength of Staniforth's and Hobler's articles in this issue that, as historical archaeologists, they seamlessly blend analysis of a variety of data types from the historical record: material, visual, oral, textual, spatial. In so doing, their analysis of obscure things and places intersects with exciting cross-disciplinary discussions of broader historical processes, such as transmission, exchange, and their inscription on material and cultural landscapes.

Integration between urban history and archaeology is the core purpose of the final article in this issue. Jointly authored by two historical archaeologists and a historian, it studies an inner-city neighbourhood in Melbourne during the second half of the nineteenth century. During this period Melbourne was transformed from the frontier township that had briefly caught the speculative gaze of Montréal merchants in 1841, into a larger mercantile city than Montréal itself. This Australian case study will be interesting to Canadian readers because it is grounded in a parallel process of New World urbanization, and because Melbourne today — its population of three and a half millions roughly equivalent to that of Greater Montréal — confronts heritage assessment and conservation issues similar to those faced by big Canadian cities.[13]

"Inside Melbourne's 'Little Lon'" is presented through three cross-looped narratives. The shortest of these draws imaginatively upon events and things in order to tell stories about what might have been.[14] The second set of narratives describes the data sources that are embedded within the imaginative vignettes, and thereby provides them with a form of "provenance". The third narrative sequence, which forms the article's core, develops general arguments about historical archaeology and urban history.

Little Lon today is a vanished community. It is doubly remote to us. First, the place name triggers myths about the locality that derive from its demonisation in the past as a slum. Second, the actualities of its past physical forms have been radically reworked by commercial redevelopment and government renewal during the twentieth century. Mayne, Murray, and Lawrence argue that it is nonetheless possible to piece together an "inside" historical perspective of neighbourhood life in this marginalised community.

Their approach derives in part from the post-processural emphases of current archaeological epistemology,[15] and in part from the

application of ethnography to history.[16] The article teases out the ambiguities of meaning that derive from historical evidence, once integrating methods are fully applied so as to expand the range of historical records under examination, and to rein back methodologies that privilege certain types of evidence (and categorisations of historical significance) over others. In so doing, the authors unravel previous characterisations of Little Lon as a slum, and — by applying their arguments to one laneway within the study area — start to reconstitute the working-class households who once lived here. A complicated palimpsest is glimpsed. The archaeological and historical evidence gleaned from these house sites suggests that the urban landscapes we occupy (and sometimes study) today comprise a multi-layered and contested pastiche of diverse elements and experiences. There are research agendas here for others in a variety of disciplines to apply and extend in diverse times and places.

Notes

1. See, for example, Camille Lapointe, *Trésors et Secrets de Place-Royale: Aperçu de la collection archéologique* (Québec: Government of Québec, 1998).

2. See John Atkin, *Strathcona: Vancouver's First Neighbourhood* (Vancouver: Whitecap Books, 1994).

3. See Robin Hooper, "ASBC Participation in the Chinatown Dig, 1996", *The Midden*, 28, no. 4 (Winter 1996), 13, 20.

4. See also Hobler's overview in David Burley and Philip Hobler, "Archaeology and the British Columbia Fur Trade", *The Midden*, 29, no. 1 (Spring 1997), 2–5.

5. See Cole Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997); Peter Ennals and Deryck Holdsworth, *Homeplace: The Making of the Canadian Dwelling over Three Centuries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

6. This process has been well described by David Hamer, *New Towns in the New World: Images and Perceptions of the Nineteenth-Century Urban Frontier* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), chapter 9. See also the interesting discussion by Elizabeth Furniss, "Pioneers, Progress, and the Myth of the Frontier: the Landscape of Public History in British Columbia", *BC Studies*, 115 &116 (Autumn/Winter 1997/98), 7–44. Compare this with B.A. McKelvie, *Fort Langley: Birthplace of British Columbia* (Victoria: Porcépic Books, 1991).

7. These Australian experiences parallel the development of maritime archaeology in British Columbia. See Robyn P. Woodward, "Twenty Years of Exploration and Education: The Underwater Archaeological Society of British Columbia", *The Midden*, 28, no. 1 (Spring 1996), 5–7.

8. See Henry Glassie, *Material Culture* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 41–86.

9. Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 5, 262.

10. See the discussion of relics in David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 238–49.

11. John Porter, "Fort Langley National Historic Site: A Review of Archaeological Investigations", *The Midden*, 29, no. 1 (Spring 1997), 6–9; John Porter, Malcolm James, Karlis Karklins, Charles Bradley, Lynne Sussman, Stephen Davis, & Alison Landals, *Archaeological Investigations at Fort Langley National Historic Site, British Columbia 1986–89*, Microfiche Report Series No. 532 (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1995); Donald Steer, Helen Lemon, Linda Southwood, & John Porter, *Archaeological Investigation at Fort Langley National Historic Park, 1979*, Microfiche Report Series No. 114 (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1980); Jamie Morton, *Fort Langley: An Overview of the Operations of a Diversified Fur Trade Post 1848 to 1858 and the Physical Context in 1858*, Microfiche Report Series No. 340 (Ottawa: Parks Canada, c.1987); Mary Cullen, *The History of Fort Langley, 1827–96*, Canadian Historic Sites Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History, 22 (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1979).

12. For an overview of this collaboration, see Paul-Gaston L'Anglais, *La Recherche Archéologique en Milieu Urbain: D'une Archéologie dans la Ville vers une Archéologie de la Ville* (Québec: CELAT-Université Laval & Ville de Québec, 1994). Recent outcomes include Myriam Leclerc, *Appropriation de l'Espace et Urbanisation d'un Site de la Basse Ville de Québec: Rapport de la première campagne de fouilles à L'Îlot Hunt (1991)* (Québec: CELAT-Université Laval & Ville de Québec, 1998); Paul-Gaston L'Anglais, *Le Site de L'Îlot Hunt: Rapport de la deuxième campagne de fouilles (1992)* (Québec: CELAT-Université Laval & Ville de Québec, 1998); William Moss, Serge Rouleau, Céline Cloutier, & Catherine Fortin, *L'Archéologie de la Maison Aubert-De-La-Chesnaye à Québec* (CELAT-Université Laval, 1998).

13. See David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

14. See Adrian Praetzellis, "Introduction: Why Every Archaeologist Should Tell Stories Once in a While", *Historical Archaeology,* 32, no. 1 (1998), 1–3.

15. See Ian Hodder, Michael Shanks, Alexandra Alexandri, Victor Buchli, John Carman, Jonathan Last, & Gavin Lucas (eds.), *Interpreting Archaeology: Finding meanings in the past* (London: Routledge, 1995).

16. Useful starting points are the discussion of "Towns" in Clifford Geertz, *After the Fact: Two Countries, Four Decades, One Anthropologist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 1–20; and Greg Dening, *Performances* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996).