

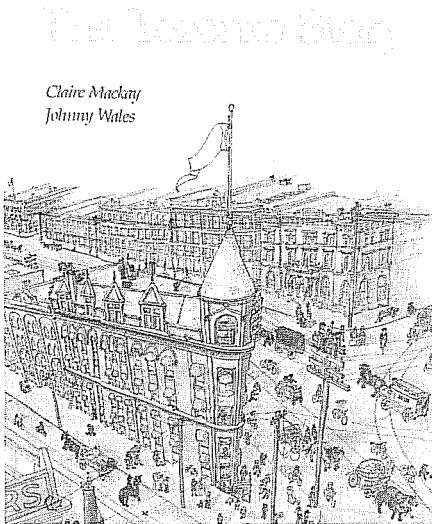
wisdom and apprehensions against the improvidence of nibbling away their food-supply on the principle that Kwakiutl don't "hoard" like whites.

Solidly as the author draws Paddy, Lynn, and their grandparents, his stereotypical crooks seem brought in for excitement. Most convincing are the dialogue and motivation, least so the Kwakiutl boy's friendship with Paddy, his ignorance of how to catch salmon and unremarked disappearance at the end. But those are things grown-ups notice.

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## TORONTO IS STILL ITS PAST

**The Toronto story.** Claire Mackay. Illus. Johnny Wales. Annick Press. 1990. 112 pp., \$34.95 \$24.95 cloth, paper. ISBN 1-55037-137-1, 1-55037-135-5.



As the two hundredth anniversary of the settlement of Toronto as a permanent community approaches (1993), booksellers will undoubtedly be coping with a flurry of histories of the city. One of the most colourful of these will surely be *The Toronto story*. While its large format seems to indicate that it is intended for a young teenage reader, it would be a shame if very much older readers as well did not have a chance to open it. They would be captivated. Everything about the book is delightful. From the wit of Mackay's prose and the cheery vigour of Wales's line-and-wash sketches to the attractive elements of the work's apparatus and design, the book will

quickly win a warm place in any reader's heart.

This is a survey of Toronto's past – from the ice-ages to the Sky Dome – with facts and figures and quotations from diaries; above all, though, it is not dry history. The author and illustrator, kindred spirits sharing a lively style, have indeed managed to narrate the story of their book's title, and one that is

full of vitality.

The author does it by choosing to relate the experiences of real individuals, children and adults, who helped make the city. As an historian, however, she nicely balances this concern for the human with an obligation to recreate the complex tableau of a period. A series of vignettes turn the historian's erudition into understandable phases of the city's story: Sophia and Francis, children of John Graves Simcoe, explore the Don Valley in 1793; Lieutenant Ely Playter watches the American raiding fleet enter Toronto Bay in 1813; housewife Elizabeth Strong labours at her year-round chores in the 1820's. The author's voice is always present to comment or to criticize, always suggesting that whatever happened in the past involved real human beings and can be understood by us today in real human terms. Mackay writes with literate clarity and constant humour: William Lyon Mackenzie is described "with eyes of blue lightning, a jaw like a tombstone, a nose like an axe – and a tongue like a flamethrower;" Edwin Boyd (the bank robber) is described as a bill collector – "the bills were tens, twenties and fifties," and his gang "shared his enthusiasm for instant banking."

The illustrator's device for making history "real" is to show us, with often whimsical but always accurate detail, eight views of the changing "city-scape" at Wellington and Church Streets – from the time when settlers there were still pulling stumps until today when the venerable Flatiron Building seems overwhelmed by the skyscrapers of continuing history. The wide margins are also used for a wealth of charming miniatures, truly "illuminations" of life in Toronto's past, painstakingly researched in part from historic photographs.

Among the book's end matter, two big pages of Timelines offer such invaluable information as: "1800 – Hogs are no longer allowed to run free in York;" "1835 – Toronto's first garbage collector, called a 'scavenger,' starts collecting;" "1904 – Second Great Fire makes charcoal of downtown T.O. Wood is banned for city buildings;" and "1950 – Shoppers greet the credit card. Sunday sports are legal." A helpfully detailed Index occupies four pages. And, entirely typical of the earnestness of the author's purpose, a bibliography of 28 items is offered the young (and not-so-young) Torontophile and is entitled "More stories to read."

It is clear that this has been a work of love. The enthusiasm of the author and the illustrator for their city, its people and its story, is matched by their historical competence and a marvellous skill in transmitting both the enthusiasm and the history. They have given the reader a truly delightful book.

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