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## Book Review

Ron Brown, *Ghost Towns of Ontario: Volume 1, Southern Ontario*. Langley, B.C., Stagecoach Publishing, 1978. 193 pages, index, bibliography, illus., \$6.95

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[See table of contents](#)

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BOOK REVIEW

Ron Brown, Ghost Towns of Ontario: Volume 1, Southern Ontario. Langley, B.C. Stagecoach Publishing, 1978. 193 pages, index, bibliography, illus., \$6.95.

As the author points out in his first chapter, many people will question whether there are actually ghost towns in Ontario. To provide his point, Brown proceeds to describe the rise, fall and remains of 100 ghost towns in southern Ontario alone. For him a ghost town is "a town which is a mere ghost of itself." He describes ghost towns that are completely deserted and those that have only a tiny residual population. Originally the village had to have at least 100 residents and two or more business functions.

Brown puts his research into a larger perspective. He presents a six stage evolution of Ontario villages, moving from early military settlements to the return to the land syndrome of our time. He also divides southern Ontario into seven different geographical areas. Using this as his organizational basis, he describes the deserted mill villages of the St. Lawrence lowlands, the stoney farm communities along colonization roads and the isolated fishing and lumbering hamlets of Georgian Bay.

One is reminded of simple and often overlooked facts that have had a profound impact on historical development. The large scale deforestation of vast areas lowered water tables, drying up mill streams and putting grist and saw mills out of business. This was a prominent factor in the decline of many villages. The temperance movement of the 1870s closed many hotel taverns, depriving them of a lucrative income. This was the beginning of the end for some roadside hamlets. It is emphasized that villages which failed were generally based on one major resource, be it water power, a road junction, a railway or a mine. When the resource was depleted or conditions changed without the village adapting, stagnation resulted, often by slow death.

Ghost Towns of Ontario is well illustrated with photographs, both recent and historical. There are maps taken from nineteenth century atlases and sketch plans based on contemporary descriptions. At times Brown becomes an artist, giving us his impressions of what a village might have looked like 100 years ago. Brown's main sources were local and county histories, directories and atlases. He does not appear to have used the census returns which might have yielded some additional information.

Few people will read this book from beginning to end. The story of 100 communities which shared much the same fate can become a little monotonous. It is basically a reference work meant to be consulted for both specific localities and for general regions. It will serve the needs of several

interest groups such as the industrial archaeologist, the historical geographer, those interested in village tradesmen and the Sunday afternoon driver. Brown has written a popular yet useful book which takes a different perspective from most other histories and provides a new way of viewing and appreciating the past.

--Larry McNally

#### RECENT PUBLICATIONS RECENTES

##### Agriculture:

2nd Annual Agricultural History of Ontario Seminar: Proceedings, Saturday October 22, 1977 (Guelph: University of Guelph, 1978).

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Brooks, R.C., "M. de Chabert and the 1750 Louisbourg Observatory," Journal Royal Astronomical Society of Canada 73 (Dec. 1979), 333-48.

Calnen, William J., "Astronomy at King's College, Windsor, Nova Scotia," Ibid. 74 (April 1980), 57-63.

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Ingolfssrud, Elizabeth, All About Ontario Cupboards (Don Mills: House of Grant, 1978).

Webster, Donald B., English-Canadian Furniture of the Georgian Period (Toronto: McGraw-Hill-Ryerson, 1979)

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