

Toronto's Visual Legacy: Official City Photography from 1856 to the Present Edited by Steve Mackinnon, Karen Teeple and Michele Dale

Michael Moir

Volume 103, Number 1, Spring 2011

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065487ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065487ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Moir, M. (2011). Review of [*Toronto's Visual Legacy: Official City Photography from 1856 to the Present* Edited by Steve Mackinnon, Karen Teeple and Michele Dale]. *Ontario History*, 103(1), 112–114. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065487ar>

temporaneous with the more secure commercial move of Jean Bonaventure Rousseaoux to the mouth of the Humber River. In the meantime, vicious internecine competition between various resident Amerindian groups had led to widely scattered warfare that also implicated Europeans at the raw edge between cultures. One major casualty was a group early touched by the French, the agriculturally-successful Huron or Wendat. They, along with their Jesuit missionaries, were virtually cleared from the region before the end of the seventeenth century by a powerful assault originating south of Lake Ontario.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century the importance of The Carrying Place rapidly faded as the traders and adventurers gave way to an invading phalanx concerned to secure order and ownership of land. Rousseaoux's role is superseded by the surveys, roads and fortresses of John Graves Simcoe, and Old World domesticity represented by his wife Elizabeth. Simcoe's tenure heralds a much more intense interest in the terrain of the portage, but for agricultural settlement rather than transit. The Humber River, under entrepreneurs like William Cooper, quickly developed as a power source and mill location. The outbreak of the War of 1812 raised interest temporarily in the portage to the north, and accounts of exciting conflicts particularly around Nottawasaga and the upper

lakes occupy the third last chapter. Many other personages appear before Robertson's account comes to an end, including Lord Selkirk and some of his disappointed settlers from Red River, fur trader Robert Livingston, the irascible William Lyon Mackenzie, and even Sir John Franklin. The resilient plan for a Georgian Bay Ship Canal along with The Carrying Place was paralleled and eclipsed by railways in the 1850s. The last highlight jumps ahead to the mid-twentieth century tragedy of the infamous hurricane.

These stories are very readable, but the book could benefit from a more persuasive and integrative theme. The Carrying Place does not quite do the job because its actual route and the physical considerations behind it remain ambiguous. The Nine Mile Portage is not similarly restricted. *Walking into Wilderness* is not footnoted but has a bibliographic essay that provides a good amount of detail. Before republishing, the volume should be checked for typographical errors, including some in captions. These memorable accounts related to the historic portage from the Toronto area to the upper lakes and the west could be especially meaningful for an inquisitive Ontarian, or even more so for a trail buff or canoeist who might try to follow it.

J. David Wood
York University

Toronto's Visual Legacy: Official City Photography from 1856 to the Present

Edited by Steve Mackinnon, Karen Teeple and Michele Dale. Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 2009. 192 pages. \$34.95 softcover. ISBN 978-1-55277-437-3 <www.lorimer.ca>

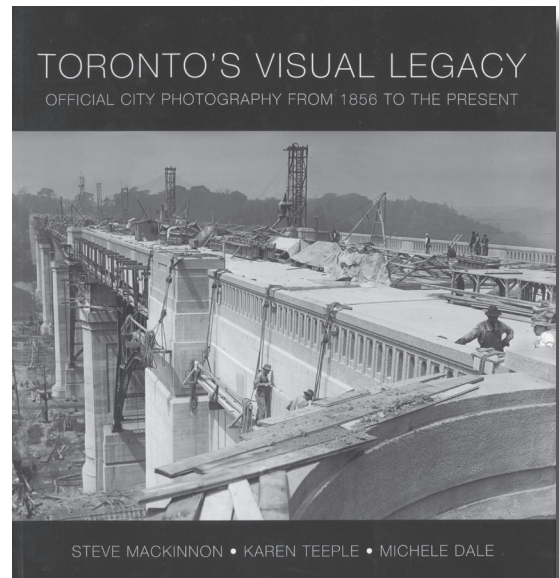
Modern life is dominated by images intended not only to inform, but also to influence the viewer. *Toronto's Visual Legacy*, a selection of almost

200 photographs from more than 300,000 images created for the City of Toronto, demonstrates that such use of imagery is not restricted to modern times. Published

to celebrate the city's 175th anniversary, the book examines the use of photography by municipal officials to document the progress of public works projects and to shape public perceptions. The result is an attractive pictorial account of Toronto's changing built and social landscape for the general reader that not only illustrates the city's growth, but also the importance of photography as an essential resource for understanding the past.

Toronto's Visual Legacy is a product of the City of Toronto Archives' exhibit program, an initiative designed to connect citizens of various ages and backgrounds with the heritage of a shared municipal environment. The authors used their combined experience of several decades working with the Archives' photographic holdings to select images based on aesthetic and informational values – the ability to tell a story as well as appeal to the eye. Photographs appear with brief but useful explanatory text. Quotations from the novels of Michael Redhill, Hugh Hood, and Michael Ondaatje add depth and texture to our understanding of the images, and hint at the ways they have shaped the authors' imaginations. The image of a pony hauling concrete, accompanied by a few sentences from *In the Skin of a Lion*, is a particularly effective example of this technique (p. 122). Five contemporary maps and plans give readers a sense of proximity while viewing the images, but more assistance in this regard would have been helpful. Key plans showing approximately where photographers stood and the direction the cameras faced would help readers place historical scenes in their understanding of the modern city.

Toronto's Visual Legacy begins with photographs taken by Armstrong, Beere & Hime in 1856 and 1857 for the City's entry in the competition to determine the capital of Canada (a contest won by Ot-



tawa). These are the earliest known images of Toronto. They feature panoramic views from the roof of the Rossin House hotel, showing streetscapes depicting the city as a bustling enterprise. Chapter Two marks the transition from freelancers, whose images began appearing in departmental reports in 1875, to an in-house service created by City Engineer Charles Rust. Photographs by his younger brother, Arthur, taken just days after the Great Fire of 1904, are some of the most moving images in the book, capturing the pall that hung over twenty acres of the devastated downtown core. A fire insurance plan with entire blocks crossed out and marked "All Gone" is particularly poignant (p. 83). Chapter Three highlights the work of Arthur Goss, Official Photographer in support of municipal departments. He gave particular attention to the work of Dr. Charles Hastings, Medical Officer of Health. Images of overcrowded and unsanitary slums, as well as initiatives such as well-baby clinics and organized recreation, were essential to the campaign for social reform through heightened public awareness.

Goss also focuses on one of Toronto's landmarks, the Prince Edward Viaduct over the Don Valley. The geometrical patterns of steel girders and effective use of perspective show the strong aesthetic values often found in engineering photographs.

The last chapter contains pictures made following the reorganization of the Works Department, when responsibility for photography fell to the Fire Department. In 1982 this function was assigned to the City Clerk's Department. The new attention given to civic events and visits by prominent individuals demanded images for press releases, posters, and public communications. Freelancers once again filled the need for documenting existing conditions and progress reports. Peter MacCallum's photographs of the dismantling of the Gardiner Expressway's eastern section in 2002 demonstrate both his artistry and the urban renewal theme running through the book.

Toronto's Visual Legacy succeeds on several levels. The photographs are printed with considerable clarity and detail, and the design allows readers to view panoramic images across two pages for maximum effect.

The book will appeal to a broad spectrum of readers who are attracted to photographs as an effective medium for connecting with a community's past. It gives a good sense of the pace and scale of change, and the role of people and projects in shaping the modern city. *Toronto's Visual Legacy* turns the tables on our standard approach to history. Photographs are not mere window-dressing; they drive a narrative of change. Readers must study the images and draw their own conclusions, mindful of the factors that caused photographers to focus their lenses on work sites, baseball games, and schools. In celebrating the city through historic images, the authors and their colleagues at the City of Toronto have created a work that should encourage others to make much more extensive use of photography to contribute to our understanding of Ontario's past and present.

Michael Moir
York University Libraries

Bibliography:

Michael Ondaatje. *In the Skin of a Lion*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987.

The Wexford: Elusive Shipwreck of the Great Storm, 1913

By Paul Carroll. Toronto: Natural Heritage Books, 2010. 328 pages. \$30.00 softcover. ISBN 978-1-55488-736-1 <www.dundurn.com>

Wexford was a steel hulled, 2,100-ton freighter that disappeared beneath the waves of Lake Huron in the Great Storm of November 1913. The tempest began November 7th on Lake Superior, but within 24 hours had apparently weakened, and many ships left their safe locations in the Sault Locks, St. Marys River and St. Clair River to try and make it to port. *Wexford* was docked in Sault Ste. Marie until the morning of November 8th and left with other ships down through the locks later that day, anchoring in Hay Lake in the after-

noon. Early November 9th *Wexford* headed out into Lake Huron with its load of 96,000 bushels of grain, destined for Goderich. Unfortunately it was not long before the weather again deteriorated, leading to blizzard conditions including hurricane force winds, snow squalls and rapidly falling temperatures over the entire Great Lakes basin: a "White Hurricane." The weather calmed significantly again on November 10th and by the 11th people along the shores of the Great Lakes began dealing with the aftermath. *Wexford* had vanished. With the aid