

Constructing Beauty: The Photographs Documenting the Construction of the Bloor Viaduct*

ANASTASIA RODGERS

RÉSUMÉ Cet article est une étude de cas mettant l'accent sur une sélection de photographies prises par le défunt Arthur S. Goss, photographe de la ville de Toronto, et portant sur la construction du viaduc Bloor. L'auteure examine l'importance du contexte politique et bureaucratique entourant la prise des photographies et se demande comment cette connaissance peut modifier l'interprétation et la compréhension de la narration du récit photographique. L'article soutient que l'objectif de la ville de Toronto en créant la série de photographies, c'est-à-dire documenter le progrès de la construction et illustrer la croissance de la ville, ne reflète qu'une partie du récit des faits et que ce n'est que quand les archivistes et les chercheurs prennent en compte le contexte fonctionnel de la création que les photographies peuvent le mieux être utilisées pour éclairer une partie de l'histoire.

ABSTRACT This article is a case study that focuses on selected photographs taken by the late City of Toronto photographer Arthur S. Goss which document the construction of the Bloor Viaduct. The paper considers the importance of the political/bureaucratic context in which the photographs were taken and how this knowledge may affect the interpretation and appreciation of the photographic narrative. This paper contends that the City of Toronto's civic agenda in creating this photographic series – to record construction progress and illustrate the growth of the City – is just one part of the entire narrative, and it is when archivists and researchers take the functional context of creation into consideration that they can use the photographs for supplying a part of the story most effectively.

Michael Ondaatje's novel, *In the Skin of a Lion*¹ describes the urban develop-

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¹ On 23 April 2002, *In the Skin of a Lion* was declared Canada's favourite book in the CBC radio programme, "Canada Reads," where a panel of Canadian personalities defended their choice for the book that should be read by all Canadians.

ment of Toronto in the early part of the twentieth century, weaving fiction with fact to create an unforgettable story of the politicians who commissioned the major public works and the immigrant workers who realized their completion. At the foundation of the novel's true and fictionalized accounts are the photographs created by Arthur S. Goss, Chief Photographer for the City of Toronto from 1911 to 1940, which document civic activities and major construction projects, and capture the faces of the men who built the city. As compelling as these photographs are for fictional inspiration, we must remember that Goss and the City of Toronto in fact created them for bureaucratic purposes. These photographs were taken to monitor public works and activities and to promote Toronto as a place of growth and development. This civic agenda was best achieved using the medium of photography, for no other medium could so systematically represent the progress of the project and its majestic completion. Furthermore, the photographic style of Arthur Goss was particularly useful in achieving these dual aims: Goss was not only a meticulous documentarian, but also he had an artistic sensibility that imbued the construction photographs with an air of beauty. The photographic narrative created, endorsed, and employed by the City of Toronto – to record construction progress and illustrate the growth of the City – is just one part of the entire narrative, and it is when we, as archivists and researchers, take the functional context of creation into consideration that we can most effectively use the photographs for supplying a part of the story.

This paper is a case study that examines the aesthetic and archival nature of the photographic records documenting the construction of the Bloor Viaduct, created by Arthur Goss in his capacity as Chief Photographer for the City of Toronto, in light of the context of their creation. Focussing on a selection of photographs from the City of Toronto Archives series RG 8–10: Works Department: photographs, this paper considers the importance of the political/bureaucratic context in which the photographs were taken and looks at how an understanding of this contextual information, and the boundaries it sets, may affect our superficial interpretation and appreciation of the photographic series.

Bureaucratic Context

Nothing defines urban promise and prosperity quite as vividly as the sight of cranes and construction. In his book, *American Technological Sublime*, David E. Nye remarks on the historic fascination with symbols of our technology overcoming natural obstacles and forces, first accomplished by the construction of bridges and soon afterwards with skyscrapers. These structures express the triumph of reason in concrete form,² and both bridges and skyscrapers can

2 David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1994), p. 77.

be seen as symbols of power for the administrations and corporations who built them. By using photography to record these technological achievements, the stages of construction are commemorated and the wonder of the project is extended long into the future.

Photography was first employed by the civic bureaucracy of Toronto, both to record and to commemorate, in 1875 when the Toronto Water Works Commission included photographs with its annual report. The Water Works Commission was later absorbed into the City Engineer's Department and in 1911 the Works Department was created. Like its predecessors, the Works Department used photography for administrative purposes: to monitor and document Works activities, such as digging, tunnelling, repairing, and dumping, as well as to illustrate lectures and reports. Roland C. Harris created the Photography and Blue Printing Section of the Works Department in 1911 and assigned Arthur S. Goss the position of Chief Photographer. Goss, employed by the City administration in different jobs since he joined as an office boy at age 11, was then working as a draftsman in the Street Improvements Section and had been photographing the City's Works projects in an unofficial capacity.³ This experience, along with his abilities as an artistic photographer, made Goss the obvious choice to head the new Photography and Blue Printing Section of the Department.⁴ Arthur Goss occupied the position of Chief Photographer for the City of Toronto from 1911–1940, and for nearly 30 years his photographic work was indispensable to City administration.

Arthur S. Goss

Goss practiced amateur photography from a young age and his talent was recognized as early as 1896, when he won his first photography prize at the age of fifteen.⁵ In the early 1900s, Goss became involved with amateur photography groups, such as the Toronto Camera Club where he served as the Club's vice-president in 1905, and began exhibiting his works alongside other photographers in Canada and England who were also exploring and promoting photography as a medium of artistic expression. Goss was also a member of the Arts & Letters Club in Toronto, where he met and became friends with members of the Group of Seven.⁶

Goss embraced the pictorial movement which sought to establish photography as an art and align itself with varying styles and theories of painting. As with any period in art, the aims and expressions of pictorialist sensibilities cer-

3 City of Toronto Archives, RG 8–10: Works Department: photographs.

4 Peter MacCallum, *Exhibit Catalogue: Arthur Goss, selected photographs: October 10, 1998–January 3, 1999* (Art Gallery of Ontario, 1999), p. 2.

5 City of Toronto Archives, RG, 8–10.

6 MacCallum, *Exhibit Catalogue*, p. 1.

tainly differed but pictorial-style photographs typically exhibited a soft focus and lighting, which created a “painterly” feel to the photograph, and the subject matter was often analogous to those found in paintings and drawings, such as nudes and allegorical scenes.⁷ Goss embraced these ideals. He moulded them to suit his own artistic expression and by his work became known as one of Canada’s leading pictorialist photographers. Surviving images from Goss’ pictorial works are held at the National Archives of Canada; reproductions can be seen in *Private Realms of Light: Amateur Photography in Canada, 1839–1940* edited by Lilly Koltun.⁸

While Goss’ experience as an artistic photographer certainly helped him to earn his position as Chief Photographer, Goss was in fact hired to produce photographs in a style quite opposite to his artistic inclinations: documentary photographs for administrative purposes. This job description required a rather different approach to the medium than Goss might have preferred, but he persevered: under Goss’ direction, the Photography and Blueprinting Section of the Works department produced over 30,000 administrative photographs. Other municipal departments, such as the City Architect, the Art Gallery of Toronto, the Board of Education, and the Health Department also commissioned work by the Photography and Blueprinting Section.⁹ The photographs of the Health Department series are perhaps the most well known of Goss’ work as City Photographer and have earned comparisons between Goss’ work and that of the United States’ Farm Security Administration (FSA) photographers. The FSA enlisted a corps of highly professional and artistic photographers, such as Dorothea Lange, Ben Shahn, Walker Evans, and Russell Lee, to document the plight of dispossessed citizens in the United States during the Great Depression. With a similar objective Toronto’s Medical Health Officer, Doctor Charles Hastings, commissioned Goss and used his photographs to influence politicians and the public to improve health and living conditions in Toronto. Goss’ photographs document the slum conditions and accompanying health problems in turn-of-the-century Toronto. They were undoubtedly instrumental in influencing officials to take action and exemplify the power of the photograph as a tool of indisputable persuasion.¹⁰

The Photograph Series of the Works Department fonds consists of nearly

7 For a more complete overview of pictorial photography, please see Chapter 9, Beaumont Newhall, *History of photography* (New York, 1982), pp. 141–165.

8 Lilly Koltun (ed.), *Private Realms of Light: Amateur Photography in Canada, 1839–1940* (Markham, 1984).

9 City of Toronto Archives, RG 8–10.

10 For a more detailed exploration of the photographs commissioned by Toronto’s Department of Health, please see Janice R. Sandomirsky, “Toronto’s Public Health Photography,” *Archivaria* 10 (Summer 1980), pp. 145–156. Dennis Duffy also discusses the Health Department photographs in his article, “Furnishing the Pictures: Arthur S. Goss, Michael Ondaatje and Imag(in)ing of Toronto,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 36, no. 2 (Summer 2001), pp. 106–129.

one hundred sub-series, most of which were initially established and maintained by Goss. Arthur Goss was a meticulous records-keeper. He maintained intellectual control over the extensive number of photographs he created by assigning the developed negatives to a category and by numbering, dating, and titling each one by writing backwards across the bottom of the negative with India ink. The content of the series is diverse, with the photographs recording both major public works, such as the building of the Bloor Viaduct, as well as the more mundane, on-going maintenance projects, such as repairing roads and dumping garbage.¹¹

The Bloor Viaduct

The Bloor Viaduct is officially named the Prince Edward Viaduct, in honour of Edward, Prince of Wales' visit to Toronto in 1919, the year of the Viaduct's official opening. Construction began in 1913 and was completed in 1918. Before the Viaduct was built, the natural barrier formed by the Don Valley and the Don River seriously hampered the development of the eastern end of the City. People had to travel south along the edges of the Don Valley to one of the narrow bridges that crossed the Don River at Queen or Gerrard Streets. When the City of Toronto annexed the east end of the City in 1909, the prospects for what is now known as the Danforth area were growing. Those who lived there considered the building of the bridge vital to their inclusion and participation in the City. However, many citizens in other parts of the City saw no need for it and the newspapers of the day voiced this resistance: some citizens were "opposed to spending a million dollars on a luxury, while the City [was] straining its financial position to build a sewer and a filtration plant."¹² Thus, controversy surrounded the building of the proposed Viaduct and it took three attempts for the electorate to approve the project. Proposals for the project were put forth in 1910, in 1912, and in 1913; in 1913, the \$2,500,000 expenditure was approved. It took almost as long for Toronto taxpayers to consent to the construction as it did to actually build the Viaduct. Thomas Taylor was the project's design engineer and well-known Toronto architect Edmund Burke designed the Viaduct's architectural features. Rowland C. Harris, then Commissioner of the Works Department, supervised the construction. Horatio Hocken, who was one of the controllers of the City at the time and later elected mayor, convinced the City of Toronto that a subway line would eventually be needed to cross the Valley. He persuaded the officials to include a platform beneath the roadway that would be solid enough to bear the weight of any subway train in the future. It was not until 51 years later, in 1966, that the Toronto Transit Commission built the subway; this incredible foresight is reputed to

11 City of Toronto Archives, RG 8-10.

12 City of Toronto Archives, Information file: Prince Edward Viaduct.

have saved the City millions of dollars.¹³ The completion of the Viaduct was a major engineering achievement that affected the urban development of Toronto immensely. It is designated as both an architectural and a historical site.

There are three sections of the Viaduct: the Don, the Rosedale, and the Bloor sections. The Don section, which is the focus of the selected photographs, is 1,620 feet long, 86 feet wide, crosses 130 feet over the Don River, and has five main arches. The Rosedale and Don Valley sections are made of steel arches, or spans, built on reinforced concrete piers. The entire Viaduct, from Broadview Avenue to Sherbourne Street, is only 13 feet short of a mile at 5,267 feet.¹⁴

The Photographs Documenting the Building of the Viaduct

It is useful to begin the examination of the Bloor Viaduct photographs by considering the Canadian tradition of which they are a part. An earlier example of employing photography to systematically document the phases of bridge construction is William Notman's images of the Victoria Bridge, which was built for the Grand Trunk Railway between 1854 and 1859, and was the longest bridge ever built at that time.¹⁵ To record this unprecedented engineering feat, the head engineer, James Hodges, commissioned Notman to document the construction progress of this great bridge. The result is a series of photographs that not only illustrate the various phases of construction, including the building of the cofferdams and masonry piers, the staging for the erection of the superstructure, and its assembly from ironwork prefabricated in England,¹⁶ but also testify to human invention and artistry.¹⁷

Photographs were also created to document the building of the Quebec Bridge, which crosses the St. Lawrence River just north of Quebec City. The first stages of construction began in 1900, but the tragic collapse of the Bridge in 1907 delayed its completion.¹⁸ The St. Lawrence Bridge Company began construction in 1909 and completed the Quebec Bridge in 1917. The Company commissioned Eugene M. Finn as the photographer to record the con-

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 In fact, the Victoria Bridge was often referred to as the "Eighth Wonder of the World," with the total length of the Victoria Bridge at 9,144 feet. Stanley Triggs, Brian Young, Conrad Graham, Gilles Lauzon, *Victoria Bridge: the Vital Link* (Montreal, 1982).

16 Ralph Greenhill, *Engineer's Witness* (Toronto, 1985), p. 17.

17 Stanley Triggs, *Exhibit Catalogue: William Notman's Studio: the Canadian Picture* (Montreal, 1982), p. 13.

18 The Quebec Bridge collapsed on 29 August 1907 as a result of faulty design and inadequate engineering supervision. Seventy-five workmen were killed. The catastrophe ruined the Quebec Bridge Company and the contractors. A royal commission was appointed in 1907 to investigate the accident and the following year the Dominion government decided to rebuild the Bridge. In spite of a second serious accident in September 1916, which killed 13 men, the Bridge was completed and the first train passed over the structure on 17 October 1917; the

struction progress. Both bravery and technical skill were required to execute the commission. The Company published an album of the photographs,¹⁹ perhaps in part to commemorate the eventual success of the Bridge after its long and tragic history. While it is difficult to say whether Arthur Goss had seen either Notman's or Finn's photographs of the larger-scale bridge projects and was inspired by the affective evidence they supplied, it is possible that Goss was self-consciously practising his craft within an established tradition of photographing engineering achievements.

Goss created over 3,000 photographs in the Bloor Viaduct sub-series on a range of subjects, including the groundbreaking ceremonies, the surveying of the construction sites, the monitoring of construction of the Don and the Rosedale sections, and the opening day ceremonies. Over half of these photographs are of the Don Section, and it is ten of these photographs that have been selected for discussion.²⁰

In his capacity as a civil servant in the City of Toronto's Works Department, Goss created the Bloor Viaduct photographs as records documenting the stages of the bridge's construction. Certainly other valuable records were also created surrounding the construction project, such as architectural plans and engineering drawings, where the technical details are articulated and accounted for; however, no other group of records can so tangibly represent the progress of the project as does this photographic series. In addition to the City's own use for the photographs,²¹ they also were featured in such trade journals as *The Canadian Engineer*, *The Journal of the Engineering Institute of Canada* and *The Contract Record*, where the progress of this major undertaking was detailed and celebrated by the engineering community throughout the years of its construction.

Bridge opened for regular traffic on 3 December 1917. The above information was gathered through series descriptions for R610-138-X-E, Quebec Bridge and Railway Company and R254-0-9-E Royal Commission on the Quebec Bridge Inquiry fonds, accessed on the World Wide Web on 25 September 2002 at <www.archives.ca>.

19 Ralph Greenhill and Andrew Birrell, *Canadian Photography 1839–1920* (Toronto, 1979), p. 146.

20 The small proportion of photographs was carefully selected by the author as a reasonable sample of the Bloor Viaduct photographs, given the space and scope considerations of the current project. An attempt has been made to represent progressive stages of construction by showing items and elements that are seen from one photograph to another. The author considered several other factors as well, such as providing a sense of the momentum, the span across time, a combination of near and far views, and a combination of pure construction shots along with images which include the individuals involved in the project.

21 Please note that it is difficult to determine exactly how the Bloor Viaduct photographs were used within City administration: the annual reports for the years 1915–1918 are not available at the City of Toronto Archives and while lantern slides were created and used, presumably for illustrating lectures, these have not yet been processed and it is unknown whether lantern slides were made for the Bloor Viaduct photographs.

The photographs were also used in the 1919 Toronto Board of Trade's *Year Book*, where the rapid development of the City of Toronto as a growing centre of life and trade was heralded.

In his photography of the Bloor Viaduct, Goss produced photographs that are undeniably beautiful; however, the photographs are no less valuable as records because of this beauty, for aesthetic and documentary qualities of photographs need not be mutually exclusive. Goss captured the material, the equipment, the changing landscape, and the evolving structure with sharp attention to line and form; this professional approach can be contrasted with his work as a pictorial photographer.²² In fact, there is at times a tension evident in Goss' work, as though some of the photographs were taken more for their composition than for their documentary value. It seems that Goss' pictorialist spirit could not be suppressed entirely and indeed finds expression within the constructs of what would later be termed documentary photography.²³ Present-day examinations of the Viaduct photographs invite reflections on what existed then and what exists now, although the singular grandeur of the Viaduct is more difficult to appreciate today, since other byways and thoroughways along the Don Valley Parkway now exist.

The value of the Viaduct photographs as records is found, in part, in the way that they systematically document progress over time. The progressive developments over the years of construction are methodically recorded in such photographs as Figure 1 (B.V. 410 Jan. 26, 1915 Progress Pier D) and Figure 2 (B.V. 417 Feb. 8, 1915 Progress Pier D). Both items are titled, "Progress Pier D" and are taken less than two weeks apart. The bare, triangulated frames of the pulley cranes in Figure 1 are later surrounded by the busy commotion of construction in item Figure 2.

The photograph in Figure 3 (B.V. 515 June 7, 1915 Don Sec. Pier D) is also an image of Pier D, and was taken on June 7, 1915; in this photograph, the beams of the two previous items (Figures 1 and 2) are outside the shot. However, the wooden infrastructure that was underway in Figure 2 has been built up considerably, and the intricate woodwork that will surround and comprise Pier D has evolved significantly in four months. The passing of time persists, and Figure 4 (B.V. 749 Aug. 24, 1916 Don Sec. Pier D) shows the same Pier D, over a year after Figure 3 was created. The enormity of the structure is

22 In *Private Realms of Light*, Lilly Koltun asserts that Goss' pictorialist style found no expression in his professional work. However, this paper argues that while Goss certainly did succeed in documenting the required amount of detail in a "realistic" way, there are some photographs in the Bloor Viaduct series where Goss is clearly indulging his artistic sensibilities.

23 John Grierson coined the term "documentary" in relation to fact-based motion picture films in 1928, and the term soon extended to still photographs depicting reality.



Figure 1 B.V. 410 Jan. 26, 1915 Progress Pier D (City of Toronto Archives, RG 8-10-410)



Figure 2 B.V. 417 Feb. 8, 1915 Progress Pier D (City of Toronto Archives, RG 8-10-417)

evident in Figure 4 and provides a sense of scale: here one construction worker appears on the ground level and a few other men are scattered on top of each pier. The sense of the strategy and deliberate planning become evident in these photographs, with the pulley cranes that were seen in Figures 1 and 2 now on top of the concrete pier. The magnificence of the bridge is brilliantly manifest in Figure 4, as the archways are reminiscent of cathedral architecture and the sheer size of the structure seems incredible.

The photograph of Figure 5 (B.V. 800 Panorama Looking S. Jan. 26, 1917) displays the steel arches that connect the piers. The same pulley cranes have been raised higher and higher and are now atop the surface of the 130-foot high bridge. One can see how the wooden infrastructure, as seen in the earlier photographs, was integral to the construction: on the left side of the bridge the scaffolding under the arch is still there, while it has been removed from the right side. The enormity of the project and the logistics of building a bridge at such a height, in all types of weather, are evident in these photographs. The inherent dangers in the Viaduct's construction workers' environment are also chillingly apparent.

Goss' alter ego as an artistic photographer finds expression in many of the Bloor Viaduct photographs. The wide-angle shots are naturally less crisp and do not reveal as much detail. In some of these wide-angle shots there is a sense that Goss was indulging his artistic sensibilities as much as recording the overall progress of the bridge. For instance, the composition of Figure 6 (B.V. 709 Mar. 28, 1916 Don Sec. Arch from A to B) is striking; a sense of balance is created with the left side's vertical line and the crane on top of the arch on the right. The railroad leads off down the centre of the photograph, with two silhouetted figures trailing romantically into the mist.

Figure 5 is similarly romantic but it also succeeds in revealing the building strategy, informing the viewer that the arches were being built from either side of the valley and there is a sense of the momentum as the piers move towards one another. While this picture is less crisp in its contrast, with the surrounding snow, sky, and ice blending in their common whiteness, the beauty of the composition lay in its balance. Goss must have positioned himself on the edge of the ice in order to achieve this near-centre view. The stage of construction on 23 January 1917 halts the meeting of the two piers, with cranes positioned on either edge. Smoke from the chimney of a construction shed centred between the two piers billows up between the edges of the bridge, twenty months prior to completion.

Goss approached his subject matter, both the structure itself and the men involved in the planning and building, with an air of respect. In the photograph of the planners before construction of the Don section began, Figure 7 (B.V. 183 July 10, 1914), the men assert their importance on the future site of the Bloor Viaduct. The photographs that include construction workers, for instance Figure 8 (B.V. 836 June 26, 1917 Deck Looking East), venerate the

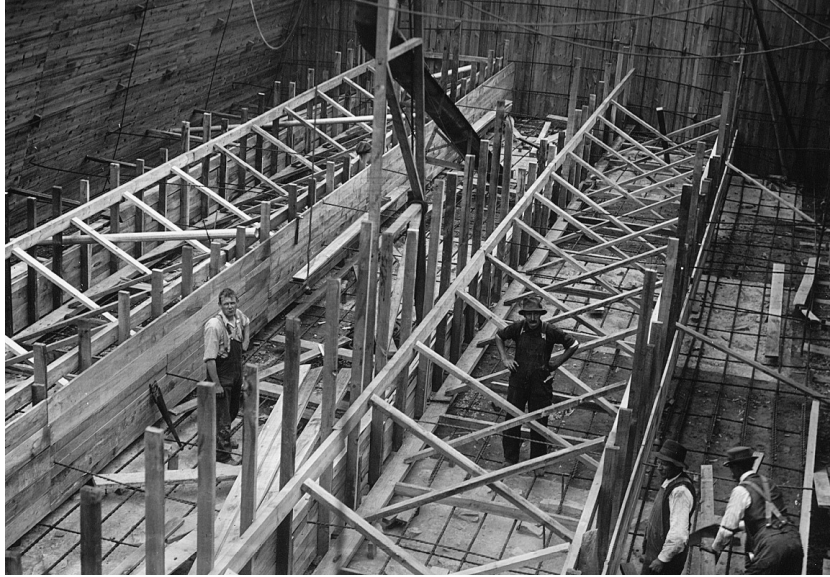


Figure 3 B.V. 515 June 7, 1915 Don Sec. Pier D (City of Toronto Archives, RG 8-10-515)



Figure 4 B.V. 749 Aug. 24, 1916 Don Sec. Pier D (City of Toronto Archives, RG 8-10-749)



Figure 5 B.V. 800 Panorama Looking S. Jan. 26, 1917 (City of Toronto Archives, RG 8-10-800)



Figure 6 B.V. 709 Mar. 28, 1916 Don Sec. Arch from A to B (City of Toronto Archives, RG 8-10-709)

workers in a setting in which they appear natural and capable. The respective contributions of the two groups of men are immortalized in these photographs.

Indeed, the compositions of these two photographs are reminiscent of one another and invite comparison. The two distinct groups of men are lined in a row, on their own “turf” and on their own terms. These photographs reveal as much in their differences as in their similarities about how the men conceive themselves and provide clues into status and self-image. The planners who are featured in Figure 7 are clean-cut, upper-middle class men looking smug and proper. The male fashions of the day are shown, as all of the men wear ties, hats, and jackets, while two men wear vests and at least two men are sporting suspenders. The well-dressed men stand holding their jackets in the warm July sun while some hold rolled up plans. We can be fairly certain that these men were not about to spread out their rolled drawings on the grass to confirm the building plans; it may be safe to assume that they were posing with the rolls to indicate their official status in a project they expected would be admired for years to come.

The construction workers in Figure 8 look strong and comparatively busy, with no time to pose. Despite this, most of these men do hold still, looking at the camera with impatience, waiting for Goss to get the shot; however, a couple of the men on the right are too busy for this nonsense and are slightly blurred as they proceed with their work. They are dressed and engaged in a manner appropriate to their own work and class. Just as the planners stand with their hands on their hips, sport ties, and proudly hold their architectural and engineering drawings, the construction workers hold similar postures, wield shovels, push wheelbarrows, and are surrounded by the accoutrements appropriate to their own work. One construction worker just left of centre holds his shovel up, perhaps in demonstrative pride, perhaps in jest, but almost certainly not in menace when his facial expression is closely examined.

While Goss’ treatment of the two disparate groups of men may not deliberately esteem one over the other, the two photographs do reveal the power relations inherent in civic projects of this nature, and contribute to the narrative of this photographic series. The officials, engineers, and planners voluntarily permit and participate in the photograph, staring back at the camera with confidence. They would have been aware that the photo shoot was planned for that day, perhaps prompting them to put on better suits and groom themselves suitably for the occasion. These men in suits are in collective control of the entire construction project, including the photography commissioned to document it. The construction workers, on the other hand, are far less in control of this moment, and indeed the entire project. They are almost involuntary participants in this photograph, and are possibly even incidental to the shot. The disparities between the two groups of men are solidified in the photographs and thus social order is preserved.

Figure 9 and Figure 10 represent the bridge in its triumphant glory. The



Figure 7 B.V. 183 July 10 1914 (City of Toronto Archives, RG 8-10-183)



Figure 8 B.V. 836 June 26 1917 Deck Looking East (City of Toronto Archives, RG 8-10-836)



Figure 9 (City of Toronto Archives, RG 8-10-865)



Figure 10 (City of Toronto Archives, RG 8-10-872)

piers and arches stand strong and the bridge is ready for the traffic of cars, bicycles, streetcars, pedestrians, and one day subway trains, while the signs of construction – scaffolding, ropes, cranes, workers – are now gone. These final photographs testify to the accomplishment of this major engineering effort, but the struggle and work of its realization are only evident when these photographs are viewed in sequence. Even then, the photographs can only attest to one view of the construction: the view commissioned by the City of Toronto and captured by Arthur Goss.

Context of the Records' Creation

The limitations of photography as a tool of realism and truth must be understood in order to evaluate photographs' value as records. While the photographs taken by Arthur Goss for the City of Toronto document civic activities, it is not sufficient to consider the photographs' content alone. Fundamental archival thinking insists that the context of any record's creation must be considered as equally important as the record's content, and perhaps this is an even stronger imperative with photographs, as the "optical illusion of photographic realism"²⁴ can seduce viewers into believing in the view framed by the boundaries of the image. For instance, Joan M. Schwartz employs diplomatics as a means of evaluating the functional context of creation for photographs and asserts,

photographs are documents, created by a will, for a purpose, to convey a message to an audience. To understand them as the product of actions and transactions, either bureaucratic or socio-cultural, we must return them to the actions in which they participated. It is their functional context that transforms photographic images into archival documents.²⁵

It is important to remember that the photographer is not the only person involved in the creation of the record; rather the photographer is but one of a series of individuals who collectively comprise the bureaucracy that commissioned and executed the making of the record. In his suggested criteria for evaluating historical photographs, Robert Levine asks whether the photographs were taken to achieve a desired effect and if such a contrived image can yield evidence; Levine also asks how official ideology can be distinguished from reality and how photographs are used to attribute legitimacy.²⁶ It is here that the Bloor Viaduct photographs' biases are revealed.

24 Joan M. Schwartz, "'Records of Simple Truth and Precision': Photography, Archives, and the Illusion of Control," *Archivaria* 50 (Fall 2000), p. 23.

25 Joan M. Schwartz, "'We make our tools and our tools make us': Lessons from Photographs for the Practice, Politics, and Poetics of Diplomats," *Archivaria* 40 (Fall 1995), p. 42.

26 Robert M. Levine, *Images of History: Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century Latin American Photographs as Documents* (Durham, 1989), p. 58.

When one considers the context of the Bloor Viaduct photographs' creation – that they were created as part of a civic agenda – it becomes clear that the *contents* of the photographs alone cannot be considered an archival record. Institutional records are always created with a purpose in mind, and this is certainly true of the Bloor Viaduct photographs. We must remember that the pointing of Goss' camera was not a random act; it was part of a larger civic bureaucracy in which Goss was only a small, though significant, part. The photographs represent a commissioned activity done for City purposes and “by recording physical and architectural progress, photographers helped to claim legitimacy for [governments who were] publicly committed to progress.”²⁷

In the case of the Bloor Viaduct, the municipal government was arguably demonstrating its commitment to progress during war time, when all other capital projects were put on hold: the building of the Bloor Viaduct was the only large scale municipal construction project in Toronto at the time.²⁸ This public commitment to progress is part of the political circumstance involved in the act of taking the photograph and so that which is left outside of the frame of the photograph may represent a view beyond, or even in contradiction with the view or needs of the commissioning institution's agenda. Understanding the impossibility of achieving objectivity in creating institutional records, together with an appreciation for the context surrounding the records' creation, allows for a more complete analysis of the photographs individually and as parts of a larger group.

The entire photographic series successfully documents the methodical approach to the construction project, the genius of its plan, the swiftness of progress, and the success of its completion. What is left outside of the frame, what is ignored, is the controversy surrounding the bridge and the human sacrifice involved in its construction. The series does not include photographs of angry citizens demanding adequate sewage and water filtration systems instead of a new bridge. There are no photographs taken from the perspective of the workers suspended from the great height of the bridge, there are no photographs of those workers who died on the job, nor photographs of families grieving for their deceased loved ones. There are no photographs of those homeowners whose property was damaged by the dynamite blasts during construction. For this part of the story, for those pieces deliberately missed or neglected we must turn to contemporary newspapers and to other records²⁹ not

27 Ibid.

28 Jesse Edgar Middleton, *The Municipality of Toronto: A History* (Toronto, 1923), p. 395.

29 For instance, the York County Coroner's Records for 1913–1920, RG 22-5897-0-2, Archives of Ontario, records the deaths of Bloor Viaduct employees, including one who fell a distance of 80 feet from a pier into a well-hole and another worker who drowned in the Don River after falling from the Viaduct. The Coroner's Records also note incidents of dead infants found underneath the Viaduct.

created by the City of Toronto administration. The photographs offer only part of the story, collectively presenting a sense of unblemished progress towards the realization of the architects' and engineers' design.

Michael Ondaatje recognized the incompleteness of the story that these photographic records tell. Ondaatje used these photographs as part of his research for the novel, *In the Skin of a Lion*, but added details about the immigrant construction workers who worked for modest wages and often in dangerous conditions. The spirit of the nameless construction workers is manifest in Ondaatje's fictional character, Nicholas Temelcoff. Ondaatje says:

Nicholas Temelcoff is famous on the bridge, a daredevil. He is given all the difficult jobs and he takes them. He descends into the air with no fear. He is a solitary. He assembles ropes, brushes the tackle and pulley at his waist, and falls off the bridge like a diver over the edge of a boat. The rope roars alongside him, slowing with the pressure of his half-gloved hands. He is burly on the ground and then falls with terrific speed, grace, using the wind to push himself into corners of abutments so he can check driven rivets, sheering valves, the drying of the concrete under bearing plates and padstones. He stands in the air banging the crown pin into the upper cord and then shepherds the lower cord's slip-joint into position ... He knows the precise height he is over the river, how long his ropes are, how many seconds he can free-fall to the pulley. It does not matter if it is day or night, he could be blindfolded. Black space is time. After swinging for three seconds he puts his feet up to link with the concrete edge of the next pier. He knows his position in the air as if he is mercury slipping across a map.³⁰

The fiction of Ondaatje's descriptive imagery blends together with the subjective reality of these photographs, and we are left with a sense of uncertainty as to where the reality ends and the fiction begins. Ondaatje has created a fiction that tries to account for the missing pieces, and it appears to succeed on one level. Ondaatje's fictional account of the construction of the Viaduct suggests to us that there could be more to the story of its creation, offers some thoughts about the people who might have built it, hints at the idea that there could have been danger and suffering involved. The photographs alone certainly do not offer these possibilities, and the popularity of Ondaatje's novel and its representation of the events almost undermines the photographs' intent by suggesting that there are alternative perspectives. However, as archivists and researchers we should not rely on fiction to move us into probing further and considering photographic records' inherent biases, and indeed the inherent biases of records in any form.

This subjective view presented by Goss and the City of Toronto offers one

30 Michael Ondaatje, *In the Skin of a Lion* (Toronto, 1987), pp. 34–35.

perspective. In Goss' capacity as City Photographer, he documented the construction progress for record-keeping and publicity purposes. It is when we, as archivists and researchers, take this context of creation into consideration that we can most effectively use the photographs for supplying a part of the story. The functional cause for the creation of these photographs did not require evidence of controversy or human suffering; these topics fall outside of the function of the records and subsequently fall outside the frame of the photographs. Recording the project and attesting to the grandeur of the Viaduct, in the face of controversy surrounding the merit of its erection and great cost, were certainly among the main purposes for creating these photographs. Goss fulfilled this objective by creating photographs that are at once documentary, beautiful, and evocative.

The Bloor Viaduct photographs instill a sense of awe in the viewer, as the bridge that many Torontonians routinely pass over and under is removed from the sphere of the ordinary and brought to a new level. What is represented in these photographs is paradoxical: the gruelling nature of the construction work performed in hard times – supplies were scarce due to the material shortages caused by the First World War, equipment was rudimentary, safety was minimal, and compensation was low – but the beauty and grandeur of the finished product is indisputably present in the photographs in a way that we may not see when just looking at the physical bridge today.³¹ The photographs' remarkable beauty reinforce the importance we attach to photographs to foster a special appreciation for their subject in retrospect. These photographs were created to produce the effect of memorializing the project and glorifying those in power who realized its completion. Michael Ondaatje's novel suggests that there were other narratives occurring at the same time and explores what those experiences might have been, reminding all those who know the Bloor Viaduct that the project could not have been achieved without some degree of sacrifice and suffering. Archivists and researchers must remember to take the

31 In fact for many individuals today, the Bloor Viaduct does not summon awe or a sense of beauty, but rather is a site of desperation and grief. Since its erection, there have been over 400 suicides committed from the Viaduct, making it the second most popular bridge in North America for committing suicide (the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco is the most frequently used bridge for suicides). For this reason, groups such as the Schizophrenic Society of Ontario have lobbied for the erection of a suicide barrier to be placed on the bridge in attempts to prevent future tragedies. Public sentiment was divided on this issue; the beauty of the surrounding landscape of the Don Valley – a rare commodity in downtown Toronto – has made some citizens passionately opposed to the defacement of the view that such a barrier could cause. A compromise has been reached, however, and a barrier called the "Luminous Veil" will be built. Construction began in the spring of 2002, rendering the Bloor Viaduct construction photographs even more poignant as a source of evidence for what the Viaduct originally looked like, compared with how it will appear after the construction of the "Luminous Veil."

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functional context of photographs' creation into consideration, even if it requires a little prodding from Canada's favourite book, to better understand a wider and richer narrative.