

## *Toronto: Biography of a City* by Allan Levine

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[See table of contents](#)

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and staff, and, as any northerner would have understood, of the patience and intelligence required in their relationships with their dogs, animals which ensured their survival.

Students might have welcomed a bibliography which collated the many scholarly references in the footnotes and introductions, and the account could also have benefitted from some reflections on the Manitoba missions as one small part of the global expansion of European Christianity that accompanied the 'Great Land Rush'. The absence of much editorial comment on the twin goals of Christianity and civilization will be puzzling to some. And to others, perhaps some notes on the continuing strong presence of Indigenous Christianity in both communities, and, indeed, of the work of the Rev. Stan

Mackay of Norway House, the first Indigenous Moderator of the United Church of Canada, might have been appropriate.

But the vivid pictures the primary documents offer will remain with the reader. How better to understand the unspoken practices of colonialism than to read of the journey of the portrait of Queen Victoria to its place of honour in the mission. And how better to encounter Cree and Ojibwe family life than to read of the food sharing, the winter travel accounts, the tenderness of Mary for the Young's son, and the teaching him of "what is good" by Jackoos, who convinced the Youngs to 'lend me your boy'.

Jean Friesen,  
University of Manitoba

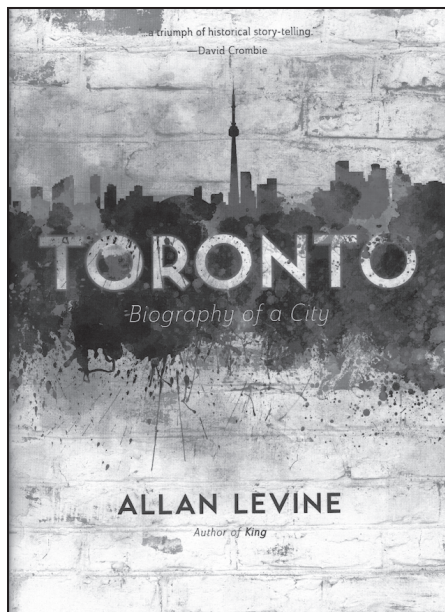
## *Toronto: Biography of a City*

By Allan Levine

Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 2014. 496 pages. \$36.95 hardcover. ISBN 978-1-77100-022-2. [www.douglas-mcintyre.com](http://www.douglas-mcintyre.com))

Toronto—a city that has, in recent years, produced scores of books exploring its architecture, cultural diversity, literature, music, art, neighbourhoods and political economy—has, oddly, produced only a very few wide-ranging works tracing the broad terrain of its history. Exceptions include Reverend Henry Scadding's *Toronto of Old* (a chatty account of Toronto's early years, first published in 1873), Eric Arthur's *No Mean City* (currently on its third updated edition since appearing in 1964), William Kilbourn's *Toronto Remembered* (1984), James Morris Careless's *Toronto to 1918* (1984) and James Lemon's *Toronto Since 1918* (1985). All have remained classic reference works, in large part because there has been no comprehensive history to replace them.

Urban historian Allan Levine's *Toronto:*



*A Biography* brings readers up to date on the city's recent history, while adding valuable analytical depth to the preceding period. Cast as a "popular-style "biography" offering "a selective, sometimes arbitrary, chronicle of To-

ronto's character in all of its different forms and contexts" (4), Levine's book is in fact an authoritative account of Toronto's development from its Aboriginal pre-history to its contemporary identity as an "Alpha City," a well-connected centre of global trade. From the spattered sidewalks of "Muddy York" to the congested freeways of the T-Dot, Levine weaves the city's formative events—including the Toronto Purchase, the American invasion during the War of 1812-14, the Mackenzie-led Rebellion of 1837 that ultimately unseated Upper Canada's oligarchical Family Compact, successive waves of immigration that have simultaneously divided and enriched the city, surging suburbanization, the creation of Metropolitan Toronto and its era of big projects, the rise to prominence of Toronto-focused print and digital media and the unwanted amalgamation that nonetheless made Toronto into a Megacity—into a compelling narrative of a city grown fat on good fortune.

Levine's "biography" is a rich, well-researched, engagingly written history, rife with fascinating detail and nuance that (to the undoubted delight of non-Toronto readers) occasionally pokes at points of particular local pride. His recounting of the Toronto purchase, for example, underscores the extent of the misrepresentation colonial administrators brought to their dealings with the Mississauga. Of the bungled 1787 deal, which resulted in an Aboriginal land claim not settled until 2010, Levine observes laconically, "The deal had holes in it, however. The official documents were incomplete, and there was no actual description of the land that had been purchased" (17).

The often celebrated William Lyon Mackenzie, whom Levine describes as "the most polarizing and misunderstood figure in Canadian history" (46), in part because his zeal for reform waxed and waned according to whether he himself had been elected, turns out to have a few things in common

with one contemporary but no less controversial political figure: ex-mayor Rob Ford. Of Mackenzie's term as mayor, Levine writes, "Toronto in 1834 needed a mayor who could tackle the city's debt problem, fix its muddy streets, and skillfully manage a council intent on arguing more than actually accomplishing anything substantial. Mackenzie's inclination was to act in the same dictatorial fashion he had accused the Tories of" while using "the patronage at his disposal for a variety of civic posts to get rid of his conservative opponents and reward his Reform friends." (52)

The strongest and most vivid sections of the book are those engaging with Toronto's long immigrant history and the struggles of new arrivals, regularly viewed with suspicion by those who preceded them. Particular virulence was reserved for the mostly Catholic refugees of the famines in Ireland in the late 1840s, deemed "unaccustomed to the habits and occupations of Canadians" (75) and "as ignorant and vicious as they are poor" (77), and Jews fleeing poverty and pogroms in Eastern Europe. Seething anti-Semitism festered for decades and peaked in the 1930s, by which time, as Levine writes, "there were areas of the city where Jews were not able to rent or buy houses" and "[i]t was as if the increased tension caused by the Depression left no room for tolerance" (166). The Christie Pits riot of August 1933—an hours-long melee following the unfurling of a Swastika flag at a baseball game—epitomized the ongoing tensions. Similar sentiments were directed at Toronto's black residents, who experienced formal employment and housing discrimination through the 1950s, and continue, as Levine documents, to be singled out disproportionately by police.

Levine's account of the city's spatial and economic expansion, particularly during the post-Second World War period when, "acting methodically and always with great debate, politicians, technocrats, social reformers, en-

trepreneurs, real estate tycoons, and planning visionaries, for better or for worse, reinvented Toronto with social housing projects, super-highways, sprawling suburbs, and shopping plazas” (199), underscores the reality that contemporary debates over development have a long and messy history in Toronto.

These discussions, while absorbing, point to a shortcoming in Levine’s narrative approach: if Toronto is personified as a biographical persona, it is clearly male. From Simcoe to Art Eggleton, Mackenzie to Ford, George Brown to Conrad Black, and “Big Daddy” Gardiner to Megacity Mel Lastman, those credited with shaping the city’s destiny are nearly all men. Even renowned urbanist Jane Jacobs, whom Levine does credit in a chapter titled “Jane’s Disciples,” is shunted aside in favour of a discussion of the longstanding acrimony between John Sewell and Paul Godfrey. We know Toronto best in its early days through the diary of Elizabeth Simcoe, but it is her husband’s declaration, “Here let there be a city,” that Levine emphasizes. In other places women are reduced to their supportive and occasionally biological roles: population growth in the city’s early years is credited to “the prolific nature of York’s women, who married young and quickly thereafter had lots of children” (28). Levine does note that by the 1970s “talented female journalists, and other women, were breaking through barriers,” but adds that “the only women who truly seemed to count... were the wealthy wives of the city’s

business elite” (273)—and immediately devotes paragraphs to them.

Similarly, Levine’s resolutely chronological structure, which means that fascinating subjects (particularly those dealing with immigration, social conditions and the conditions of everyday life) are introduced, dropped and returned to, is somewhat disjointed. This is especially unfortunate given that these analyses are Levine’s strongest and most innovative (particularly outstanding are an account of Thornton and Lucie Blackburn, ex-slaves who successfully ran the city’s first taxi company, and discussions of the immigrant “slums” of Corktown and St. John’s Ward). A more thematic approach might have improved the book’s continuity and highlighted the originality of Levine’s reporting.

Levine concludes by invoking Toronto’s status as an “Alpha City”—a term aptly underscoring the city’s identity not only as a confident (some might say arrogant) centre, capable of throwing its economic weight around, but also as a place where something new is always unfolding. As Levine shows in this rich and fascinating book, beginnings are what have always drawn people to Toronto: the sense of possibility, the promise of growth.

Amy Lavender Harris,  
Award-winning author of *Imagining Toronto*  
(Mansfield Press)

## *Consumers in the Bush* *Shopping in Rural Upper Canada*

By Douglas McCalla

Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2015. Xiv+296 pp. \$100.00 hard-cover. ISBN 978-0-77354-499-4. \$ 34.95 softcover. ISBN 978-0-77354-500-7

Here is a book which offers in extraordinary detail the consequences of pursuing a very simple idea. Upper Canadian

general stores, like all small businesses, kept careful business accounts. Each store kept a day book, a record of every transaction made