

## **Toronto's Underworld: the Don River Valley as a "Repository for Undesirables"**

Not far from the spot where, at present, the Don-street bridge crosses the river, on the west side and to the north, lived for a long time a hermit-squatter, named Joseph Tyler.... His abode on the Don was an excavation in the side of the steep hill, a little way above the level of the river bank.... To the south of his cave he cultivated a large garden, and raised among other things, the white sweet edible Indian corn, a novelty here at the time; and very excellent tobacco.<sup>1</sup>

Henry Scadding's 1873 description of Joseph Tyler's cave is the first detailed record in what would become a long history of homelessness in Toronto's Lower Don River Valley. According to Scadding's account, Tyler was an industrious and inventive recluse, a veteran of the American War of Independence who manufactured and sold "pitch and tar" to merchants in town, and ferried the Helliwell brewery's beer in his "magnificent canoe" when the roads were too muddy to use. He was a puzzling figure—Scadding notes the "mystery attendant on his choice of life of complete solitude [and] his careful reserve." His choice of location was equally mysterious: the Lower Don River in Tyler's time (the 1820s and 30s) was separated from the town of York by the woods of the military reserve, making Tyler a man distinctly on the margins. Whether Tyler chose to live on the Lower Don or was pushed there by circumstance is difficult to determine. Certainly his livelihood of pitch and pine knot production would have been facilitated by a location close to the forest, and the river provided easy transportation into town. The uncertainty surrounding Joseph Tyler is emblematic of the history of people on the margins—indeed, the fact that he is named and some details of his life recorded is more than we have for most of the people who found themselves living in the valley, for various reasons, over the last two hundred years.

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Scadding, *Toronto of Old: Collections and Recollections Illustrative of the Early Settlement and Social Life of the Capital of Ontario* (Toronto: Adam, Stevenson & Co., 1873), 228-29.

This paper explores selected episodes in the history of marginalized people who have come to live in or frequent Toronto's Don River Valley from the early nineteenth century to the present. A review of the local history of the valley turns up scattered references to gangsters, criminals, and a colourful cast of "hermit-squatters," as Scadding called them, setting up camp in the valley over the years. A closer look reveals a distinct pattern of marginalized groups finding refuge in the valley, from squatters along the Lower Don in the 1830s, to Roma encampments in the upper valley in the 1910s and 20s, to the establishment of a "hobo jungle" along the flats of the lower valley in the early 1930s, and the ongoing presence of homeless people in the valley today. The valley also became a favoured location for institutionalized "undesirables": 1860 saw the creation of a "House of Refuge" for the poor, homeless, and mentally ill on the east bank of the river; the Don Jail opened immediately south of the House of Refuge in 1864; and later in the century two isolation hospitals provided quarantine for victims of smallpox and diphtheria. For the individuals or families who found themselves there either by choice or by force, the valley seems to have operated as kind of urban underworld, a place "on the edges" that provided both refuge and invisibility.

A connection exists, I will suggest, between perceptions of the river valley as a marginal space at the edge of the city and its function as a repository for marginalized people. As Ian McKay contended in his ground-breaking article on the development of a liberal order in Canada, a "bridge exists" between those groups of people—and, I would add, places—deemed unfit for inclusion in the liberal project of individualism, order, productivity and wealth creation.<sup>2</sup> Despite substantial work in Canadian historiography on marginalized groups and, in the environmental history literature, on degraded spaces, few studies have examined the links

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<sup>2</sup> Ian McKay, "The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History," *The Canadian Historical Review* 81.4 (2000).

between those places and people relegated to the margins of urban environments. Certainly, land value and perceptions of risk were at work.<sup>3</sup> Ken Cruikshank and Nancy Bouchier's study of squatters and working class families in nineteenth century Hamilton is illustrative in demonstrating the geographic connections between industry, polluted and poorly drained lands and working class neighbourhoods.<sup>4</sup> And yet, while most studies in the environmental inequality literature describe the unequal distribution of environmental hazards in racialized or working-class neighbourhoods,<sup>5</sup> few investigate the congregation of marginalized populations in already degraded spaces or in urban/rural borderlands. Even fewer explore the link between homeless people and degraded environments.<sup>6</sup> How such spaces were constructed as marginal, and the attractions they held for homeless travellers, have yet to receive detailed treatment. This paper takes a small step in that direction.

Like all histories of people on the margins, sources are few and problematic. Those sources that are available—from police records, institutions for the homeless or mentally ill, and contemporary newspaper articles, among others—are flavoured with the prejudices of the day.

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Hurley, for example, shows how middle-class whites in Gary, Indiana constructed a "hierarchy of place"—creating homogenous neighbourhoods priced out of reach of the poor while at the same time shielding themselves from environmental hazards. Andrew Hurley, *Environmental Inequalities: Class, Race, and Industrial Pollution in Gary, Indiana, 1945-1980* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Ken Cruikshank and Nancy B. Bouchier, "Blighted Areas and Obnoxious Industries: Constructing Environmental Inequality on an Industrial Waterfront, Hamilton, Ontario, 1890-1960," *Environmental History* 9.3 (2004); Nancy B. Bouchier and Ken Cruikshank, "The War on the Squatters, 1920-1940: Hamilton's Boathouse Community and the Re-Creation of Recreation on Burlington Bay " *Labour/Le Travail* 51 (2003).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Hurley, 1995; Robert Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class and Environmental Quality* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1990); Harold L. Platt, *Shock Cities: The Environmental Transformation and Reform of Manchester and Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Todd McCallum's work on Depression-era hoboes in Vancouver describes the establishment of a hobo jungle in a derelict area of Vancouver's waterfront, but doesn't explore the connection between marginal space and the marginalized populations that congregated there. See Todd McCallum, "'Still Raining, Market Still Rotten': Homeless Men and the Early Years of the Great Depression in Vancouver" (Doctoral Dissertation, Queen's University 2004); Todd McCallum, "The Great Depression's First History? The Vancouver Archives of Major J.S. Matthews and the Writing of Hobo History," *Canadian Historical Review* 87.1 (2006). Similarly, Jill Wade's excellent 1997 article on marginal housing in Vancouver describes squatters living on polluted foreshore lands along Burrard Inlet, False Creek, and the Fraser River, but doesn't explore how and why such places were constructed as marginal. See Jill Wade, "Home or Homelessness? Marginal Housing in Vancouver, 1886-1950," *Urban History Review* 25.2 (1997).

Even fewer sources exist from the perspective of the marginalized themselves. With these limitations in mind, this paper will focus on two groups of “undesirables” whose presence in the valley received significant coverage in Toronto newspapers: 1) Roma immigrants who camped in the valley in the 1910s and 20s; and 2) the unemployed men who formed a “hobo jungle” on the flats of the river in 1930 and 1931. Drawing upon a limited record of historical photographs and newspaper articles, I will sketch the movement of people through place, and explore the ways that place—including topography and local resources—provided for and attracted populations with few alternatives. Here, place itself, rather than poverty, homelessness, or city politics, takes centre stage as the object of investigation.

*The Lower Don Valley: A Space on the Margins*

From the early decades of the nineteenth century, when John Graves Simcoe’s fledgling town of York expanded to become the colony’s first incorporated municipality, the Don River was construed as a space on the margins. Until the 1880s, the lower reaches of the river formed the eastern boundary of the city: the west bank lay in the City of Toronto and the east bank in the County of York. This jurisdictional divide had significant repercussions for people’s experience of the place. Well into the twentieth century, the east bank of the Don was considered a place more rural, and consequently more relaxed, than the city territory across the river. Lower taxes on the County side meant fewer policemen to apply the law, and in some cases a differing legal context creating openings for various illicit activities. A local history of the river recalls, for example, that “on the City side swimmers had to be fully costumed from head to toe” but “across

the river you swam naked.”<sup>7</sup> Taverns on the County side hosted blood sports such as cock fighting that were more effectively policed in the city. Jurisdictional variances were compounded by the nature of the river valley as a “wild space” on the edge of town: forested ravines were physically less accessible to policemen and other authorities. As such, the valley was often perceived as a kind of “lawless space”—a frontier of sorts, and a harbour for undesirable activities and individuals.

As a fringe space, the Lower Don Valley also provided a convenient location for the city’s wastes: far enough from residential and commercial areas to allow its use as disposal site, but close enough to make the process of dumping convenient. Not only did location play a role, but also topography: the Lower Don Valley’s steep ravines created a convenient receptacle for wastes (indeed, ravines throughout the city were used as “levelling up places” until the first sanitary landfill sites were created in the 1950s).<sup>8</sup> Filling served the double purpose of storing wastes and removing the barriers to development posed by these yawning divides in the city’s topography. Today, forty-seven abandoned landfill sites litter the Don watershed.<sup>9</sup> Dumping in the river was even more convenient for early industrialists, as wastes moved downstream and out of mind with the flow of the water. By 1852 thirty-nine grist, saw, and paper mills had established on the banks of the two main branches of the Don.<sup>10</sup> Tanneries, breweries, soap factories and oil refineries followed, and by the late nineteenth century the lower river and the

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<sup>7</sup> Ron Fletcher, *Over the Don* (Toronto: Ron Fletcher, 2002), 26. A review of by-laws for York County between 1842 and 1859 shows that bathing “without proper bathing dress” was unlawful in York County waters just as it was in the City of Toronto. Perhaps Fletcher refers here to the relative absence of police surveillance on the County side. (County of York, By-Law No.69, To Make Provisions for the Preservation of the Public Morals within the United Counties of York and Peel, In “Existing By-Laws, Passed by the Home District and County Councils of York and Peel, from 1842 to the First Session of 1859, Inclusive,” County of York Diffusional Material, Archives of Ontario.

<sup>8</sup> Wayne Reeves, "From the Ground Up: Fragments toward an Environmental History of Tkaronto," in *Greentopia: Towards a Sustainable Toronto*, ed. Alana Wilcox, Christina Palassio, and Jonny Dovercourt (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2007), 71.

<sup>9</sup> The Don Watershed Regeneration Council, *Forging a New Deal for the Don* (Toronto: Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, 2006), 5.

<sup>10</sup> Ontario Department of Planning and Development, "Don Valley Conservation Report," (Toronto: 1950), 126.

marsh at its mouth were widely regarded as a cesspool and a persistent threat to public health.<sup>11</sup> In keeping with its position on the edge of the growing city, the Don also received increasing amounts of raw sewage from the 1850s on.<sup>12</sup> While improvements in sewage treatment and disposal in the early twentieth century removed the menace of raw sewage discharge, pollution caused by industrial expansion and combined sewer overflows during heavy rains led the Ontario government to label the Don as the Province's most polluted river in a 1950 study.<sup>13</sup>

### *People on the Margin*

Information on people living in the Don River Valley is difficult to obtain from traditional sources. Census enumerators walked through the neighbourhoods bordering the valley, but didn't enter the wooded areas of the valley to record people living there. City reports on housing and homelessness document city-wide housing crises, particularly in the 1930s and during the post-war boom in the 1940s, but rarely reach the level of specificity needed to trace people living rough in the valley.<sup>14</sup> Police records are a source I have yet to explore; it is likely, however, that with limited resources and a small staff of overworked constables, few ventured

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<sup>11</sup> Until about 1880, the miasmatic theory of disease held that "accumulations of human, animal, or vegetable waste, left to rot, produced noxious vapours which led to disease"(Catherine Brace, "Public Works in the Canadian City; the Provision of Sewers in Toronto 1870-1913," *Urban History Review* 23.2 (1995): 35.). Despite mistaken ideas about the origins of disease, high coliform counts in public drinking water were likely the cause of a series of cholera epidemics which struck Toronto in 1832, 1843, 1849, 1854 and 1866 (Carl Benn, *The History of Toronto: An 11,000 Year Journey* (Toronto: City of Toronto Culture Division, 2006).).

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed discussion of nineteenth century sewerage in Toronto, see Catherine Brace, "One Hundred and Twenty Years of Sewerage: The Provision of Sewers in Toronto 1793-1913" (M.A. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1993);Brace, "Public Works in the Canadian City; the Provision of Sewers in Toronto 1870-1913," 34.

<sup>13</sup> Ontario Department of Planning and Development, Part VI, Chapter 2, 15. The situation is little changed today, with a 2007 Environment Canada study identifying the Don as among the most polluted waterways in Canada, and the most polluted in Ontario. Jessey Bird, "'Trashed' for 150 Years, Toronto's Don River Struggles to run clean again," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 30 November 2007.

<sup>14</sup> In his 1911 report on slum conditions in Toronto, for example, Medical Health Officer Charles Hastings identifies six areas of marginal housing in the city, two of which border on the Don River. His detailed house-by-house investigation, however, doesn't include a search for the "completely homeless" in the valley lands below the so-called "slums." (Charles J. Hastings, "Report of the Medical Health Officer Dealing with the Recent Investigation of Slum Conditions in Toronto, Embodying Recommendations for the Amelioration of the Same," 5 July 1911, Series 60, City of Toronto Reports Collection, Box 2, Item 23, City of Toronto Archives).

into the valley.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, it is precisely this absence of scrutiny that may have attracted people to the valley in the first place. As Bouchier and Cruikshank note in their study of working-class residents and squatters in Hamilton's Burlington Bay, "one of [the community's] attractions was that it was nicely secluded from the gaze of the Harbour Commission and city police authorities that workers on street corners and in busy city taverns often felt."<sup>16</sup> Despite this relative silence in the official record, public interest in the unfortunate and the alien ensured that some coverage appeared in the newspapers of the day. Two incidents in the early twentieth century—the establishment of a "gypsy camp" on the Upper Don River in the 1910s and 1920s, and the emergence of a hobo jungle on the flats of the Lower Don in the 1930s—were the subject of considerable public interest and coverage by the local media.

In their illustrated history of immigration to Toronto in the early twentieth century, Bob Harney and Harold Troper made reference to groups of Roma immigrants who carved a space for themselves at the edge of society:

Moving about in family groups or small 'tribes,' their wagons or old cars appeared in and around Toronto at certain times of year. The river valleys along the Humber and Don were their favourite campsites and those who did not come into the centre of the city to do business spent their time fishing and making sweet grass and reed baskets.<sup>17</sup>

As these observations suggest, Toronto's river valleys provided not only refuge from authorities (examples from other North American cities show that Roma families often faced imprisonment or ejection when confronted by local police<sup>18</sup>) but also a source of sustenance and livelihood.

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<sup>15</sup> Toronto historian Carl Benn notes that until police services reforms in the 1850s the City employed only five full-time constables. Over sixty men were employed by the force in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Benn, 31.)

<sup>16</sup> Bouchier and Cruikshank, 22.

<sup>17</sup> Robert F. Harney and Harold Troper, *Immigrants: A Portrait of the Urban Experience, 1890-1930* (Toronto: Van Nostrand Reinhold Ltd., 1975), 38.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, John Tylor Lyon, "'a Picturesque Lot': The Gypsies in Peterborough," *Beaver* 78.5 (1998). Lyon documents the arrest and temporary jailing of the male travellers on charges of loitering and obstruction of a public highway; local authorities apparently attempted to deport the families to Mexico, only to find, ironically, that they were naturalized Canadians. See also T.A. Acton, *Gypsy Politics and Traveller Identity* (Hatfield,

Toronto photographer John Boyd Senior's images of Roma women and children along the banks of the Humber River in 1918 show women gathering water from the river and cooking meals on fires fueled by driftwood from the river banks.

In the fall of 1910, a group of Roma families established a camp site in the Upper Don Valley near Eglinton Avenue. An article in the *Toronto Star* on November 5<sup>th</sup> of that year described the camp, noting in predictably patronizing terms its distance from mainstream Canadian experience:

Tucked away in the bushes around the last bend of a long road to the north of the city, miles from a railroad, and a good walk from any other human habitation, are four little white tents, the dwelling place of the remnants of a gypsy tribe. They have prepared for the winter only by building leaf shelters over the doorways of the tents and there they will stay through storm and sunshine until the wanderlust seizes their gypsy fancies.

At the time, this area of the valley remained rural and largely wooded, with large farms occupying the neighbouring table lands. Not the polluted environment of the lower river, the area nevertheless occupied a margin in its rurality and its position just outside the city limits.<sup>19</sup> Despite its relative isolation, local residents—apparently concerned that “these gypsies might have too many of the story book gypsy characteristics”—“tried to show [the Roma] that there were other parts more favorable to their race.” Interestingly, the families responded in this case by “promptly [purchasing]” the property, thereby “[showing] themselves to be law abiding citizens, and people of wealth.” Presumably these property owners were not among the Roma

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Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press, 1997); Marlene Sway, *Familiar Strangers: Gypsy Life in America* (U. of Illinois Pr., 1988).

<sup>19</sup> As Ruth Sandwell has shown in her 1999 collection, rural areas were often constituted as marginal spaces by urban dwellers, particularly in their role as receivers of the city's wastes. R.W. Sandwell, ed., *Beyond the City Limits: Rural History in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999).

families viewed by Toronto Medical Health Officer Charles Hastings as “sleeping and living like animals” and deported in 1914.<sup>20</sup>

Ten years later a group of eight “Serbian gypsy” families occupied a site on the west branch of the Don near the intersection of Yonge Street and York Mills Road.<sup>21</sup> Unlike the 1910 camp, this camp was easily visible from the road. An article in the *Globe* June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1920 noted the camp was situated “not more than one hundred yards from Yonge Street... so that passing motorists may easily be beguiled to visit their encampment and have their fortunes told.” The camp’s roadside location in the valley provided the dual advantages, the article suggests, of access to the river for cooking, bathing, and drinking water, and access to a source of revenue through roadside sales. Men in the camp apparently worked in the city as chauffeurs and coppersmiths, and supplemented their income with roadside sales of used cars and car parts. As the reporter milled about trying to get an interview with one of the women of the camp, he observed children, apparently “too numerous to count” swimming in the Don. They swim with their clothes on, he noted, “[jumping] into the water and then [waiting] for the sun to dry them.” It wasn’t long before the camp raised the ire of local residents. Complaints throughout the summer of 1920 about “the condition of things at the gypsy camp at York Mills bridge” were directed to the County police and health authorities.<sup>22</sup> The situation was last mentioned in the *Star* August 21<sup>st</sup>, when the columnist speculated that “the gypsies are preparing to move to their winter quarters.”

Transience in the valley took on greater visibility still during the 1930s, when unemployed men established a large hobo jungle in the flats of the Lower Valley, north of Bloor

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<sup>20</sup> Charles Hastings, Toronto Medical Officer of Health, Annual Report to the Toronto Board of Health, 1914, p.112. City of Toronto Archives, Series 365, Department of Public Health Reports.

<sup>21</sup> “Gypsies at York Mills,” *Toronto Star*, 2 June 1920.

<sup>22</sup> “Gypsy Camp in North Toronto,” *Toronto Star*, 25 May 1920.

Street. Sometime in the fall of 1930 a group of transients found refuge in a brick factory in the valley, and rumours began to circulate about the Don Valley “kiln-dwellers.” Some investigative journalism by the left-leaning *Toronto Star* located the camp in early December—the reporter apparently having “tramped one night almost the full length of the Don valley searching for [the men]” before being tipped off weeks later by a young homeless man who had spent time at the site. “Last night,” he reported, “during bitter winds and near-zero weather, forty-two homeless, jobless, and penniless wandering men slept on ‘hot-flops’ in the Don Valley yards of the Toronto Brick Co.” The reporter explained: bricks baked in a series of huge chambers, or kilns, often took up to a week to cool. “While they are cooling, [the men] climb right inside the kilns, stretch themselves out on the hard, warm bricks and seek the solace of sleep.” How did they come to find shelter in a working brick factory? The reporter was careful to point out that these “decent and respectable” men were not trespassers:

These men are not bums. They are not tramps. Nor are they hoboes.... They are residents of the Don Valley yards of the Toronto Brick Co. as the invited guests of Frank E. Waterman, general manager of that company, who has not only issued instructions to his staff that the men are to be allowed the privileges of his brick yard, but he has on several occasions stoutly resented the intrusion of policemen and plainclothesmen.”<sup>23</sup>

Asked why they chose the valley brick works rather than the House of Industry or one of the city’s night missions, one of the men responded, “we’ve still got a little pride left,” adding that they found begging on the streets demeaning. This sentiment was repeated frequently in the *Star*’s coverage of the Don Valley camp, and in accounts of hobo jungles in other parts of the

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<sup>23</sup> “Forty-Two Homeless Men Snoozed on Heated Bricks,” *The Toronto Daily Star*, 2 December 1930. Plainclothesmen apparently entered the site in the early hours of the morning and shook men awake with offers of work to test their resolve to find employment. All men, the *Star* article reported proudly, readied themselves quickly only to find the offers were a ruse.

country.<sup>24</sup> It was expressed especially clearly in a letter to the editor of the *Star* from an anonymous jungle resident in July 1931. Identifying himself as a World War I veteran who found himself homeless in the same city he had enlisted from years before, he wrote that he was “of a husky build and suited to manual labor.” “Before I will accept charity or line up in a bread line,” he continued, “I offer my services for room or board.” He signed the letter only with his location: “Don Valley.”<sup>25</sup> Another letter to the editor from a resident of the hobo jungle suggested, interestingly, that work could be created for the unemployed men of the valley by creating a project to straighten the river north of Bloor Street and to remove unnecessary weeds and trees from the valley.<sup>26</sup>

If pride was one reason these men chose the valley, the shrinking availability of other forms of relief was another. A follow-up article in the *Star* June 19, 1931 counted three hundred men in the valley “following [the] recent closing of all city missions and shelters.” The brick works population had expanded to one hundred men; an additional two hundred slept “on the banks of the muggy Don river with the sky as a blanket and the earth as a mattress.”<sup>27</sup> Later that summer the jungle had expanded again, with approximately four hundred men camped along the flats of the Don River. As Reverend Peter Bryce observed in a tour of the valley in August 1931, some men slept in box cars and dugouts; others fashioned “most ingenious huts”—“bivouacs of rushes... bound together by striplings sewn through with thatch.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See, for example, McCallum, “The Great Depression’s First History? The Vancouver Archives of Major J.S. Matthews and the Writing of Hobo History.”; Wade.

<sup>25</sup> “He Enlisted in Toronto,” *Toronto Daily Star*, 9 July 1931.

<sup>26</sup> John J. MacArthur, Letter to the Editor, *The Globe*, 19 September 1931. The project never materialized.

<sup>27</sup> “300 Jobless Sleep Nightly Along Don River’s Banks,” *The Toronto Daily Star*, 19 June 1931. Michiel Horn provides some context for both the heavy burden experienced by Canadian municipalities in providing relief, and the attempt to clamp down on assistance to transients in order to force them out of the city and into relief camps. Michiel Horn, *The Great Depression of the 1930s in Canada*, vol. Historical Booklet No.39 (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1984), 12.

<sup>28</sup> Rev. Peter Bryce, “Jobless in Don Valley ‘Jungle’ Confident Work Will Be Found,” *The Toronto Daily Star*, 20 August 1931.

The river valley provided natural amenities, such as water for drinking, cooking and bathing, reeds and saplings for hut construction, and driftwood for campfires; it also yielded resources from the history of human settlement in the area. A local dump in the valley north of the Bloor Street Viaduct (the site of today's Chester Springs Marsh) provided a bounty of discarded objects that men used to furnish their make-shift homes: a picture frame, an old trunk, a radio antennae (but no radio), and a semi-functioning kerosene lamp were some of the objects mentioned in a *Star* article August 20, 1931.<sup>29</sup> The most obvious attraction of the Don Valley site, however, beyond its proximity to the city centre, were the rail lines that ran through the valley. As former East York mayor True Davidson recalled in her 1976 memoir, "the jungle became known amongst the fraternity of those riding the rods, and almost every freight that came down the Don brought more inhabitants to the area."<sup>30</sup> As the Depression worsened and ever increasing numbers of unemployed men from across the country congregated in the valley, mayors from Toronto and East York vowed to crack down on outsiders seeking relief within their city limits. Toronto police vowed to "watch every freight train" to "stop transients from forcing themselves on the municipality."<sup>31</sup> The coming winter's relief services would be provided to local residents only, and not transients from other areas, the mayors warned.

It was the beginning of the end of the Don Valley jungle. In late September 1931 the Province announced that 2,500 unemployed men would be drafted from congested Southern Ontario centres for work on the Trans-Canada highway project in Northern Ontario.<sup>32</sup> Further drafts followed, and by the beginning of October the "peculiar and varied habitations" of the

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<sup>29</sup> For a fascinating study of scavenging by marginalized populations in nineteenth century Paris, see Barrie M. Ratcliffe, "Perceptions and Realities of the Urban Margin: The Rag Pickers of Paris in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Canadian Journal of History* 27.2 (1992).

<sup>30</sup> True Davidson, *The Golden Years of East York* (Toronto: Centennial College Press, 1976), 82.

<sup>31</sup> "Police Will Watch Every Freight Train for Jobless Influx," *The Globe*, 26 September 1931. Also "City Relief Work to Start at Once 'For Own Citizens,'" *The Globe*, 19 September 1931.

<sup>32</sup> "Quota from South in Jobless Draft Estimated at 2,500," *The Globe* 30 September 1931.

jungle had been demolished, their residents transferred to northern camps or removed to temporary shelters.<sup>33</sup> As the *Toronto Star* reported, it seems the men of the Don Valley jungle had fared remarkably well for their ordeal: of 213 men examined by medical doctors prior to joining the first road-building contingent, only three were rejected as unfit for hard labour. No diseases were reported, and no cases of malnutrition—in fact, the incredulous reporter noted, the men on the whole were more likely to be overweight than underweight.<sup>34</sup>

### *Conclusion*

These snapshots provided by newspaper accounts hint at the ways that both Roma families and Depression-era hoboes used the environment around them to enhance what must have been a fairly marginal existence. Both groups, it seems, chose the valley for access to certain amenities, such as water, firewood, and material scavenged from nearby landfill sites. Distance from authorities may also have been important, as the experience of Roma travellers in other parts of North America, and the jungle residents' aversion to institutionalized shelter, suggests. The brick works manager's "[stout resentment]" of the intrusion of plainclothesmen also suggests a limited degree of protection afforded to homeless men under his roof. In its role as a semi-rural space on the edge of the city, and, in its lower reaches, an industrial and heavily polluted space, the Don River Valley became a space on the margins. Devalued by more fortunate inhabitants of the city, it became, as I have argued, a place for people pushed to the edges of society. Despite developments over the last forty years that have seen much of the valley "re-valued" as a recreational landscape, in some respects not much has changed: makeshift tents of the homeless can still be seen on the banks of the river in the lower valley, and

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<sup>33</sup> "East York Policemen Houseclean 'Jungle,'" *The Globe*, 7 October 1931.

<sup>34</sup> "Men of Don Valley Jungle a Healthy and Husky Lot," *The Toronto Daily Star*, 30 September 1931.

as recently as this spring, the City used the valley as a receptacle for huge amounts of filthy, salt-laced snow from the city's roads.

In its focus on marginal people in a marginal place, this paper contributes to a growing trend in recent Canadian historiography to draw attention to the structures of power at work in designating people and places within the framework of centres and peripheries—the liberal order framework that Ian McKay outlined so provocatively in his 2000 prospectus in the *Canadian Historical Review*.<sup>35</sup> Drawing from the evidence provided by middle-class perceptions of the marginalized, it seeks to go a step further by shedding light on the lived experience of people “on the outside” of the liberal project—in this case, those whose “poverty... irregular habits, and... problematic, intermittent relation to the formal market economy, particularly to money and waged work” stood in sharp contrast to liberal values of order, property, and self-control.<sup>36</sup> Assessed as marginal by powerful groups in the urban centre, places like the Don River Valley, with its polluted waters and difficult-to-develop ravine banks, and populations like the Roma and the Depression-era hoboos, were among the casualties of the liberal project of city-building in early twentieth-century Toronto.

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<sup>35</sup> McKay, 619.

<sup>36</sup> R.W. Sandwell, "The Limits of Liberalism: The Liberal Reconnaissance and the History of the Family in Canada," *The Canadian Historical Review* 84.3 (2003): 447.

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