

Scientia Canadensis

Canadian Journal of the History of Science, Technology and Medicine
Revue canadienne d'histoire des sciences, des techniques et de la médecine

Scientia
Canadensis

Shaped by the West Wind: Nature and History in Georgian Bay. By Claire Elizabeth Campbell. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005. xvii + 282 p., ill., notes, bibl., index. ISBN 0-7748-1098-X hc. \$85; 0-7748-1099-8 pb. \$29.95)

Neil S. Forkey

Volume 30, Number 1, 2007

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/800528ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/800528ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

CSTHA/AHSTC

ISSN

0829-2507 (print)

1918-7750 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Forkey, N. S. (2007). Review of [*Shaped by the West Wind: Nature and History in Georgian Bay.* By Claire Elizabeth Campbell. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005. xvii + 282 p., ill., notes, bibl., index. ISBN 0-7748-1098-X hc. \$85; 0-7748-1099-8 pb. \$29.95)]. *Scientia Canadensis*, 30(1), 91–93.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/800528ar>

Copyright © Canadian Science and Technology Historical Association /
Association pour l'histoire de la science et de la technologie au Canada, 2007

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

Érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

General / Général

***Shaped by the West Wind: Nature and History in Georgian Bay.* By Claire Elizabeth Campbell.** (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005. xvii + 282 p., ill., notes, bibl., index. ISBN 0-7748-1098-X hc. \$85; 0-7748-1099-8 pb. \$29.95)

“Our reaction to Georgian Bay,” writes Claire Elizabeth Campbell, “reveals our ideas about nature, but at the same time, the landscape itself shapes these ideas” (p. 2). Thus captures the essence of what might appear to be an introspective, regional, even microscopic study. Yet, it is anything but. Instead, Campbell utilizes a small canvas, studying a region within a province, to paint a much grander portrait of the intersection of nature, human perceptions, and national myths. The result is a tour-de-force of environmental and public history that inaugurates the University of British Columbia Press series “Nature/History/Society.” The series editor, Graeme Wynn, also provides the forward to this volume.

Campbell’s brilliant book helps to confirm that nowadays we can write of not merely of the robust state of Canadian environmental history, but also of the well-integrated environmental history of Canada’s most populated province, Ontario. Separately, J. David Wood and I contribute to an understanding of the relationship between people and place in the early nineteenth century, especially as it relates to the populating of early Ontario. Patricia Jasen addresses the reasons for the province’s success as a tourist and traveler destination. Margaret Beattie Bogue maps the rise and decline of the international fishery of the Great Lakes. W. R. and N. M. Wightman explain why northwestern Ontario lingered as a resource frontier into the twentieth century, while Jean Manore documents the ebb and flow of hydroelectric development in the northeastern half of the province. Gerald Killan and George Warecki plot the advent of the wilderness movement, especially as it relates to provincial parks. Jennifer Read compliments those writing on late-twentieth century topics in her pioneering work on Pollution Probe, one of the first environmental groups to gain attention during the 1960s. Campbell’s book contributes to this growing body of literature.

Writing the history of a place, a region, or a bioregion has useful applications in any national narrative. Here Campbell situates Georgian Bay not merely as a well-known vacation destination, but as a link within

the province to wider pan-Canadian themes. In between, the economic, social, and cultural links to the nation-state are plumbed. Chapters one to three, for example, respectively take up the politics of cartography, the niche occupied by those living at and working the bay's resources, and the changing images of Aboriginal and Amerindian Peoples who have inhabited the region. In this range of chapters, Campbell especially shines in her discussion of Samuel de Champlain's exaggeration of the bay as a conduit to the west. In his 1632 depiction, the bay appears larger than it should, and in keeping with the motivation behind such initial, imperialistic interpretations, he showcases the supplies of staple wealth as well as the rough political territories of the French allies and foes. Subsequent cartographers, however, such as those of the early nineteenth century, took a far different tact: the bay was more an obstacle than an encouragement to westward movement. Indeed, they argued against the imagined east-west axis of Champlain's *mer Douce*, stressing alternate routes that by-passed the rocky shores.

Even to the Victorian mind, so often infused with the belief that science and technology could conquer all, the bay served no useful purpose as a transportation and communication route, save for the freighters that ferried grain across the upper Great Lakes. This near deindustrialization of the bay in the national consciousness gave rise to the vacationing trade that still sparks interest. That the bay was for so long written off as the domain of rock, pine, brisk winds, and of sparse year-long inhabitation, it was not surprising those tourists and travelers seeking the picturesque or sublime (to coin Romantic-era terminology) would find value in the region's rustic-ness. It is in this context that the bay itself was fragmented yet again, between the harsh northern Canadian Shield and the more welcoming, prosaic coastal inlets of the southern shore.

Modernization of rail and shipping links to other provincial and Great Lakes centres by the latter nineteenth century helped to promote fishing and lumbering enterprises; yet, the true anchor of the region's economy was to be found in the vacation trade. An Ojibwa presence seemed to add a certain rugged exoticism that meshed well with the Euro-Canadian vision of primal wilderness: a distant, isolated place that railed against intrusions from the outside. As Campbell notes, "[t]his identification between an intractable wilderness and an uncivilized people became even more entrenched over the course of the nineteenth century. Georgian Bay and its Native inhabitants came to symbolize the antithesis of civilization for Upper Canada" (p. 98).

Comparatively, the three subsequent chapters focus upon what she refers to as the "culture of an inland sea," the pull of Georgian Bay upon cultural arbiters such as artists and writers, and finally the past and

contemporary strategies to protect the beauty that is so crucial to the lucrative vacation trade. Northern-ness, Campbell reminds us, is an adjective used to symbolize Canada, and the roots of this thinking are also to be found in Georgian Bay. Alexander Young Jackson, Arthur Lismer, James E. H. MacDonald, Frederick Horsman Varley, and Frank Carmichael of the Group of Seven painters, chose settings around the bay to position Canada as a nation and people both confronting the harshness of the land and elements, and living triumphantly among such scenes. This use of the region as a national icon, the promotion of a myth of survival and success is underscored well by Campbell in her mélange of local versus outside perceptions of the place. Literary giants such as Margaret Atwood and Douglas LePan plied similar themes in framing what have become (accurately or inaccurately) lasting impressions of Canadians and non-Canadians of the country.

Readers of this journal will likely be impressed by Campbell's discourse on cartography, the history of transportation systems, and reflections upon architectural designs that speak to the roughness of Georgian Bay. Overall, however, the greatest contribution of this volume is to our greater understanding of the stories that we tell about such places as Georgian Bay, and the stories that kindred places tell to us. Claire Campbell has written a remarkable, place-based narrative that will serve as a model for such future study.

NEIL S. FORKEY
St. Lawrence University