

Creating Colonial Pasts: History, Memory, and Commemoration in Southern Ontario, 1860-1980 by Cecilia Morgan

Ross Fair

Volume 108, numéro 2, fall 2016

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1050602ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050602ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (imprimé)

2371-4654 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Fair, R. (2016). Compte rendu de [*Creating Colonial Pasts: History, Memory, and Commemoration in Southern Ontario, 1860-1980* by Cecilia Morgan]. *Ontario History*, 108(2), 266–268. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1050602ar>

In the series, Timothy Kent brings together a genealogy project more than forty years in the making to tell the stories of people engaged in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century fur trade. He does so by intertwining family history with some academic resources and with the lived experience of a fur trade enthusiast and reenactor. He has “immersed” himself in the physical past from a very different physical present, often overlooking environmental and physical changes that have occurred over time (9). These subtleties tinge an ambitious undertaking with nostalgia, undermining the final product of Kent’s life’s work. *Phantoms of the French Fur Trade* is a wonderful contribution to fur trade his-

tory in that it approaches the subject from a personal perspective, drawing readers in to the details of Kent’s family trees that he has lovingly reconstructed through archival research and travel, with careful attention to the details of ancestors’ lives and experiences.

Stacy Nation-Knapper, Ph.D.
Assistant Director, Academic Support
Center, Rochester Institute of Technology

¹ Guillaume Teasdale and Tangi Villerbu, eds. *Une Amérique française, 1760-1860: dynamiques du corridor créole*. Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2015. While the book covers the century following Kent’s work, chapters include contextualization of events occurring while his subjects lived.

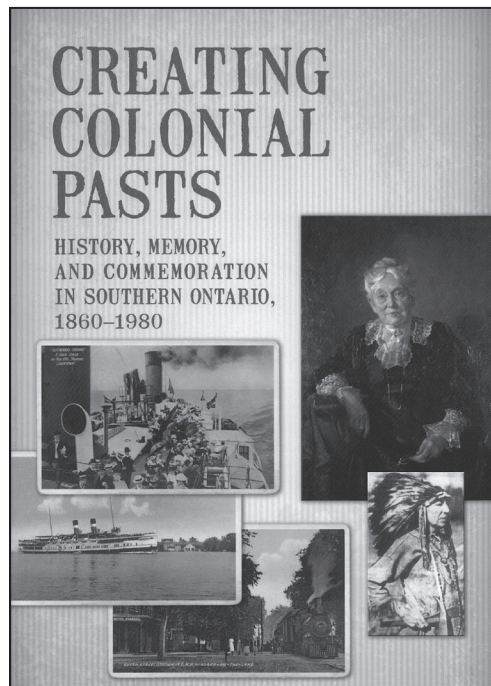
Creating Colonial Pasts

History, Memory, and Commemoration in Southern Ontario, 1860-1980

by Cecilia Morgan

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015.
217 pages. \$70.00 hardcover. ISBN 978-1-4426-4837. \$32.95 softcover. ISBN 978-1-4426-2615-7. \$32.95 ebook. ISBN 978-1-4426-1683-7 <www.utppublishing.com>

Creating Colonial Pasts is not your typical book, a characteristic that Cecilia Morgan acknowledges right from the beginning. By way of four examples drawn from Southern Ontario, Morgan “explores the ways in which individuals and groups struggled to define themselves and their contexts through the medium of historical narratives.”⁽¹⁰⁾ Chapters are formed by reflections selected from Morgan’s career researching the breadth and depth of the archival record pertaining to Ontario’s



past. As she explains, her examples are drawn from webs of connections that, on occasion, have led her away from her core research. In this collection, she sets forth

an analysis that highlights that these webs are significant subjects of study. Ontarions who have otherwise been described as “local”, “amateur”, or “native” were, she asserts, grappling with history in complex and inclusive ways to create narratives of the past to employ for present purposes and for the benefit of future generations.

In her opening chapter, Morgan explores the historical interests and output of Niagara-on-the-Lake resident Janet Carnochan during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Carnochan provides a prime illustration of an individual negotiating the colonial past, for this schoolteacher made it her life’s purpose to raise awareness of Niagara’s past by collecting and exhibiting the region’s material past and by recording and publishing many of the institutional, state, wartime, and family stories of its early residents. Morgan examines how Carnochan and others assembled and exhibited the Niagara Historical Museum collection in Niagara-on-the-Lake’s Memorial Hall. Morgan also analyzes the wide range of individuals and issues Carnochan considered in her compendium history of the area, *History of Niagara* (1914). In doing so, Morgan provides rich evidence to support her claim that Carnochan “believed passionately in the need to anchor the Niagara landscape in the past, one that she believed was all around her and her fellow-townfolk...” (172).

For the next two chapters, Morgan shifts her focus to the Six Nations of Grand River. First, she employs the examples of Elliott Moses and Milton Martin. By way of their roles on the reserve and their involvement in institutions and organizations beyond the reserve, both had opportunity to reflect on the Native existence in mid-twentieth century Canada. Morgan explores how each individual “targeted the rhetoric of the nation-state” (89) in differing ways,

but how each rooted his position within a consideration of the past as he tried to make sense of the local Native experience and the Native experience within the “binaries of ‘white’ versus ‘Indian’” (90) of the Canadian nation state. For each, Morgan argues, “History embodied multiple, sometimes entangled, forms of desire and held a range of meaning...” (173). Next, Morgan draws on the records of Celia B. File, another schoolteacher, who wrote a narrative of her time living and teaching on the Tyendinaga reserve near Deseronto during the 1920s. Morgan explores File’s assertion that she felt more at home on the reserve than elsewhere, and considers how her views informed the MA thesis she wrote about Molly Brant while at Queen’s University in the 1930s. In File’s mostly forgotten records, Morgan suggests, we are able to see “the possibility that relationships between indigenous and settler women could be registered in a different key.” (111)

In her final chapter, Morgan returns to the world of Niagara-on-the-Lake. This time, she looks at ways in which generations of local groups and individuals “laboured to produce the town as a tourist attraction and to create for it an identity that managed and married landscape, history, and culture.” (113) She provides a fascinating analysis of the multilayered considerations of history, economic potential, and the physical, social, cultural and political landscapes that needed to be navigated in order to formulate plans for honouring Niagara-on-the-Lake’s past, with the aim to market it as desirable a tourist destination to Canadians and Americans. In this practical example of creating a colonial past, Morgan provides a case study of the competing, conflicting, and overlapping uses of the past that local citizens, local businesses, provincial and federal officials, and others employed to construct Niagara-

on-the-Lake's identity and its future. As a true bookend to her work, Morgan takes time to wonder how Janet Carnochan might have reacted to the twenty-first-century version of this tourist town.

Although *Creating Colonial Pasts* is “not a monograph” (3), there are important ways in which this publication could be more like a traditional book. First, Morgan's consideration of “Southern Ontario” is mostly limited to Niagara-on-the-Lake and the Six Nations of the Grand River, with only one chapter centered on the more easterly Tyendinaga reserve. While Morgan does provide solid reasoning for avoiding local historians already covered in other studies, plus good reasons to not consider contemporary historians who lived in Ontario's large urban centres, in the end, the collection begs for a few more examples, particularly from the eastern and western reaches of the province with similar early experiences of colonial settlement. What about Franco-Ontarions who created their colonial past within the settler and indigenous considerations of the past that she explores? Morgan's examples in this volume may be “threads” (4) pulled

from her previous research, but one or two new case studies would have rounded out and strengthened her analysis in important ways. One also has to wonder why this set of reflections was published without any bibliography, when its specific purpose seeks to illuminate the significance of local historians and the local history they wrote, plus the webs of connections that fan out across the archival record.

Nevertheless, none of these shortcomings should overshadow the contribution Morgan has made in this study or her masterful writing and analysis. She aims to “examine the formation of historical memory and the use of historical knowledge in Southern Ontario...” (3) and she accomplishes this task by providing a compelling framework for analysis. More importantly, her study provides a roadmap for others to explore underutilized collections stored within the local archives across the province—eastern, western, southern, and northern—and their unexplored webs of connections.

Ross Fair
Ryerson University

HEART OF THE GREAT LAKES
Lake Huron and the Saugeen to 1850



Robin R. Hilborn

Heart of the Great Lakes
– *Lake Huron and*
the Saugeen to 1850

by Robin R. Hilborn

Southampton, Ontario: Family Helper Publishing,
2015. 212 pages. \$40.00 hardcover. ISBN 978-0-
9809468-7-1 (www.familyhelper.net/huron)

Oh the challenges of writing a *good* local history book! I'm sure all of us have seen or even own (but simply don't want to admit we do) such weighty tomes of 400-500 pages, that tell every single