

Modest Hopes: Homes and Stories of Toronto's Workers from the 1820s to the 1920s by Don Loucks & Leslie Valpy

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Brent Scollie has been a scholar focused for several decades on the history of the Lakehead and the surrounding region, contributing to our understanding of the history of the area through numerous articles and entries in the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. The *Biographical Dictionary and History of Victorian Thunder Bay* complements his earlier biographical work on Thunder Bay mayors and councillors. There are some 849 biographical entries in the dictionary which are a representative sample of the individual Americans, Canadians, and Indigenous people, both resident and non-resident, who played in role in the history of Thunder Bay District from 1850-1901. As part of a pioneer society on the northwestern periphery of Ontario, the representatives of the region include notables, politicians, capitalists, promoters, government officials, and ordinary folk such as liverymen, grain trimmers, coal handlers, and women who left a mark in their own right or as wives connected to their husbands. Scollie's selection criteria was based on the individual's length of residence, prominence, and visibility in the historical record.

The biographies are preceded by a history of the district during the last half

of the nineteenth century, covering the political administrative changes, and economic developments associated with farm settlement, mining, forestry, fishing, the grain trade, and manufacturing. There are also sections detailing the social history of Thunder Bay and the surrounding townships and municipalities, with such topics as the Indigenous peoples, ethnic and religious communities, the professional class, education, sport and recreation, theatre and music, women, the local militia, as well as the judiciary and law enforcement among other topics. The history and biographies are well written, meticulously researched and documented with archival material and the latest secondary research on the region. The depth of the information reflects the authors familiarity and love of the history of Thunder Bay. As such, the *Biographical Dictionary and History of Victorian Thunder Bay* is a welcome addition to our understanding of the history of Northwestern Ontario and will be useful to both genealogists and those interested in the history of Northern Ontario.

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Modest Hopes

Homes and Stories of Toronto's Workers from the 1820s to the 1920s

By Don Loucks & Leslie Valpy

Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2021. 272 pages. \$29.99 softcover ISBN 9781459745544 (dundurn.com)

Don Loucks and Leslie Valpy have written a thoughtful and unique new book about the experience of Toronto's working class through the eyes of the buildings they lived in. The central thrust of the book revolves around the simple and humble housing inhabited by the workers

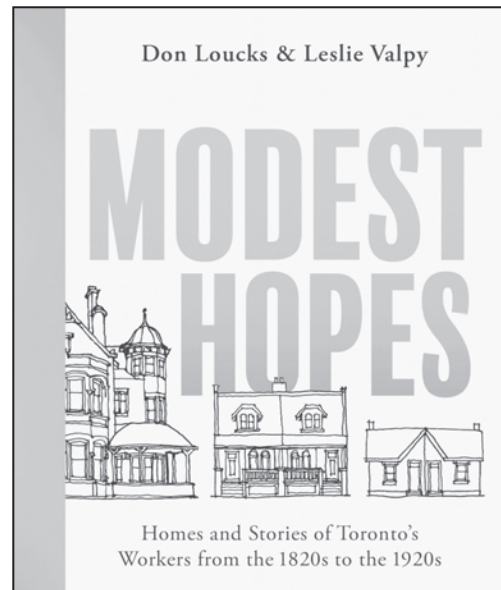
of Toronto between 1820 and 1920. Additionally, the book focuses on the architectural origins of those structures and the experience of the workers themselves.

Modest Hopes fills a needed gap within the historical literature of the city through addressing a topic largely undiscussed:

workers' housing and the architectural history and sociology behind it. In recent years authors such as Doug Taylor and Roberto Perin have published detailed looks into Toronto's structural and cultural past. Perin's 2017 book, *The Many Rooms of This House*, outlines the architectural and social history of Toronto's places of worship from 1840 onwards. Doug Taylor's 2014 *Toronto Theatres and the Golden Age of the Silver Screen* takes on a more modern view of the structures and culture revolving around neighbourhood theatres and cinemas of the early to mid twentieth century. Loucks and Valpy's *Modest Hopes* leans on books such as these, yet dives far deeper into the idiosyncratic details of specific ethnic experiences and the minutiae of the design of the homes in which these people resided.

Loucks and Valpy argue that "Toronto was once a city of cottages" (74), and that the living quarters themselves meant far more than just safety and warmth. The cottages and small, standardized, structures that were afforded to and earned by the working class of Toronto from 1820-1920 can upon hindsight be classified as "Modest Hopes." Yet, as is thoughtfully made clear throughout the book, to the newly arrived Torontonians there was nothing modest about them at all. These homes represented the acquisition of a dream and of why they came to Toronto in the first place. The book highlights the experiences of specific diasporas with special focus on the mass immigration of the mid-nineteenth-century Irish, the difficult plight of the Chinese within both Toronto and Canada writ large, the Scottish and others.

The book opens with the history of social movements in England during the eighteenth and nineteenth century that gave rise to more comfortable worker housing, specifically those referenced in Nath-



aniel Kent's 1775 book, *Hints to Gentlemen of Landed Property*. Kent changed the manner by which people viewed the role of housing for workers. Kent spearheaded a movement that argued for a respected and well-housed labour force. Workers bestowed with a sense of privacy and pride would reap benefits for the land owners and managers of industry themselves. In a nutshell, Kent popularized the benefits of workers living in comfortable settings. Loucks and Valpy open the book discussing how those movements had a lasting effect on Toronto.

Grouped into six sections, the book outlines what structures were used by Toronto's working class from 1820-1920: a look at the history behind workers' housing in Toronto, a description of what types of designs were used and by whom, which immigrant groups occupied these structures, a broad history of Toronto itself, a look at which neighbourhoods housed the structures, and an intimate collection of stories about eight families that lived through such experiences. What serves as

most unique about the book is its detailed look at structures already known by most Torontonians. These are known as “cottages,” which can still be spotted across the entire city, often in former working hubs and now wedged between multimillion dollar homes as well as a selection of other styles of homes described in detail at the beginning of the book. Special attention is given throughout the book to the design and architectural aspects of the structures, a nod to Loucks’ lengthy career as an architect.

Loucks and Valpy’s experience within

the heritage conservation and urban planning world has clearly inspired this important book. They campaign for an appreciation of the modest hopes that helped give rise to Toronto and argue these homes are windows into a much larger story: “Connecting housing and hope,” (74) a topic deserving of far greater scrutiny, study and appreciation.

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Violent Loyalties

Manliness, Migration and the Irish in the Canadas, 1798-1841

By Jane G.V. McCaughey

Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020.
256 pages. £80. ISBN 978-1-78962-186-0
(www.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk)

In 1845, while living in exile in the United States, William Lyon Mackenzie published the first installment of a projected collection: *The Sons of the Emerald Isle, or Lives of One Thousand Remarkable Irishmen*, brief biographies, each “a noted character of Irish parentage or descent.” His stated purpose in publishing was to counteract American “nativism” with its harsh rejection of Irish (indeed all non-native) immigrants. These were Irish lives that mattered.

Professor Jane G.V. McCaughey has a very different purpose with this study of Irish men in Upper and Lower Canada in the era of the 1837 Rebellions. It focuses not on a thousand individuals, but on six examples of Irishmen involved with major male violence:

- Benjamin Lett, a lone terrorist best known for his 1840 destruction of Queenston’s Brock monument.
- James Fitzgibbon, of Laura Secord fame—but featured here as a disciplined Irish loyalist serving as an Irish

