

Wellington County By Fred Dahms

Karen Dearlove

Volume 101, numéro 1, spring 2009

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065685ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065685ar>

[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

Dearlove, K. (2009). Compte rendu de [*Wellington County* By Fred Dahms]. *Ontario History*, 101(1), 115–116. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065685ar>

regarding this shift.

Overall I find *A Silent Revolution* an intriguing addition to Canadian historical geography and a text that would be fascinating for exploration at higher levels of undergraduate or graduate classroom study. This text would be invaluable to those seeking to explore aspects of historical change in Hamilton and Victoria, as Baskerville's meticulous attention to records of the time communicates a vast amount of detail. Still, I find

this volume most significant in its broader contributions to understanding historical gendered identities. Baskerville's findings provide an intriguing examination of women's identities as property owners, and of the shifts in laws and governance that influenced the ability of women to conduct themselves as people in control of wealth.

Glenna Harris,
McMaster University

Wellington County

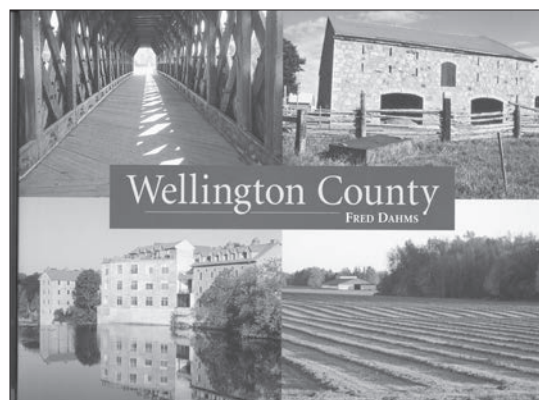
By Fred Dahms

Erin: Boston Mills Press, 2008. 158 pages. \$39.95
hardcover.

ISBN 1-55046-502-3 (www.bostonmillspress.com)

Fred Dahms' interest and background in geography is evident throughout the readable text and abundance of lavish photographs in *Wellington County*. A founding member of the University of Guelph's Department of Geography, Dahms' enthusiasm and appreciation for his subject is clear. Author of several non-academic books exploring the history and geography that characterizes the small communities and landscapes of Canada, Dahms' newest work is a treat for amateur historians and geographers, as well as residents of Wellington County or day-trippers searching for an afternoon's adventure.

Dahms begins with the natural environment, exploring the ancient geographic development of the area and the impact of water and stone on the settlement of Wellington County. From the gorges on the Grand River, to Luther Marsh and the kettle lake at Puslinch, Dahms clearly describes the natural history and heritage. He explains how settlers exploited these natural features, by harnessing the power of water for mills or quarrying limestone for building material and gravel. *Wellington County* also addresses



the impact of the human exploitation on the natural environment—the intensification of the annual flooding throughout the watershed, for instance—and responses, such as building dams for flood control along the major waterways.

The second chapter is devoted to the architectural history of stone building in the county, especially the abundance of limestone structures in Guelph and Fergus. Dahms' text reads like heritage walking tours of these communities, highlighting the significant architectural treasures as well as providing tidbits of historical background. Throughout this chapter he links the past with the present, providing stories and examples of how cherished and well-preserved historical buildings have been transformed for new uses. The Wellington County Mu-

seum and Archives, for example, inhabits an impressive building originally constructed as the Wellington County Home of Industry and Refuge, a poorhouse.

Dahms explores the rural landscape of Wellington County through case studies of present agricultural endeavours. In one he examines the history of the family farm at Blythwood, from its beginnings in 1863 to the present day. Other examples look at what Dahms calls “modern pioneers,” like the Blue Haven Farm, a hobby farm in Eramosa Township. As with his previous chapters, this one links the past to the present by highlighting the agricultural history of the area, including the Mennonite heritage and the University of Guelph’s School of Agriculture, and by lamenting the decline in family farms in recent years.

Three chapters concentrate on the built communities in Wellington County, starting with a chapter-long portrait of Guelph. While the text goes back and forth between past and present, the majority of content highlights the modern city, its buildings and amenities. The neighbouring rival communities of Elora and Fergus are presented in a single chapter. Dahms contrasts Elora, heavily dependent on tourism, with Fergus, which still has an industrial base. In both cases he praises efforts to preserve historic buildings for modern uses, a persistent theme throughout the book. The chapter titled “Mill Towns, Historic Villages and Ghost Towns” is especially interesting for the backyard tourist. Even those readers familiar with Wellington County will find stories about settlements that have long since disappeared—places they may have never heard of before. Dahms presents several reasons for the decline of these communities, including the beginning of rural mail delivery in 1911, the influx of motor vehicles and paved roads, and the general decline of industry in once-thriving mill towns.

Chapter seven, “Arts and Artisans in Wellington County,” seems somewhat out of place in this otherwise cohesive volume. However, tourists to the county, as well as backyard tourists, may find the information useful and enjoyable.

Dahms’ conclusion, “Towards a Sustainable Future,” brings together the themes explored throughout the book. He again laments family farms threatened by agribusiness, highlighting the environmental hazards posed by pesticide and chemical run-off. Urban sprawl, sewage treatment, landfill sites, water supply, and urban congestion are all modern problems that threaten the communities of Wellington County. Yet Dahms does not paint an overwhelmingly gloomy picture of the future. He praises provincial and municipal plans that address these growth issues. He lauds local conservation authorities that preserve natural environments, and make efforts to preserve the built heritage. Concerned citizens, Dahms explains, are the key to preserving the history and natural heritage of the area.

Wellington County is both a visually beautiful book and an insightful one. Although it may be of limited use for academic historians, it might serve as a starting place for researching some of the interesting stories of Wellington County, especially the long-deserted “ghost towns.” Dahms includes a bibliography of his sources to guide further research. But for amateur historians and geographers it is an excellent example of a well-researched book of local interest that is both readable and knowledgeable. It is especially of interest for those wishing to explore Wellington County for the first time, or local citizens looking to learn more about their own communities.

Karen Dearlove
McMaster University