

## Book Notice

*Place Names of Ontario*. By Alan Rayburn. U of Toronto P. 1997. Pp. xxi-404.

Alan Rayburn knows more about Canadian placenames than probably anyone to date. From the uncounted tens of thousands of Ontario placenames (some 57,000 plus are officially recognized), he has selected 2,285 to include in this extensive, authoritative and certain to be influential dictionary. The length of the entries varies according to the extent of the political, geographical or social histories of the named items, from one sentence, as in the case of Limerick (named for the country in Ireland) to several columns, as in the case of the larger cities such as Toronto and Ottawa.

Rayburn is at his best when he combines social and political history as these impact upon place naming, as he does in such entries as Kitchener and Swastika; these are wonderful mini-histories not only of places and names but of the ways of people with placenames; they are incisive, informed, and instructive.

Of particular interest in Rayburn's introduction is the summary of the sources of Ontario names. Given that the roster of names included is a selection rather than a sample, and (justifiably) slanted toward the names of populated places and municipal divisions and thus perhaps not representative of the names of Ontario in general, the origins of the names are still remarkable. More than 25% of the names included have immediate British roots; they are either transferred directly from British placenames or taken from British personages. An almost equal number recall prominent Canadians or first settlers. The list falls off dramatically after these major contributors with the remaining half of the names divided among an additional 20 categories.

Of the many things I like about this book the one that is most noteworthy is that it is definitive and reliable; the entries do not ride on the jaded horses of hearsay, supposition or folk etymology but on solid, authoritative and certain scholarship, worn lightly and for this all the more impressive.

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