

Book Reviews

Sites of Power: A Concise History of Ontario. PETER A. BASKERVILLE.
Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2005. 296 p. ISBN 0-19-541892-1.

The cover of Peter Baskerville's short history of Ontario is a striking 1929 photograph of five well-dressed people engaged in discussion against a backdrop of a steam locomotive and the gigantic Algoma Steel industrial complex. The photograph conveys an important aspect of the province's historical development and encapsulates the substance of Baskerville's book; namely, the centrality of power in its many forms that has largely defined the province from early European settlement to the present. As anyone who has studied Ontario history can attest, it is a story that is frequently framed around power. To ignore Ontario's prominent place within Confederation (and the role of prominent Ontarians in bringing it about), its industrial might, its economic clout, its geographical advantages, its large area and population relative to the rest of the country, and so on, is to ignore the fundamental elements of the province's past. Appropriately, the cover photograph is contrasted opposite the frontispiece with a 1915 image of a poverty-stricken woman, reminding readers that not everyone benefited from Ontario's prosperity and standing within Canada. In this regard, Baskerville's treatment of the province's past is a solid and balanced account of both those who wielded power, and the many people who struggled (with various degrees of success) within social, economic, and political power structures that were not of their own making.

Baskerville teaches Canadian history at the University of Victoria and *Sites of Power* builds upon his recently published *Ontario: Image, Identity and Power*, which was part of Oxford University Press' Illustrated History of Canada series. As he notes, Ontario "has never been, is not now, and never will be knowable in the singular" (p. vii). True enough, but there are overall trends and themes that can be examined and assessed, and Baskerville does so by highlighting many important points about Ontario's development. By examining the dynamics of power, he effectively shows that it is "one of the

most important determinants of how people and place interact.” At the same time, Baskerville demonstrates how power “begets resistance” (p. viii), and he ably documents the experiences of those who did not buy into official versions of order or views about the way things should be. In effect, he seeks to provide an account of “the people who lived in Ontario and about the social processes that have given Ontario’s space meaning” (p. viii).

After taking the reader through an interesting chapter on Ontario’s early history (9000 BC to AD 1500), Baskerville provides an excellent account of the contact period between the aboriginal population and Europeans. He obviously read widely for this section of the book, using archaeological and anthropological accounts and theories to better understand the dynamics in the relations between the two groups and within aboriginal communities. This is followed by two chapters addressing European/aboriginal contact, and the impact it had on both cultures. Chapter four takes the reader from the Seven Years War to the creation of Upper Canada in 1791, and includes a good discussion on the United Empire Loyalists. The ensuing two chapters move the narrative up to the Confederation era with all its social, economic, and political complexities. Chapter seven discusses the role of Ontario within the newly-created Dominion of Canada, and provides a solid account of long-serving (1872–1896) premier Oliver Mowat’s use of the courts to obtain even more power for Ontario (and the other provinces) than Father of Confederation and Prime Minister John A. Macdonald was ever willing to concede. Chapter eight discusses the origins and refinement over time of an interventionist state as well as the First World War and its aftermath. Chapter nine ushers the reader through the Second World War, and the final chapter addresses Ontario from the 1940s to the present. Throughout, the prose is lively and engaging, even when the subject is not particularly interesting. A good example of this is Baskerville’s description of the political deadlock besetting Canada East and Canada West that provided the impetus for dreaming of a wider confederation of British North American colonies.

Given that this is a general history, there is little to comment on regarding Baskerville’s use of archival textual records to describe Ontario’s past. That said, he makes extensive and good use of secondary sources, and provides the reader with a comprehensive overview of the state of the province’s historiography. In terms of non-textual sources, a striking feature of Baskerville’s work is his use of images. The book is richly illustrated with woodcuts, maps, and photographs that are not there merely because such works are expected to have illustrations, but because they provide useful visual representations of some of the events and themes Baskerville alludes to in his text. It is obvious that considerable archival research went into locating and selecting the illustrations used in this work, and these efforts will hopefully persuade other historians to follow his example.

There are, however, some concerns. In terms of balance, Baskerville’s treat-

ment of the post-Depression era is relatively thin, especially when contrasted against what precedes it. Moreover, as with any survey history, there are aspects of the province's past that receive short shrift. The experience of the Knights of Labor, for example, is reduced to a single passage (p. 144), as is that of the Patrons of Industry (p. 180). Granted, the lack of attention paid to these groups is a judgment call on Baskerville's part, but given that both organizations presented a significant challenge to established power structures in Ontario, it is curious that they receive so little space in the text. In addition, some descriptions needed to be put into better context. For example, there is no doubt that conditions for the poor in Toronto in the late 1800s and early 1900s were dreadful, but they paled in comparison with Montreal that had, for example, a significantly higher infant mortality rate.

On a more basic level, there are other concerns. For instance, there are points in the text where the prose is a bit dense. A dictionary needed to be consulted when Baskerville discussed British "suzerainty" over the Five Nations (p. 33). (By the way, the word means overlordship for those of you who do not use it in everyday conversation.) Moreover, there are a number of typographical errors, such as placing Pontiac's attacks upon British forts in 1863 rather than 1763 (pp. 37–8). As well, in any subsequent editions, Baskerville should be clear that he is referring to the Legislative Council in the middle of page 50, so as to not further confuse students of Upper Canada about the complex legislative system that was in place at that time for such a small population. Finally, William Meredith did *not* remain premier until 1914 (p. 159): James P. Whitney did (in fact, Meredith was never premier). With respect to images, the woodcut showing aspects of Iroquois warfare on page 22 is clearly reversed, and should be turned around in any subsequent re-printings.

Overall, this is a competent, thoughtful, and reasonably comprehensive general history of Ontario, and it comes at a time when such a book is needed by those teaching the province's history at the post-secondary level. There is no doubt that *Sites of Power* will be on the reading lists of many Ontario history courses (and on the reference shelves for archival institutions that deal with Ontario themes), and so it should.

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Archival Information: How to Find It, How to Use It. STEVEN FISHER, ed. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004. 177 p. ISBN 1-57356-389-7.

The world is woefully short on publications dedicated to introducing potential users to archives and archival research. While institutions may publish thematic guides, bibliographies, and finding aids, these tools are not generally