

North of Superior: An Illustrated History of Northwestern Ontario By Michel S. Beaulieu and Chris Southcott

Karl Hele

Volume 103, Number 1, Spring 2011

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065484ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065484ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Hele, K. (2011). Review of [*North of Superior: An Illustrated History of Northwestern Ontario* By Michel S. Beaulieu and Chris Southcott]. *Ontario History*, 103(1), 107–109. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065484ar>

because the texts are drawn from a century-and-a-half of geographical writing, we are also able to discern transformative change in the regions.

The writing and analytical skill displayed in these classics of Canadian geography is palpable, and so is Warkentin's editorial skill in demonstrating the worth of these seminal studies for interpreting Canada's regional structure. The happy conjoining of skilled editor and fascinating

subject matter has yet again contributed to our understanding of Canada's major regions. In time, no doubt, John Warkentin's regional writing on Canada will itself be critically examined to further elucidate the on-going contribution of seminal studies to the interpretation of a country that is, for certain, "so vast and various."

Larry McCann
University of Victoria

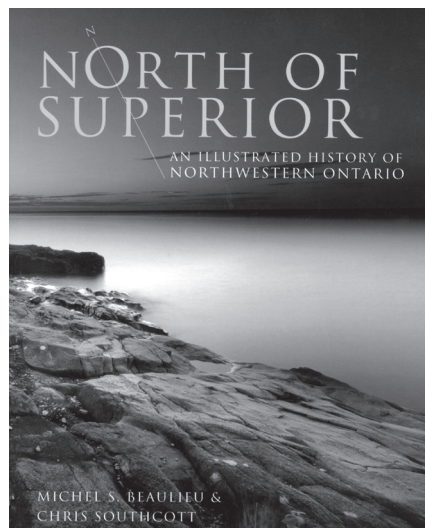
North of Superior: An Illustrated History of Northwestern Ontario

By Michel S. Beaulieu and Chris Southcott. Toronto: James Lorimer and Company Ltd., Publishers, 2010. 126 pages. \$34.95 softcover. ISBN 978-1-55277-469-4 <www.lorimer.ca>

Michel S. Beaulieu and Chris Southcott, scholars at Lakehead University, have produced a masterful rendition of northwestern Ontario's regional history. *North of Superior* is not only well situated within the larger provincial and national story but is readily accessible to non-academics and academics alike. Beaulieu, an historian, and Southcott, a sociologist, have combined their talents and knowledge of northwestern Ontario to produce a well-written and illustrated popular history. While many members of the university community dismiss popular history as suspect, it would be a mistake to pass over *North of Superior* on these narrow premises. It is a work of history that reaches out to all Ontarians as essential reading that will enable them to gain a better

understanding of the province's past.

North of Superior explores the history of northwestern Ontario chronologically from pre-contact to the present, each chapter centring upon events important within the region. Chapter one builds up to Saint-Lusson's ceremonial assertion of French title to the region in 1671; chapter two carries through to the merger of the Hudson's Bay Company and North West Company in 1821. This event deeply affected the Métis and First Nation populations' access to goods, employment, and credit, as well as reducing the presence of non-Natives in the region until the late nineteenth century. There follows "sixty-eight years [when] the region was transformed from a fur-trade hinterland into one of whose primary purpose was to serve the industrial



needs of the south.” (p. 41) The development of the commercial fishery, the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and the fight for recognition and rights by Aboriginal people are focal points.

In a brief period between 1889 and 1918 northwestern Ontario became integral to the settlement of the West, an important shipping terminus for foodstuffs heading east, and a centre for mining and pulp and paper. These years are typified also by rapid urban growth and labour unrest. The Left and Communist movements in Ontario were strongest in the northwest, shaping both provincial and federal responses to a perceived threat to political stability and status quo.

Through the Depression era southern Ontario continued (perhaps disdainfully) to view the northwest as its hinterland for growth. Rather, Beaulieu and Southcott chose to focus on development, community, and change within the region derived from internal and external forces. Some of the issues tackled include the discrimination levelled against non-Canadian-born workers during the Depression, how even at the height of the Depression mining still enjoyed a few minor booms, the Depression's impact on Aboriginal people, and the effect of the Second World War on the region. Chapter six, covering the years 1945 to 1985, shows how northwestern Ontario, initially buoyed by World War II, began a slow decline as increased mechanization became the norm in the forestry and mining industries. This was the time when the Aboriginal rights movement developed in the region. Growing discontent with treatment of the north fuelled a separatist movement in 1976 with the intent of creating Canada's eleventh province. Chapter seven, the conclusion, details in a positive but almost nostalgic manner the response of the region to the decline in its major

employment sectors, continued out-migration of youth, and potential for the future as communities pull together to survive.

For me, the inclusion of Aboriginal people is the most significant contribution of *North of Superior*. Far too often they are not present in local histories, or are maligned, or invisible once the fur trade or treaty process is completed. Rather, Beaulieu and Southcott place Aboriginal people within the regional context, noting that from a development perspective, and largely due to government policies, these people were marginalized. In *North of Superior* Aboriginal people regularly appear and are noted for their participation, albeit limited, in the region's development. They worked as miners, foresters, guides, and labourers despite prejudice and legal restrictions. The authors leave no doubt that regional development, while including individuals, created significant disparity among the original inhabitants of the northwest. *North of Superior* is a true regional history, including all the people living there, their participation or exclusion, and efforts to make a living faced with an exploitative environment. It is refreshing to see Aboriginal people recognized as important to the past and future, even if outside forces did not see them as such.

North of Superior has a few minor drawbacks. First and foremost, more maps are needed, particularly showing settlement over this vast area through time. Cities, mines, hydro-dams, and many other features could usefully appear on maps associated with each chapter, giving dates when they were founded (or abandoned). Treaty area maps and locations of the First Nations communities are, likewise, serious omissions. Readers should not be left wondering where Grassy Narrows is located or where the treaties extend. Additionally, Beaulieu and Southcott need to expand

upon a few key points, such as their vague reference to a 1909 strike being the bloodiest in Canadian history. Still, omissions of this nature are minimal.

North of Superior is a wonderful introduction to the history of northwestern Ontario and its importance within the province and nation. It is at once scholarly

and popular, presenting an excellent inclusive introduction to a rich history. I hope that this volume will inspire further study and publications on a long-neglected corner of our province.

Karl Hele
Concordia University

Early Voices: Portraits of Canada by Women Writers, 1639-1914

Edited by Mary Alice Downie and Barbara Robertson, with Elizabeth Jane Errington. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2010. 316 pages. \$28.99 softcover. ISBN 978-1-55488-769-9 <www.dundurn.com>

Was it Queen Victoria who said, “You can’t trust actors: you don’t know where they’ve been!”? Certainly, this could have been true of travel writers who constituted a major genre before the emergence of popular novels. From Herodotus and Julius Caesar through to Samuel Champlain and David Thompson, the reading public consumed these evocative accounts of people and places. But these were predominantly male voices and male imagery. To be sure, there *have* been women travel writers and commentators in early Canada. In Ontario Elizabeth Simcoe, Anna Jameson, Anne Langton, Susanna Moodie and Catherine Parr Traill all have enriched our insights into backwoods life and the maturing of a colonial society. Nevertheless, as Jane Errington observes in her fine introduction to *Early Voices*, this writing has regaled us principally with accounts of “strong men and silent women.” (p. 21)

In *Early Voices*, Marty Alice Downie and Barbara Robertson have attempted to redress this bias. They present us with 29 women who have recorded their experiences and observations of Canadian communities – five of them in Ontario – in what Errington calls a “wonderfully

eclectic collection.” (p. 21) This eclecticism is one of the strengths of this work. Some of the writers were merely visitor-voyeurs; others were committed settlers. All experienced the travails of a trans-Atlantic crossing, the discomforts of contemporary travel, and the limitations of a nascent social infrastructure. Their perspectives are as diverse as the subjects. While it may be charged that the elite gaze of Baroness von Riedesel, Lady Aberdeen, and Lady Dufferin might have been through their lorgnettes or their crystal champagne glasses, even the more adventurous ladies ensured that their needs were attended to when on a voyageur experience. Anna Jameson (1794-1860) “had near me my cloak, umbrella, and parasol, my note-books and sketch-books, and a little compact basket always by my side, containing eau de Cologne, and all those necessary luxuries which might be wanted in a moment.” (p. 114). What a way to rough it in the bush!

In their search for a more plebian experience the editors turned to Ella Sykes (1863-1939), a middle-class daughter of the English manse, a member of a family not unfamiliar with the corridors of power, and eventually a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. An experienced traveler,