

According to Baba: A Collaborative Oral History of Sudbury's Ukrainian Community by Stacey Zembrzycki

Michel S. Beaulieu

Volume 106, Number 2, Fall 2014

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1050703ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050703ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Beaulieu, M. S. (2014). Review of [*According to Baba: A Collaborative Oral History of Sudbury's Ukrainian Community* by Stacey Zembrzycki]. *Ontario History*, 106(2), 280–282. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050703ar>

According to Baba

A Collaborative Oral History of Sudbury's Ukrainian Community

By Stacey Zembrzycki

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014. 252 pages. \$ 95.00 hard-cover. ISBN: 978-0-77482-695-2 (www.ubcpress.ca)

According to Baba is a multilayered work, both captivating and thought provoking in terms of its content and analysis. Stacey Zembrzycki provides a welcome examination of a region largely ignored by historians, fulfilling a shameful gap in Canadian historiography. Her work is also a captivating exploration of the issues surrounding community evolution and development and is a much-needed rigorous “reflection on how oral history theory takes shape in practice” (p. 18).

According to Baba also accomplishes what is increasingly rare in scholarly work: the reader is embraced and allowed to share in the (re)discovery of the history of Sudbury's Ukrainian community during the first half of the twentieth century, through a rigorous analysis that is at the same time intensely personal. It is an analysis teased out through her constant dialogue, reflection, and self-effacing sharing of her relationship with her Baba (Ukrainian for grandmother) throughout the project.

What is produced is an honest and frank discussion of oral history practice through Zembrzycki's own attempt to understand those stories heard throughout her life that held a special importance for both herself and her Baba (p. 19). As Zembrzycki rightly points out, the book is the “first of its kind to thoroughly examine the Ukrainian Canadian experience outside of Western Canada” (p. 20). It is also one of the relatively rare accounts that is not pur-

posefully limited to the “narrow elitist and organizational agendas” that dominate the literature (p. 20).

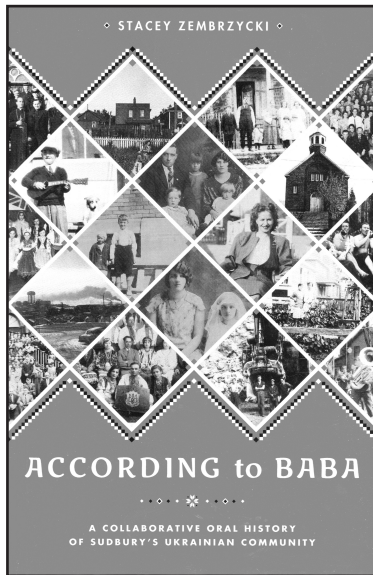
The introduction, rather than being merely a stale outline of how her work fits within the larger literature, is an engaging and thought provoking contribution. Using concepts in the work of authors such as Alessandro Portelli and Pamela Sugiman, Zembrzycki undertakes a self-analysis of how the project evolved from a standard social history of Sudbury's Ukrainian community between 1901 to 1939 to a dialogue and discourse on oral history and the issues of shared authority. As Zembrzycki herself comments, the end result is not “a conventional oral history but a reflective one that seeks to place practice and process at the centre of the discussion” (p. 3).

Zembrzycki's approach is reflected in how *According to Baba* is organized. The first four chapters, organized both chronologically and thematically, trace the evolution of Sudbury's Ukrainian Community from the turn of the century to the brink of the Second World War. We are guided through how the community was built (Chapter 1), solidified (Chapter 2), contested (Chapter 3), and cultivated (Chapter 4). Each revolves around a significant period in its evolution, a narrative constructed from the experiences shared by those Zembrzycki interviewed and through the dialogue with her Baba. One of the most interesting elements of these chapters is how Sudbury's Ukrainians lived through the depression, and their reflections on the period decades later.

The final chapter ties everything together. Baba's Sudbury is not so much “dissected” as the entire project is reflected upon in an attempt, as Zembrzycki writes, “to bring a sense of closure to the project and to discuss the very particular circumstances in which the interview took place”

(p. 128). Discussed, at times in dialogue format, are Zembrzycki and her Baba's own interview stories both in the weeks following the final interviews and three years later when she herself delved into coming to terms with the project's methodology (p. 130). The chapter is structured around Zembrzycki's desire to "engage with the materiality of her past," and much of it based on a walking interview she and her Baba took on the streets of the Donovan area that were the subject of many of the interviews and discussions.

It is fitting that the book, much like the project, comes full circle in what is a perfect example of renowned oral/public historian Michael Frisch's notion of shared authority and analytical reflection. Much of Frisch's work, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft And Meaning of Oral and Public History* (1990) chief among them, makes the case that "more may be learned from studying the process than from a focus on the position to which it has brought us" (p. xv). *According to Baba* certainly accomplishes this goal. However, Zembrzycki goes further and deeper. Sharing Frisch's emphasis on the need to make oral history more of a democratic cultural practice (p. 7), she has also mobilized the knowledge acquired in her project in an accompanying online component. The website www.sudburyukrainians.ca allows for a greater exploration of the various social networks and themes found in the book by providing open access to the textual, audio, and visual resources that form the core of *According to*



Baba. Of particular note are the sections "Web of Stories" and "Memoryscape." For those who find themselves in Sudbury, a historical walking tour of the Donovan area of Sudbury, complete with associated audio files and a guide, can be downloaded as a package.

We are taught that balanced reviews need to be critical of some aspect of even the best works. The only drawbacks to *According to Baba*, if they are drawbacks, are ones

that Zembrzycki herself identifies and ones she can hardly be faulted on. Historians are, after all, beholden to the source material available. The history of ethnic communities, particularly in the early half of the twentieth century in relatively remote resource- industry heavy regions in places such as Northern Ontario, are difficult at the best of times. The vast majority of the participants were connected through the Catholic Church. As Zembrzycki herself discusses, the various other Ukrainian communities in the region-Orthodox, progressive, and nationalist, have largely disappeared.

According to Baba is more than just a scholarly contribution to the field. The reader is engaged at one level by Zembrzycki's narrative and, at another and more personal one, by her style and approach. At first, I was tempted to write that the "star" of the work is her Baba. And certainly once I had finished reading the book, I found myself not only wanting to hear more of Baba's stories but also wanting to meet this incredible woman.

It is through the love and intimacy that Zembrzycki brings to the work – the sharing of the relationship between her and her Baba as they jointly explore their shared history – that is perhaps the most remarka-

ble aspect of *According to Baba*. Historians can learn a lot from this work.

Michel S. Beaulieu
Lakehead University

William Henry Harrison and the Conquest of the Ohio Country

By David Curtis Skaggs.

Baltimore; John Hopkins University Press, 2014. 303 pp. \$44.95 (U.S.) hardcover. ISBN 978-1-42140-546-9 (www.press.jhu.edu)

William Henry Harrison has an undisputed legacy as the ninth U.S. president, having died shortly after taking office. In this book, David Curtis Skaggs examines his career prior to that time, with emphasis on the battles of Tippecanoe and the Thames. Given his previous works related to the old Northwest (the region south of the upper Great Lakes), Skaggs is well versed on his topic.

From his early years, Harrison was driven by ambition and, as a young “peach-fuzzed, abstemious, gentrified and intellectually curious ensign” (p. 26), he stood out in an officer corps “filled with incompetent, intoxicated, illiterate, and ineffective men” (p. 8). Serving under “Mad” Anthony Wayne he gained valuable experience in frontier fighting, before turning to politics, becoming governor of Indiana Territory at the age of twenty-eight. In this role, he had to rationalize the “paradox” [in a national policy] of “honourable Native treatment” (p. 55) with his role in negotiating away millions of acres of their

land (p. 59). This relentless encroachment resulted in Tecumseh’s indignant response that as Native lands were held in common, they could only be given away by common consent. Harrison dealt with this threat by scattering Tecumseh’s followers at the battle of Tippecanoe and “For the following two years the struggle in the Ohio Country revolved around Harrison and Tecumseh” (p. 73), the consequence of “Indian intransigence, British connivance, and American expansion” (p. 32).

In 1812, Hull’s surrender of Detroit and Brock’s cession of Michigan Territory presented Harrison with “new opportunities” (p. 83) as commander of the Northwest Army. Despite two additional major reverses at the Raisin River (Frenchtown) and near Fort Meigs (Dudley’s defeat), Harrison persisted. But after the U.S. naval victory on Lake Erie, he roundly defeated the Anglo-Native force at the battle of the Thames where Tecumseh was killed. Although this first significant American land victory of

