

## *Canada Cycle & Motor: The CCM Story* by John A. McKenty

Ben Forster

Volume 104, numéro 1, spring 2012

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065404ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065404ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

---

### Éditeur(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

### ISSN

0030-2953 (imprimé)

2371-4654 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

---

### Citer ce compte rendu

Forster, B. (2012). Compte rendu de [*Canada Cycle & Motor: The CCM Story* by John A. McKenty]. *Ontario History*, 104(1), 222–224.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1065404ar>

tion of pictures; is it necessary to have two identical views of Preston Hill from August (black and white, p. 91) and September (colour, p. 97)? Conversely, this reviewer noticed one pair of photos that were not included. The original 1977 *Grand River* book included a photograph of the Guelph railway car shop while the 2010 book contained only a modern picture (p.188) of the car shops as they had been renovated into residences. Both photos together would have provided an interesting comparison in adaptive reuse of buildings.

Transportation historians, railway enthusiasts, and local historians will have no difficulty in appreciating the value of these

books. To fully appreciate the significance of the interurban era a reader should probably try to find a copy of the long out-of-print book, John Due's *The Intercity Electric Railway Industry in Canada* (1966). For the layman, the photographs and maps alone would provide days of exploring the historical landscapes so well identified in the two books. Based on the quality of these revised editions it can only be hoped that the third book by Mills on Hamilton's electric railways will also be reprinted by Railfare.

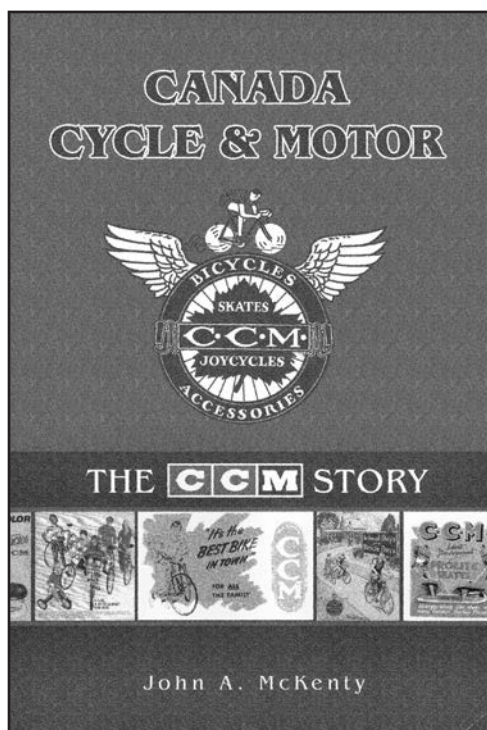
Christopher Andreae,  
Senior Built Heritage Specialist,  
Golder Associates Ltd., London Ontario

### *Canada Cycle & Motor: The CCM Story*

by John A. McKenty

Belleville, Ontario: Epic Press, 2011. 352 pages. \$19.95 softcover. ISBN 978-1-55452-667-3 ([www.essencegroup.com](http://www.essencegroup.com))

John McKenty has produced a polished and balanced narrative history of the Canadian Cycle and Motor Company, or CCM as it became. McKenty does not spend time on theoretical reprise and the erection of complex interpretational structures, but he also largely avoids a merely anecdotal account. The substantially illustrated volume explores the firm's creation out of five different bicycle companies in 1899 with much care, outlining the pressures of domestic and then potential foreign competition in the Canadian market. In fully delineating the backgrounds of the Canadian capitalists involved in creating CCM, the author provides an excellent picture of the tight world of late nineteenth-century Ontarian capitalism, where there was much opportunity, though only a few over-achievers such as George Cox,



Joseph Flavelle or Walter Massey. It would have been useful, in his discussion of the CCM merger, for the author to note that the company was intended to be a near mo-

nopoly, with pricing power to be achieved through production control. Companies of this character, with hardly any attention being given to developing efficiencies of scale and scope through rationalization were common in late nineteenth-century mergers in Britain and also the United States. A bit of watered stock would then sweeten the deal for the companies and capitalists involved. Without consolidation of operations, such mergers tended to be unstable and failure-prone, and that indeed was the direction CCM was heading in its early years. Fortunately, the threat of failure brought a creative response in the hiring of the young T.A. Russell, a member of a newly emerging managerial class, who pursued effective operational rationalization of the firm. And from that arose a story of considerable success.

It is too bad that the author does not make more of the bicycle's role outside the arena of sport and pleasure. In an era when few could afford the enormous expense of a horse and carriage (or that of the startling horseless carriage), the bicycle soon became a form of personal point-to-point urban transportation easier to use than, and nearly as quick as, a horse. Even more important, it was cheap in comparison to equine travel, and so accessible to better-off working class people and to much of the lower middle classes. Therein lay the true cause of its immense popularity. Such a story is however more difficult to tell, and is less entertaining, than the story of bike racers and, as CCM expanded its productive repertoire to skates, of hockey stars. Charming and anecdotal tales about these elements fill up the middle third of the book, and while providing opportunities for insights into the marketing of the company's products, can leave the academic reader a bit restless.

McKenty is quite right in discussing

both skates and the daring expansion into automobile manufacturing as an organic response by the bicycle manufacturer to opportunity and the need to smooth out seasonal variations in demand. The move to make autos also gave the firm product access to the highest income bracket in Canada—quite a different market than that served by bicycles. The Russell, as the company's automobile became known (named after the manager who engineered the firm's growth) was a key product until it was spun off and then merged with an American auto manufacturer in 1915, as a single North American market began to develop for cars. It was a portent of the processes of international production rationalization that, despite the interruptions of recessions and wars, was a defining characteristic of twentieth-century business, and was to rattle and then destroy the rest of CCM starting in the 1950s.

The author pivots the company's success, and its failure, on its labour relations. A mix of paternalism and family-like employee loyalty provided the basis for a long period of growth for the firm through to 1941 under Russell's managerial leadership, he argues. Thereafter, increasingly strained labour relations, sometimes arising out of aggressive demands by the workforce, but increasingly framed by a CCM management and ownership that was profit- and competition-oriented and hostile or uncomprehending of labour needs, broke the spirit and the progress of the firm. Such an interpretation has its merits, but is inappropriately mono-causal. Fortunately the author provides numerous indications of other forces at work. Off-shore competition, first of all, became increasingly intense from the 1950s onwards which, when met by CCM, seriously compromised the quality of the company's bicycle product. And the decline in product quality was the

consequence of managerial decisions, not falling labour commitment. Then, in the go-go financial atmosphere of the 1960s, the company became a mere financial asset rather than a treasured productive entity.

A shifting panorama of owners more interested in erecting financial empires in holding-company conglomerates than in producing competitive, high-quality skates and bicycles was to blame. The cycle of innovation, investment, and higher productivity desperately needed under ferocious competitive pressures was short-circuited until irretrievable damage was done the company's reputation, market share, and finances. And so, to foreshorten the tale, bankruptcy came

by 1983, along with the sale of assets and the CCM name. It was a sorry end.

This book commendably and effectively pieces together a complex story from a wide variety of sources. That difficult task is disguised through a clear expository style. While more credence might have been given to broad market forces, those forces are to be discerned in the book, and the reader will understand that managers with a steadier and more innovative hand, and capitalists dedicated more to products rather than to greed might have allowed CCM a longer ride.

Ben Forster,  
University of Western Ontario

### *Laurentian University: A History*

by Linda Ambrose, Matt Bray, Sara Burke, Donald Dennie, and Guy Gaudreau

Edited by Matt Bray

Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010.

XIV + 409 pages. \$49.95 hardcover. ISBN 978-0-7735-3772-9. [www.mqup.ca](http://www.mqup.ca)

This book purports to be a history of the first half-century of Laurentian University. But it is that and a great deal more. Because of the particular and often very complex issues involved in the founding and development of Laurentian University, arising from its geographic location and northern hinterland, and from its linguistic, cultural, economic, and religious circumstances, its founders and builders faced many special challenges as they proceeded with the task of creating a new post-secondary institution. Thus, this biography of an institution becomes, in a very real sense, an extended essay on many of the challenges faced by this country as its history unfolds.

In addition to the economic and physical challenges of its northerly location on the Laurentian Shield, the University

needed to address the particular challenges posed by its bilingual constituency. In fact, it had a tri-cultural mandate, to serve those of Indigenous culture in addition to the French and English speaking communities. Beyond that lay the reality of the extraordinarily diverse multicultural society of Sudbury and its hinterland upon which the new University had to draw for many of its students and for much of its political and financial support.

As they coped with these many special circumstances, the founders of Laurentian were dealing constantly with some of the most fundamental challenges that confront Canadian society. This is clearly reflected in this book that, in addition to portraying the birthing of a post-secondary institution, provides invaluable examples, insights, and information about the cultural,