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Peter A. Baskerville. *Sites of Power: A Concise History of Ontario.* Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2005. vii + 296 pp. $46.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-541892-7.

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A Gap Well Filled

Peter Baskerville's *Sites of Power: A Concise History of Ontario* fills one of the gaping lacuna in the province's history: a "modern" synthesis of Ontario's past. The book stands as a landmark achievement despite its minor shortcomings.

Baskerville argues that a single analytical framework cannot possibly explain Ontario's past or present and that the province's remarkable diversity leaves no room for sweeping generalizations in this area of study. Instead, he contends that the province's development has been shaped by myriad conflicting forces. These played out among the members of the population because of differences in gender and race (ranging from the Hurons and coureurs-de-bois of the Contact period to the Italians and Anglo-Saxons of the recent past), and the gaps that separated the rungs of Ontario's socioeconomic ladder. In addition, the province's natural and constructed environments also played key roles in these clashes, acting as both the sites and agents of change.

Baskerville's book has many strengths. It stands as *the* desperately needed current account–in terms of methodology *and* time frame–of the history of Canada's most populous province. It views its subject through a wide prism of historical subfields (they span the gamut from the traditional political to the more contemporary environmental and First Nation approaches) as it covers everything from the pre-Contact period to the rise and fall of the recent Common Sense Revolution. Synthesizing these multiple subfields of Ontario history into one monograph (and traveling over several millennia in the process!) is an august undertaking, but Baskerville proves more than up to the task. In this regard, the book is exemplary. Moreover, in rising to this challenge Baskerville has done a masterful job of tapping the rich secondary literature in Ontario history. The result is over thirty pages of footnotes that are truly invaluable. They collectively serve as a superb, literally "up-to-the minute" bibliography for the study of the province's past. This makes the book a must-have acquisition for any course director in Ontario history.

At the same time, however, Baskerville's laudable approach to breaking the traditional mould for "run-of-the-mill" narrative histories of Ontario is a double-edged sword. In endeavouring to present an argument,

Baskerville has naturally been judicious in his selection of evidence. As a result, his book lacks many of the details often found in "textbook" histories. Although this is hardly a deficiency for which he can be faulted, it is a trait that may place some of the information the book presents beyond the grasp of students with little or no background in this field. Baskerville describes the Quebec Act, for example, as having been intolerable because it aimed to block settlement into the "Indian Territory" from the thirteen colonies without addressing the new rights and privileges the Act gave the francophones in British North America (p. 40). On the same page he goes on to note that General Burgoyne was defeated at Saratoga without identifying on whose side the official was fighting.

Sites of Power also has a few content and structural weaknesses. There are some factual errors, which range from minor to major: Baskerville writes that "Meredith" (instead of J. P. Whitney) was the province's premier until 1914 (p. 159), the Ministry (instead of the Department) of Education existed in 1912 (p. 175), and Ontarians planted millions fewer seedlings than they actually did during the early 1900s (p. 189). Likewise, the book includes numerous paragraphs that encompass far too many subjects, thereby rendering the read more than a tad confusing (especially on pages 85, 149, 204-205, 235 and 239). If this is a function of a ruthless edit to condense the material into the prescribed page limit, the end does not justify the means. This may also explain the book's rather abrupt ending. It jumps from Dalton McGuinty's electoral victory in 2003 to a confusing discussion that asks, "Could there be an Ontario outside of Confederation?" (p. 243).

Despite these flaws, Baskerville's account stands as the best survey text for a course in Ontario history; on this account the verdict is unequivocal. It is generally an interesting read whose all-encompassing approach makes it the best in its class.

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