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An Intimate Understanding of Place: Charles Sauriol and Toronto's Don River Valley, 1927–1989



Abstract: Every summer from 1927 to 1968, Toronto conservationist Charles Sauriol and his family moved from their city home to a rustic cottage just a few kilometres away, within the urban wilderness of Toronto's Don River Valley. In his years as a cottager, Sauriol saw the valley change from a picturesque setting of rural farms and woodlands to an increasingly threatened corridor of urban green space. His intimate familiarity with the valley led to a lifelong quest to protect it. This paper explores the history of conservation in the Don River Valley through Sauriol's experiences. Changes in the approaches to protecting urban nature, I argue, are reflected in Sauriol's personal experience – the strategies he employed, the language he used, and the losses he suffered as a result of urban planning policies. Over the course of Sauriol's career as a conservationist, from the 1940s to the 1990s, the river increasingly became a symbol of urban health – specifically, the health of the relationship between urban residents and the natural environment upon which they depend. Drawing from a rich range of sources, including diary entries, published memoirs, and unpublished manuscripts and correspondence, this paper reflects upon the ways that biography can inform histories of place and better our understanding of individual responses to changing landscapes.

Keywords: Toronto, Don River, conservation movement, twentieth century

Résumé : Chaque été de 1927 à 1968, l'écologiste torontois Charles Sauriol et sa famille quittent leur maison de ville pour s'installer dans un chalet rustique quelques kilomètres plus loin, dans la zone naturelle de la vallée de la rivière Don, au cœur de Toronto. Durant ces années, Sauriol a vu la vallée pittoresques, aux fermes et régions boisées se transformer en corridor vert urbain toujours plus menacé. Fort de sa très grande connaissance de la vallée, tout au long de sa vie, il se donna pour mission de la protéger. Cet article explore l'histoire de la conservation dans la vallée de la rivière Don par le biais de ce qu'a vécu Sauriol. Je soutiens que l'expérience personnelle de Sauriol, y compris les stratégies qu'il a employées, le langage qu'il a utilisé, les pertes qu'il a lui-même subies dans la foulée des politiques de planification urbaine – reflète les changements d'approche déployés pour assurer la protection de la nature urbaine. Au fil de la carrière d'écologiste de Sauriol, des années 1940 aux années 1990, la rivière est devenue une représentation symbolique de plus en plus puissante de la santé urbaine et plus

précisément de la relation saine entre les citadins et le milieu naturel duquel ils dépendent. Puisant à une riche collection de sources – notes de journal personnel, de mémoires publiés et de correspondance et manuscrits inédits –, cet article réfléchit aux façons dont une biographie peut nous renseigner sur l'histoire d'un lieu et nous aider à mieux comprendre les réactions individuelles aux mutations du paysage.

Mots clés : Toronto, rivière Don, mouvement pour la conservation, vingtième siècle

In the summer of 1983, Toronto conservationist Charles Sauriol sat down to capture some of his memories of the Don River valley in the 1920s. He recalled a time before sewage fouled the waters of the upper river, before highway development sent a ribbon of pavement along the valley bottom – a time when the upper valley was still largely rural, and partly wild. 'I remember,' he wrote, 'seeing the full moon break over the pines, spreading its beams . . . over the misty shrouds that rose from the river. . . . Seated in front of the cottage, I could hear the water flowing over the river stones, and sometimes, just at dusk, the strident call of a whippoorwill.'¹ For Sauriol, lived experience in the Don Valley led to a lifelong quest to protect it. Over the forty-one summers that he and his family spent in a cottage at the Forks of the Don, Sauriol moved from a casual appreciator of 'open spaces' to a fervent champion of the valley as a vital green space for wildlife and harried urban residents alike. Major events for the Don – including the construction of the Don Valley Parkway in the late 1950s and the protection of remaining floodplain lands in the early 1960s – would make themselves felt in deeply personal ways within Sauriol's own life history. Through Sauriol's experience, furthermore, we can chart the beginnings of the twentieth-century environmental movement, including the ideological shifts from private nature appreciation to nature as a public good, and later in the century, from the sober tactics of postwar conservationists to the more playful and publicly engaged advocacy of the new environmentalism.

For most observers, the Don is an insignificant river notable only for the fact that it drains Canada's most urbanized watershed. Thirty-eight kilometres in its entirety, the river runs from its headwaters in the moraine lands north of the city south to its outlet in Lake Ontario, immediately east of the present city centre. Two main branches, the East and West Don, join to form a single stream (the Lower Don River) at the Forks about seven kilometres north of the lake. A third tributary, Taylor-Massey Creek, flows into the Forks from the east.

1 Charles Sauriol, *Tales of the Don* (Toronto: Natural Heritage / Natural History, 1984), 19.

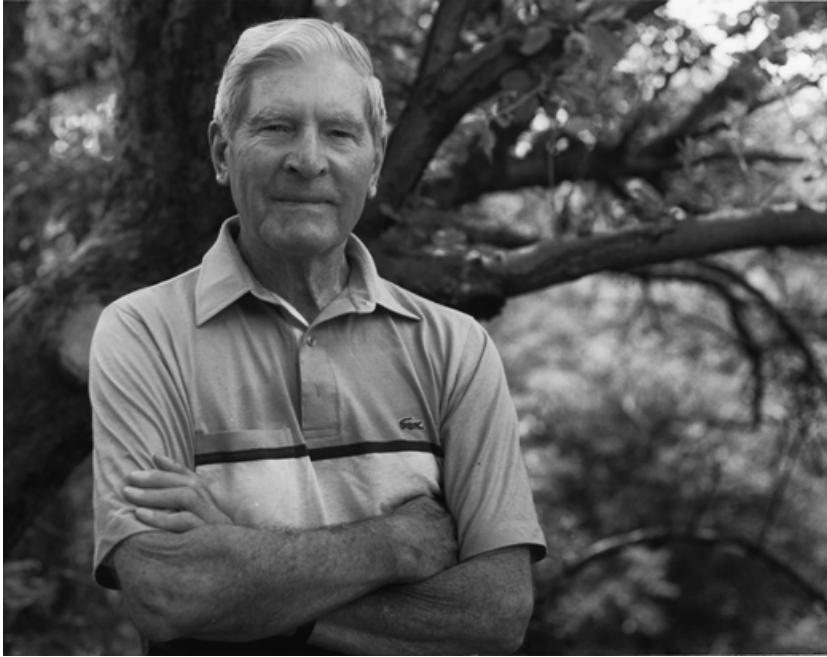


FIGURE 1 Charles Sauriol, ca. 1992.

Source: File 14, Series 101, Photographs of Charles Sauriol, Charles Sauriol Fonds, City of Toronto Archives.

The area below the confluence is known as the Lower Don; the wider watershed surrounding the east and west branches, the Upper Don. Despite its inconsequential size, the river has played a significant role in Toronto's development and in the conservation initiatives that developed in the city through the mid- to late-twentieth century. As we shall see in Sauriol's experience, it has also had a profound effect on individual lives.

This paper explores the intersections between Sauriol's life narrative and the history of the valley he loved, weaving from these interconnections a history of individual experience in place. Discernible in Sauriol's life story is the history of the river itself, bending a serpentine and mutable path through some of the major events in his life. It was the river that drew his father, Joseph, to the city in 1886, when he relocated from eastern Ontario to take a job operating one of the dredges that straightened the Lower Don. Sauriol was born eighteen years later in 1904, the youngest of seven children in his francophone

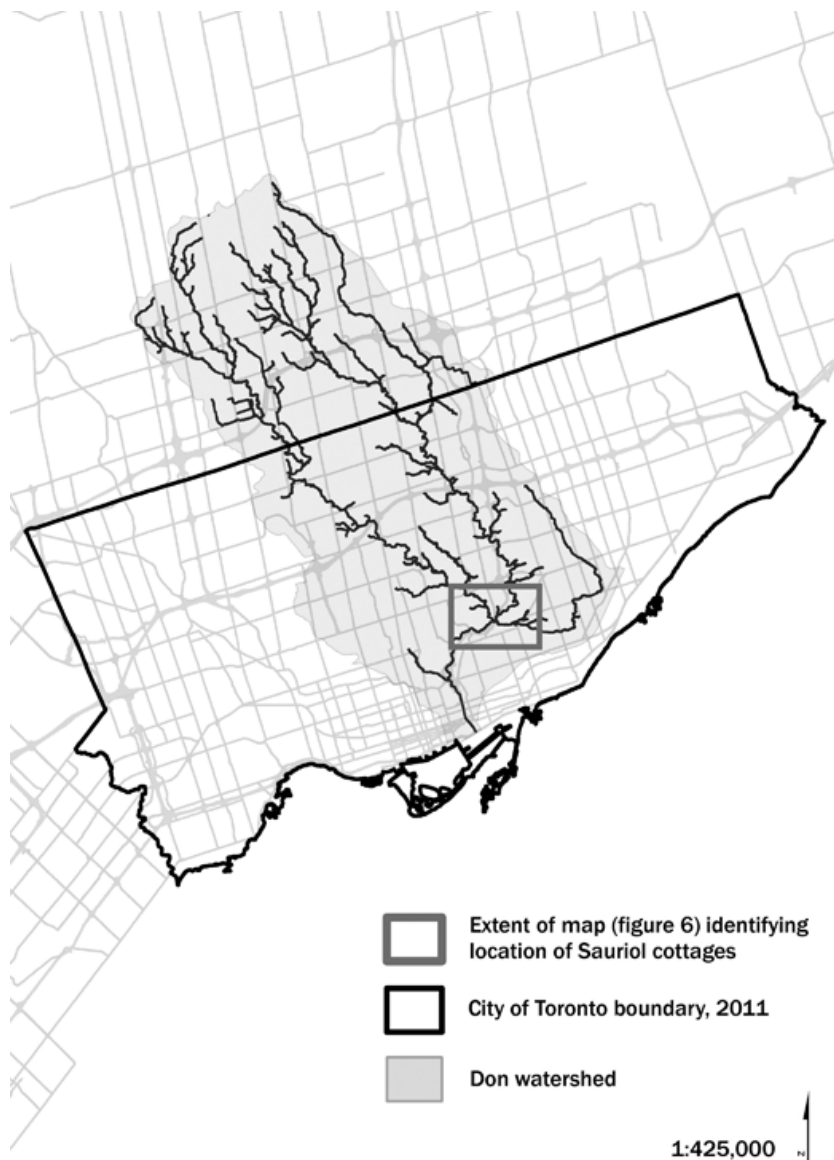


FIGURE 2 The Don River Watershed.
Source: Prepared by Jordan Hale.

Catholic household. Less than two blocks from his childhood home near Toronto's Queen Street and Broadview Avenue, the canalized lower river appears to have been of little interest to Sauriol as a child. Instead it was the upper valley with its rolling 'pine-clad' hills and deep swimming holes that captured his teenage imagination. When his family relocated to east Toronto in 1919, Sauriol joined other neighbourhood boys in the East Toronto 45th Boy Scouts Troop. The troop organized regular hikes and weekend camping expeditions to the East Don and Taylor-Massey Creek. Recalling his first camp-out in the valley at the age of sixteen, Sauriol wrote, 'It was a wilderness at our door, an escape from home, school, discipline . . . which held everything a red-blooded nature-loving boy could ask for.'² Sauriol's time with the Scouts would rank among his fondest boyhood memories. The experience he gained constructing lean-tos and identifying plants and animals, and the values he absorbed, including core Scouting principles of self-reliance, civic leadership, and rational scientific judgment, shaped his later work as a conservationist and his lifelong passion for the outdoors.³

Through a Scouting contact Sauriol landed his first job in publishing, as a messenger with the *Saturday Night Press*. He later commuted this experience into a job with the Montreal publishing firm Poirier Bessette, accepting by the early 1930s the position of advertising manager that he would hold for thirty years. As his career in publishing began to take hold, positioning him within a distinctly urban and cosmopolitan milieu, Sauriol turned to the valley for release, occupying his time away from work with long solitary hikes in the upper valleys of the Don. In 1927, at the age of twenty-four, he arranged to lease a small farm worker's cottage near the Forks of the Don. The cottage would become the focal point for his experiences in the valley, a retreat from the pressures of urban life that he shared first with his father and brothers, and later with his wife, Simonne, and their four children.

Biography offers to studies of environmental history an alternate history of place, one informed by individual experience. It allows us

2 Charles Sauriol, 'Boyhood Memories of South Riverdale,' ca. 1980, file 6, box 107297, series 107, Manuscripts of Charles Sauriol, [194-]-1995, Charles Sauriol Fonds, City of Toronto Archives (CTA).

3 Ben Jordan outlines the connections between the early twentieth-century conservation movement and the Scouting movement in the United States in his recent article, "'Conservation of Boyhood': Boy Scouting's Modest Manliness and Natural Resource Conservation, 1910-1930,' *Environmental History* 15, no. 4 (Oct. 2010): 612-42.

to move from the macro-narrative of landscape change to the intimate territory of personal observation, memory, and response to changing circumstances. For environmental historians concerned with changing human expectations of and experiences in nature, it helps us to better comprehend the personal toll exacted by large-scale environmental change. More than this, too, it enables us to more evocatively imagine a landscape lost. While maps and archival images carry us some distance toward picturing the early-twentieth-century Don Valley, Sauriol's deep engagement with this place as a boy and later as a cottager breathes life into these renderings. Through his accounts of painstakingly replanting trees on a denuded slope, cavorting in the river with his children on a hot July afternoon, discovering the foundations of a former mill on a winter hike through the upper valley, he attaches stories to place. His loss of this storied landscape becomes, vicariously, our loss too. Thus, Sauriol's story is significant in part because it offers rare insight into the changing environments of the urban fringe in mid-twentieth-century Canada.

Most biographies in environmental history have taken as their subjects those prominent individuals whose influence shaped public consciousness or mapped the future of treasured national landscapes: John Muir, John Wesley Powell, Rachel Carson, Rosalie Edge.⁴ Far fewer have explored the lives of less-celebrated figures, or those who dedicated themselves to efforts at the regional or local level.⁵ This

4 Jack E. Davis, *An Everglades Providence: Marjory Stoneman Douglas and the American Environmental Century* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009); Dyana Z. Furmansky, *Rosalie Edge, Hawk of Mercy: The Activist Who Saved Nature from the Conservationists* (Athens, GA: Wormsloe Foundation Nature, 2009); Mark Hamilton Lytle, *The Gentle Subversive: Rachel Carson, Silent Spring, and the Rise of the Environmental Movement*, 1st ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Donald Worster, *A River Running West: The Life of John Wesley Powell* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Donald Worster, *A Passion for Nature: The Life of John Muir* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). In the Canadian context, see James King, *Farley: The Life of Farley Mowat* (Hanover, NH: Steerforth, 2002); Anthony Robertson, *Above Tide: Reflections on Roderick Haig-Brown* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour, 1984); Donald B. Smith, *From the Land of the Shadows: The Making of Grey Owl* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1999).

5 Among very few monograph-length studies is Daniel Nelson's study of Ohio Congressman John F. Seiberling Jr. and his role in the creation of the Cuyahoga Valley National Park (*A Passion for the Land: John F. Seiberling and the Environmental Movement* [Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2009]). Other conservationists of regional significance receive coverage in monographs focused on particular places or developments, such as Adam Rome's *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism*

article joins a recent trend in biographical writing in exploring the lives of less prominent historical actors.⁶ Here the interest rests not so much on individual achievement and influence as on the relationship between the individual and his or her social and political (and in this case, physical) milieu. As Alice Kessler-Harris notes, the importance of the individual rests not so much in 'what she or he may have done, but [in] what her thoughts, language, and contests with the world reveal.'⁷ What I aim at here is not a comprehensive narrative of Sauriol's life but rather a selective mapping of key events in his life upon the environmental history of the river – an overlaying of personal biography upon a biography of place. Through Sauriol's efforts to observe, record, and in many cases resist what he viewed as the unwelcome encroachments of urban development upon a remnant swath of wilderness within the city, we can discern the influence of changing ideas about the environment through the twentieth century, and the ways those ideas, in turn, had concrete ramifications for the geography and environmental integrity of an urban river valley.⁸

Sauriol makes such a compelling subject for study in part because he left behind such a rich record of his life experiences. Author of six books about his experiences as a conservationist, an apiarist, and a cottager in the Don Valley, together with numerous unpublished manuscripts and regular diary entries throughout his life, he gathered meaning from the act of self-documenting. Executed with less elegance than the works of Muir or Leopold, Seton or Haig-Brown, and focused on a place perhaps less compelling than Yosemite or the wilds of British Columbia, his work never received the recognition that other conservationist-writers enjoyed in this period: most of his books are out of print, and his name is unknown to most Torontonians beyond local history and environmental advocacy circles. His influence survives, however, in the physical landscape of valley parklands, including the Charles Sauriol Conservation Reserve created in the East Valley in

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), and Richard Walker's *Country in the City: The Greening of the San Francisco Bay Area* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008).

- 6 David Nasaw, 'Historians and Biography,' *American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (June 2009): 576.
- 7 Alice Kessler-Harris, 'Why Biography?,' *American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (June 2009): 626.
- 8 Jack Davis makes a similar argument in charting the development of core ideas in American environmentalism against the long twentieth-century life of Florida Everglades advocate Marjory Stoneman Douglas (*An Everglades Providence*).

1989, and a number of other protected areas he had a hand in creating across the province.

While there is a growing body of work on the conservation movement in Canada, the urban open space movement of the postwar years is a subject that has received only peripheral attention by Canadian scholars.⁹ Focusing on the activities of grassroots conservationists at mid-century helps to demonstrate the endurance of conservationist thought beyond the movement's heyday in the 1910s. Changes in the approaches to protecting urban nature, I argue, are reflected in Sauriol's personal experience – the strategies he employed, the language he used, and the losses he suffered as a result of urban planning policies. Over his years as a rambler, a cottager, and later a campaigner for valley conservation, Sauriol's environmental consciousness shifted from a personal appreciation of nature on his private valley holdings to embrace the principles of rational management for the public good. Dramatic and unsettling change in a place that French historian Pierre Nora would identify as his *milieu de mémoire*, a setting 'in which memory is a real part of everyday experience,' also prompted acts of commemoration. Beginning in the 1940s, Sauriol produced a series of manuscripts reflecting on the character and history of a rapidly changing landscape. This personal archive of experience – including his five-volume *The Don Valley As I Knew It*, and his 1945 manuscript 'Fourteen Years on Four Acres' – became, in Nora's terms, a *lieu de mémoire*, a symbolic representation of a place transformed beyond recognition.¹⁰ In this way the river valley remained a source of inspiration, and a seat for memory, throughout Sauriol's long twentieth-century life (1904–95).

SUMMERING IN THE DON

In his 1982 memoir *Remembering the Don*, Sauriol looked back on over forty summers spent with his family at a cottage on the East Don, recalling summers that 'filled my time with the orchard, the garden, the apiary, the easy living by the then clean Don River.'¹¹ Having first

9 While there is a considerable literature on the history of urban sprawl in Canadian centres, very little has been written about grassroots responses to suburban development and its connections to strains of conservationist thought in Canada.

10 Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 1:1.

11 Charles Sauriol, *Remembering the Don: A Rare Record of Earlier Times within the Don River Valley* (Toronto: Consolidated Amethyst Communications, 1981), 19.

spotted the cottage on a weekend Scouting expedition at the age of sixteen, Sauriol arranged to lease the building and its surrounding four acres from the Canadian National Railway seven years later, in 1927. Constructed in 1899 by landowner John Taylor to house a farm hand, the cottage had been sold to the CNR along with a portion of the Taylor estate when railway construction divided the property in 1904.¹² It had seen a series of tenants in the intervening years and by 1927 was in a state of considerable disrepair. The 'Lily of the Valley,' as Sauriol came to call it, the cottage was a simple clapboarded structure consisting of a living room, a pantry, and three small bedrooms. Bounded by the Don on the east, north, and west, the property in 1927 was completely denuded of trees, 'save for two old apple trees ... [and] an ancient willow tree.'¹³ With the assistance of his father, and later his wife and children, Sauriol worked over the years to better the condition and comfort of the cottage, to expand and nurture his garden, and to reforest the property. He purchased the cottage from the railway company in 1930, and after years of lobbying, finally purchased the land from them in 1939. Crucially for Sauriol in the years that followed, the land included a second, tenanted cottage (the former home of Philip de Grassi, a military officer who was first granted the land at the Forks in 1831) situated closer to Don Mills Road.

Sauriol's years at the cottage were guided by a closely held vision of self-sufficiency. In this wild place at the city's edge he aimed to pursue a 'simple life' of discriminating consumption. 'So indoctrinated was I in my love of simple things,' he wrote in 1929, 'that I was beset with remorse over the wiring of the cottage, which seemed as a desertion of my ideal towards country living.'¹⁴ A self-described 'back-fence producer,' he bottled honey from his apiary, made maple syrup from trees he had planted, fashioned preserves (presumably with his wife Simonne's assistance, though she is rarely mentioned in his writings) from the wide variety of fruits and berries he grew on site, and harvested the annual bounty from his vegetable garden to feed his family and friends.¹⁵ In his writings, he made conscious comparisons to the

12 Charles Sauriol, 'The Don Valley as I Knew It,' vol. 5 (1938-42), [194-?], file 38, box 123723, series 107, Manuscripts of Charles Sauriol, [194-]-1995, Charles Sauriol Fonds, CTA.

13 Sauriol, *Remembering the Don*, 137.

14 Sauriol, 'Fourteen Years on Fourteen Acres,' 1945, file 4, box 107297, series 107, Charles Sauriol Fonds, CTA. On 'simple living' movements in American history, see David E. Shi, *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

15 Sauriol, *Remembering the Don*, 31.



FIGURE 3 Charles Sauriol in front of the original cottage at the Forks of the Don, July 1935.

Source: File 8, Series 80, Photographs of the Don Valley, Charles Sauriol Fonds, City of Toronto Archives.

families that worked the land before him. He and his father, he wrote in 1945, 'were as pioneers, re-carving in this semi-wilderness a fine place to live.'¹⁶ While framing himself as a pioneer, Sauriol emphasized the divergence between his objectives and those of his forebears on the property. Philip de Grassi cleared the land of its trees to make it suitable for agricultural development. Sauriol, in contrast, worked to reforest the property as a 'beautification' project: 'I thought only to turn [my acres] into a place of beauty. Forest trees were planted by the thousands. Rich soil was wrested from sod and twitch grass, . . . [to become] a garden land in which fine fruits and vegetables grew.'¹⁷ Here Sauriol's personal ethic of self-sufficiency, and the importance he placed upon the rehabilitation and 'beautification' of degraded lands, demonstrate his connection with the diverse strains of conservationist thought that existed in Canada in the early decades of the twentieth century.

A member of the rising professional middle class, Sauriol enjoyed a privilege inaccessible to many in the 1930s and 1940s of owning

16 Sauriol, 'Fourteen Years.'

17 Sauriol, *Remembering the Don*, 136.

not only a cottage property but a primary home within the city. Sufficient time away from work to enjoy and improve his holdings also characterized his position in society. As an urban advertising executive, Sauriol occupied the ambivalent position of promoting consumption while at the same time constructing a self-image of the discerning anti-consumerist. As such, he epitomized what T.J. Jackson Lears has identified as the ambivalence of antimodernist dissent in early-twentieth-century America: typically held by the urban educated elite, antimodernist sentiment placed value in the hard but satisfying lives of rural premoderns; its backward-looking impulses, however, often coincided with an enthusiasm for material progress and possessive individualism in a rapidly urbanizing, secularizing society.¹⁸

Sauriol's professed goals of self-sufficiency and his desire to seek solace in nature define him as a man of his times as much as they set him apart. While forging a summer home out the wilds of the city's Don Valley would have been considered an esoteric activity by most early-twentieth-century Torontonians, Sauriol's self-image in this period drew upon an established rhetoric of social and particularly urban reform. Between 1881 and 1921, the proportion of Canadians living in urban areas doubled from about 15 per cent to almost 50 per cent of the total population. In the same period, Toronto's population multiplied by six.¹⁹ A wide range of problems, including poverty, crime, and a pervasive sense of anxiety, were thought to stem from the rapid industrialization and urban growth transforming Canadian centres. Social reformers in Canada, like their American counterparts, responded with a diverse array of movements to address the ills of urban life, among them what has generally been defined as a 'back-to-nature' movement.²⁰ Distinctly urban and middle-class in impetus, the movement promoted the benefits of outdoor life as an antidote

18 T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and Transformation of American Culture, 1880–1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981). Ian McKay has documented similar trends in the Canadian context in *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994).

19 Alan F.J. Artibise and Gilbert A. Stelter, 'Conservation Planning and Urban Planning: The Canadian Commission of Conservation in Historical Perspective,' in *Consuming Canada: Readings in Environmental History*, ed. Chad Gaffield and Pam Gaffield (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1995), 154.

20 The 'back-to-nature' movement differed from the 'back-to-the-land' movement of the same period, which 'sought both to revitalize rural life for those already on the land and to encourage city dwellers to take up homesteading.' Back-to-nature, in contrast, championed short respites in nature as a tonic for city-weary urban dwellers (Shi, *The Simple Life*, 194).

to the hectic pace and corrupting influences of the city. Nature study in the schools, summer camps and Scouting organizations for boys, hiking clubs, and the proliferation of summer cottages among wealthy urbanites were among the outlets for a widespread desire to reconnect with nature in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Sauriol's writings reveal the influence of these ideas. In keeping with back-to-nature ideals, he saw the Don Valley as 'a realm of wild life that the city had not despoiled.'²¹ During the hard years of the Depression and Second World War, the cottage provided solace for his 'harassed mind.' He wrote in 1945, 'I went out to my place thousands of times. . . . Often an absent lover I wooed the place in fleeting moments. It may have been only to gather a basket of apples from the snug root cellar on a snowy evening, or to plant a seedling tree, or to gather an armful of wood . . . but out I went, and as often as I went I cast overboard the debris of the day. Those pinched, sordid thoughts of wars, misery, consternation, and the woe of the world.'²² Like many Canadian men of his generation, he recalled that the works of nature-writer and back-to-nature enthusiast Ernest Thompson Seton 'kindled within me a dormant love for the outdoors.' Works by Henry David Thoreau and American naturalist and writer John Burroughs (1837-1921) also featured among his 'perennial reads.' Parallels with Thoreau are readily discerned: both men found a meditative retreat from a rapidly changing society in a woodland cottage close to home; both sought a life of self-provisioning simplicity. No mention is made, perhaps surprisingly, to other conservationist-writers of the period, including John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Canadian writers Roderick Haig-Brown and Grey Owl (Archibald Belaney). Unlike these men, Sauriol seems to have professed little interest in testing himself in remote wilderness locations or engaging in manly wilderness activities such as fishing and hunting. It was perhaps the very domesticity of Seton and Thoreau's projects that appealed to him: Thoreau, with his 'experiment in simple living' a mile outside of Concord; Seton, who set his *Two Little Savages* in Sauriol's own Don Valley.

Sauriol's fascination with the valley was more than a summer cottager's desire for escape. His search for solace met with a deeply held ethic of conservation. Efforts over many years to improve degraded areas in the valley through reforestation and bank stabilization reflected a belief in the rational management of nature's bounty. At the same time, in his writings and his later advocacy work, Sauriol

21 Sauriol, 'The Don Valley as I Knew It,' 2:194.

22 Sauriol, 'Fourteen Years.'

expressed a passionate conviction that the valley should be protected from urban encroachment, its 'beauty spots' preserved as places for the physical and spiritual health of the city's residents. In Sauriol we can see what George Altmeyer has identified as a particularly Canadian strain of early-twentieth-century conservationist thought, one that combined a concern for pragmatic scientific management of natural resources with a sense of moral duty to preserve nature's aesthetic beauty for future generations (and not, as they are often portrayed, mutually exclusive impulses).²³

THREATENED PARADISE, 1940S

In the years following the Second World War, pressures from population growth and corresponding residential development were beginning to make themselves felt in Sauriol's beloved valley. More and more valley lands (and the adjacent tablelands that drained into them) were becoming earmarked for residential and industrial development. The growing expanse of paved surfaces, particularly in the lower valley, produced detrimental effects for the watershed's hydrological regime, including soil compaction, increased surface run-off, and corresponding declines in groundwater reserves. By 1949, the Ontario Department of Planning and Development concluded, 15 per cent of lands within the watershed had been urbanized; this figure would grow exponentially in the decades that followed.²⁴ 'The city is expanding feverishly,' Sauriol wrote in 1953. 'Bulldozers are eliminating the beauty spots of centuries. Chain saws are heard all day long. . . . Once tranquil highways, including Don Mills Road, are crowded "bumper to bumper" with traffic. The fields of yesteryear contain rows of houses. Expansion,

23 George Altmeyer, 'Three Ideas of Nature in Canada, 1893-1914,' in *Consuming Canada: Readings in Environmental History* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1995), 105. The development of the land conservation movement in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century Canada is further explored in Peter Gillis and Thomas R. Roach, 'The Beginnings of a Movement: The Montreal Congress and Its Aftermath, 1880-1896,' in *Consuming Canada*, 131-51; and A.H. Richardson, *Conservation by the People: The History of the Conservation Movement in Ontario to 1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, for the Conservation Authorities of Ontario, 1974).

24 Ontario Department of Planning and Development (ODPD), 'Don Valley Conservation Report' (Toronto: ODPD, 1950), pt 1, 10.

we are told, will continue.²⁵ In the same year that Sauriol wrote, construction of Don Mills, Toronto's 'first modern suburb,' began in the valley north of the Sauriol cottage. While the upper valley remained largely rural in the early 1950s, signs of change were, for Sauriol, unsettlingly present.

With population growth came increasing pollution. Storm sewer outlets carried herbicides, pesticides, road salt, and dog excrement from the city's ever-increasing paved surfaces into urban waterways. In the upper watershed, residential development quickly overtaxed a series of small and outdated sewage treatment plants, resulting in the discharge of partially treated effluents into the river.²⁶ Tests by the Provincial Board of Health in 1949 found a daily average of 6,500 pounds of suspended solids in the waters of the Don – almost double the normal summer flow of the river itself. Conditions became so bad that in 1950, a provincial conservation report described the Don as an 'open sewer' and ranked its water as the most heavily polluted in the province.²⁷ Such environmental degradation was not confined to the Don. Across the province and in other parts of North America, farmers, naturalists, and foresters expressed growing alarm about the effects of deforestation, soil erosion, and flooding, and their consequences for agriculture and forestry. In 1946, the province responded by passing the Conservation Authorities Act, which enabled local residents to request a conservation authority funded by the local and provincial government to manage and conserve resources in their watershed. Two years later, in 1948, the Don Valley Conservation Authority formed to address resource conservation throughout the Don watershed.

At the same time as these initiatives, grassroots activism was building upon local level concerns. Ongoing encroachment by residential and commercial development onto valley lands led Sauriol and two conservation-minded colleagues to form the Don Valley Conservation

- 25 Don Valley Conservation Association (DVCA), 'Presentation of a Plan for the Protection and Beautification of the Don Valley,' 19 Oct. 1953, file 8, box 103027, series 104, Publications of Charles Sauriol, ca. 1939–1995, Charles Sauriol Fonds, CTA.
- 26 Gore and Storrie, Consulting Engineers, *Toronto and York Planning Board Report on Water Supply and Sewage Disposal for the City of Toronto and Related Areas*, 1949, p. 90, file 227, box 107792, series 40, Records of the Information Officer for the Metropolitan Toronto Planning Department, Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto Fonds, CTA; Richard W. White, *Urban Infrastructure and Urban Growth in the Toronto Region: 1950s to the 1990s* (Toronto: Neptis Foundation, 2003), 11.
- 27 ODPD, *Don Valley Conservation Report*, pt 6, 15.

Association (DVCA) in the spring of 1947. Attracting a membership of over three hundred Toronto residents, the DVCA worked to protect valley resources and inform the public about a threatened wilderness at their doorsteps. Nature walks, annual tree-planting days, and automobile tours of the watershed emphasized the still 'wild and serene' Don Valley as a 'green buttress' to the growing city below it. A contemporary of the better-resourced Don Valley Conservation Authority (which confusingly adopted the same acronym), the association fuelled its activities almost entirely with the energies of its founders and the support of its membership.²⁸ Like the open space campaigns of other North American centres in this period – notably American urbanist William Whyte's efforts to protect the Brandywine Valley outside of Philadelphia, and Congressman John Seiberling's efforts to protect the Cuyahoga Valley near Cleveland, Ohio – the DVCA emphasized conservation, aesthetic amenity, and outdoor recreation in their efforts to protect the Don.²⁹ While Sauriol makes no explicit reference to conservation initiatives elsewhere, he was well connected to conservation advocates locally, and clearly he drew upon established tropes of conservation and wilderness preservation in advancing his campaign.

Some of the earliest initiatives of the DVCA involved efforts to control public behaviour in nature. Incensed by 'despoilers of the beautiful,' Sauriol and his colleagues set out to curb such 'menaces to conservation' as 'the shooting of songbirds, ducks [and] pheasants, the setting of grass fires, [and] the hacking of trees by juveniles.' In 1947 they established a citizens patrol of the valley to protect trees from the hatchets of young boys and rare wildflowers from the enthusiasm of their admirers. That same year, an Easter week 'Save the Valley' campaign proved especially successful in 'uproot[ing] vandalism.' Visits to schools and Scout groups informed children about the benefits of non-intrusive nature study, while collaboration with local police saw the seizure of '18 axes, 7 bayonets and a few butcher knives' from would-be valley vandals.³⁰ As much as the DVCA aimed to cultivate respect for the non-human world, they also forwarded an understanding of nature as a place in which humans had no part, except as contemplative visitors or caring stewards. By proscribing certain behaviours and promoting others, they aligned themselves with their counterparts in

28 DVCA, *Cardinal*, Fall 1954, file 14, box 115736, series 104, Publications of Charles Sauriol, ca. 1939–1995, Charles Sauriol Fonds, CTA.

29 Nelson, *A Passion for the Land*; Rome, *Bulldozer in the Countryside*, 119–52.

30 Sauriol, 'Beginnings of the Don Valley Conservation Association,' *Cardinal*, Spring 1954; Charles Sauriol, *Trails of the Don* (Orillia, ON: Hemlock, 1992), 268–9.

wilderness conservation in constituting nature as a static entity that, bounded and regulated, could be protected from human interference.³¹ In this ideological shift from private enjoyment to regulated public use of nature lay deeply personal consequences for Sauriol in the years to come.

In 1949 the DVCA reorganized into three regional branches within the Don watershed, Sauriol taking up the leadership of the East York branch (DVCA-EV). Two years later, Sauriol launched the DVCA-EV's quarterly magazine, the *Cardinal*. Written and produced entirely by Sauriol with modest financial assistance from the DVCA-EV, the magazine contained a mixture of short articles on valley history, fictional stories emphasizing the moral righteousness of nature stewardship, news about conservation activities, and educational 'conversations' between the DVCA mascots, Canny and Candid Cardinal. Sauriol wrote in his inaugural Spring 1951 issue, 'Persons residing in the Toronto metropolitan area have at their disposal a . . . bower of natural beauty which is the envy of many other cities: *The Cardinal* will endeavour to make . . . the streams, woodlands, birds and flowers at your door . . . mean more to you than ever before.' Between 1951 and 1962, annual steam locomotive trips through the valley capitalized on a general public nostalgia for train touring.³² These 'Conservation Specials' brought considerable exposure to the DVCA cause, attracting an average of eight hundred passengers each year.³³ The DVCA continued to provide a grassroots voice for valley conservation into the early 1960s, when rapid environmental change and a shifting socio-cultural landscape gave rise to new strategies.

Conservation activities in the valley received a boost from an unexpected source in the early morning of 16 October 1954. A tropical storm originally projected to dissipate over southern Ontario suddenly re-intensified, pounding Toronto with winds that reached 110 kilometres per hour. From his home on Hillside Drive overlooking the valley, Sauriol watched through the night as heavy rain and winds

31 On the exclusionary effects of the twentieth-century conservation policies in the United States and Canada, see Karl Jacoby, *Crimes against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves, and the Hidden History of American Conservation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Tina Loo, *States of Nature: Conserving Canada's Wildlife in the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007); and John Sandlos, *Hunters at the Margin: Native People and Wildlife Conservation in the Northwest Territories* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007).

32 John R. Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor: Railroads and the American Scene* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983). See especially chap. 13.

33 Sauriol, 'Beginnings of the Don Valley Conservation Association'; Sauriol, *Tales of the Don*.



FIGURE 4 'Stop: Don't Cut Trees,' Don Valley Conservation Association, 1947
(with unidentified DVCA member).

Source: File 73, Series 81, Photographs of the Sauriol Cottage,
Charles Sauriol Fonds, City of Toronto Archives.



FIGURE 5 Cover plate, the *Cardinal*, first edition, Spring 1951.

Source: File 14, Series 104, Publications of Charles Sauriol, ca. 1939–1995, Charles Sauriol Fonds, City of Toronto Archives.

transformed the Don into a torrent with an astonishing capacity for destruction. ‘The quiet of the night,’ he wrote, ‘was shaken by the reverberations of huge floating trees pounding objects in their path; the water was littered with fast-moving objects scarcely discernible in the darkness.’³⁴ In the space of forty-eight hours, Hurricane Hazel dumped 285 millimetres of rain in the Toronto area, washing out bridges and roads across the city and taking eighty-one lives across southern Ontario. In Toronto alone, over 1,800 people were left homeless, and damage across the province was estimated at roughly \$100 million (about \$1 billion today). Although no lives were lost in the Don Valley, two cars and their occupants were swept into the river.³⁵ The storm and its consequences marked a turning point for conservation initiatives in the valley, and across the city; it also signalled a transition for Sauriol and his career as a conservation professional.

As the city rebuilt over the winter of 1954–5, it did so with a new awareness of the significance of valley lands as natural drainage channels

34 Sauriol, *Trails of the Don*, 282.

35 Jim Gifford and Mike Filey, *Hurricane Hazel: Canada's Storm of the Century* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2004); Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA), ‘Hurricane Hazel 50 Years Later,’ <http://www.hurricanehazel.ca/>.

for flood waters.³⁶ In 1957, four Toronto-area conservation authorities, including the Don, amalgamated to form the Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (MTRCA), which allowed for greater coordination among jurisdictions in regulating the use of urban watersheds. The MTRCA had the power to acquire valley lands for flood control and recreation – a decision that would have important implications for the future of the Don Valley. Sauriol played a key role in these acquisitions as chairman of the MTRCA Conservation Areas Advisory Board from 1957 to 1971, and as the first executive director of the MTRCA Foundation – the fundraising arm of the MTRCA – from 1963 to 1966. Between 1957 and 1994, approximately 15 per cent of lands within the Don watershed were protected as part of the MTRCA floodplains protection program.³⁷ At the same time, the newly created Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto³⁸ took up the massive task of overhauling the city's aging sewage infrastructure. Between 1956 and 1965, Metro removed five over-burdened sewage-treatment plants from the Don watershed. These developments had implications not only for river water quality, but also for the enjoyment of newly created valley parklands, once made unbearable by the stench of sewage. The removal of upstream plants contributed to a change in the public perception of urban ravines. Once viewed as inaccessible wastelands and barriers to development – obstacles to be bridged or filled – these rugged valley landscapes were increasingly recognized as urban amenities, vital corridors of green space slicing through the heart of the city.³⁹

In the protection of valley lands from private development and the removal of outdated sewage infrastructure, major milestones had been achieved in the conservation history of the Don. Flood control strategies

36 While Hazel can be credited with tipping the balance toward watershed conservation in southern Ontario, and greatly accelerating plans for the acquisition of valley lands, floodplain protection had been a subject of discussion among conservation-minded planners and scientists for a number of years before the storm hit. The City Planning Board's 1943 *Master Plan for the City of Toronto and Environs*, for example, proposed (unsuccessfully) to protect the Don and Humber River valleys from 'encroachment and vandalism' by incorporating them within a U-shaped green belt linked by a low-speed 'drive-way.'

37 Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, *Plan for Flood Control and Water Conservation* (Woodridge, ON: MTRCA, 1959); TRCA, 'The History of Flood Control in the TRCA,' <http://trca.on.ca/flood-monitoring/index.dot>.

38 For more on the history of the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto and its powerful position as a 'municipal corporation,' see Timothy J. Colton, *Big Daddy: Frederick G. Gardiner and the Building of Metropolitan Toronto* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 71–2; and White, *Urban Infrastructure*.

39 Thanks to Toronto historian Richard White for this insight.

that focused on large infrastructure developments such as dams and channel reinforcements and parks that laid a uniform carpet of turf through valley lowlands, however, had their own consequences for fragile valley habitats. Furthermore, large portions of valley ravine lands remained in private hands, providing sweeping vistas for Rosedale mansions and backyard play space for houses perched on the valley's edge. In the decades that followed, groups like the Toronto Field Naturalists pressed for more comprehensive ecological protection for urban valley lands, and a new generation of environmental activists began to lament the ongoing pollution of the river by stormwater runoff and riverside industries.

HEARTBREAK

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, dramatic changes in the landscape of the valley brought related upheavals in Sauriol's life. Foremost among these was the construction of the Don Valley Parkway (DVP) and the Bayview Avenue Extension through the valley. 'I was standing in a pine grove of my own planting one day last June,' Sauriol wrote in the spring of 1956, 'when two men came along with maps in their hands. They were trying to locate the position of a roadway in relation to my acres. To any but my unbelieving eyes, the plan was clear enough; the road led across the meadows through my orchard, to the plateau on which stood the cottage. That road . . . would wipe out the work of thirty years.' Once again, the course of larger events in the history of the valley, and of the city more broadly, would have for Sauriol intensely personal ramifications. As Joy Parr has demonstrated so compellingly in her work on the destabilizing influences of megaprojects in people's daily lives in Canada, the massive environmental changes occasioned by such projects disrupted people's embodied understandings of the world – their daily, sensory experience of place. As familiar places became unrecognizable, people lost established ways of knowing themselves.⁴⁰ Sauriol experienced something similar, endeavouring as he did to capture his own experience, and that of others before him, of a place in rapid flux.

Sauriol's shock notwithstanding, the parkway would have been a familiar topic of discussion for most Toronto residents through the 1940s and early 1950s. First proposed in 1943 as a scenic – and slow-moving – access route to future green belt lands, it took on speed and

40 Joy Parr, *Sensing Changes: Technologies, Environments, and the Everyday, 1953–2003* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009).

width with Metro's plans for a network of expressways radiating outward from downtown Toronto in the early 1950s. Metro Chair Frederick Gardiner was a powerful advocate. He envisioned a modern multi-lane highway through the valley that would relieve congestion in the downtown core and carry automobile traffic efficiently to the city's rapidly expanding suburban districts. Famous for '[punching] things through' without pausing to consider objections, Gardiner had no patience for the caution advised by consulting engineers in planning the DVP. According to Timothy Colton's 1980 biography, Gardiner spent many weekends tramping through the valley with an aide in tow, determined to find a way to do what his engineers said was impossible. 'The engineers were saying you couldn't put a six-lane highway in [the valley],' he recalled in a 1961 interview with the *Toronto Star*. 'So we'd have a look at [it and] say: We'll move the railway over a piece. We'll tear down the hill. We'll shift the river over a piece, then we can have the highway through there. That's what was done years later.'⁴¹ Rapid population growth in the postwar period created its own logic. Here Sauriol's appreciation of the valley as a *place*, for recreation, reflection, and restoration, met with Gardiner's reductive vision of the valley as a *corridor* through which to move automobiles and sewage pipelines.

Metro Council approved plans for the parkway in 1956; work began on the southern reaches of the highway two years later. In 1961, workmen pulled down the Sauriols' cherished cottage. The road right-of-way was surveyed, leaving Sauriol and his family with a portion of their original holdings, including the old de Grassi cottage on the west side of the river. Restored after Hurricane Hazel as the headquarters of Sauriol's Don Valley Conservation Association, the cottage provided an opportunity to regroup and start over. Demonstrating great pluck, Sauriol and his family packed their possessions and moved across the river. By 1964 construction was completed from the Gardiner Expressway north to Bloor Street; the parkway reached its end-point at Highway 401 in 1967 (to be continued as Highway 404 in the 1970s and 1980s).

Typically portrayed by chroniclers of Toronto as 'winding mostly through inaccessible ravine land' and therefore causing little disruption to established communities,⁴² the DVP nevertheless had significant ramifications for human experience in the valley, forever altering the capacity for what Sauriol, or Seton, before him, would have described

41 Colton, *Big Daddy*, 62.

42 *Ibid.*, 165. This relative lack of disruption to existing neighbourhoods differed markedly from Toronto's proposed Spadina Expressway plan of the same period, ultimately completed only in part before being cancelled in response to public protest.

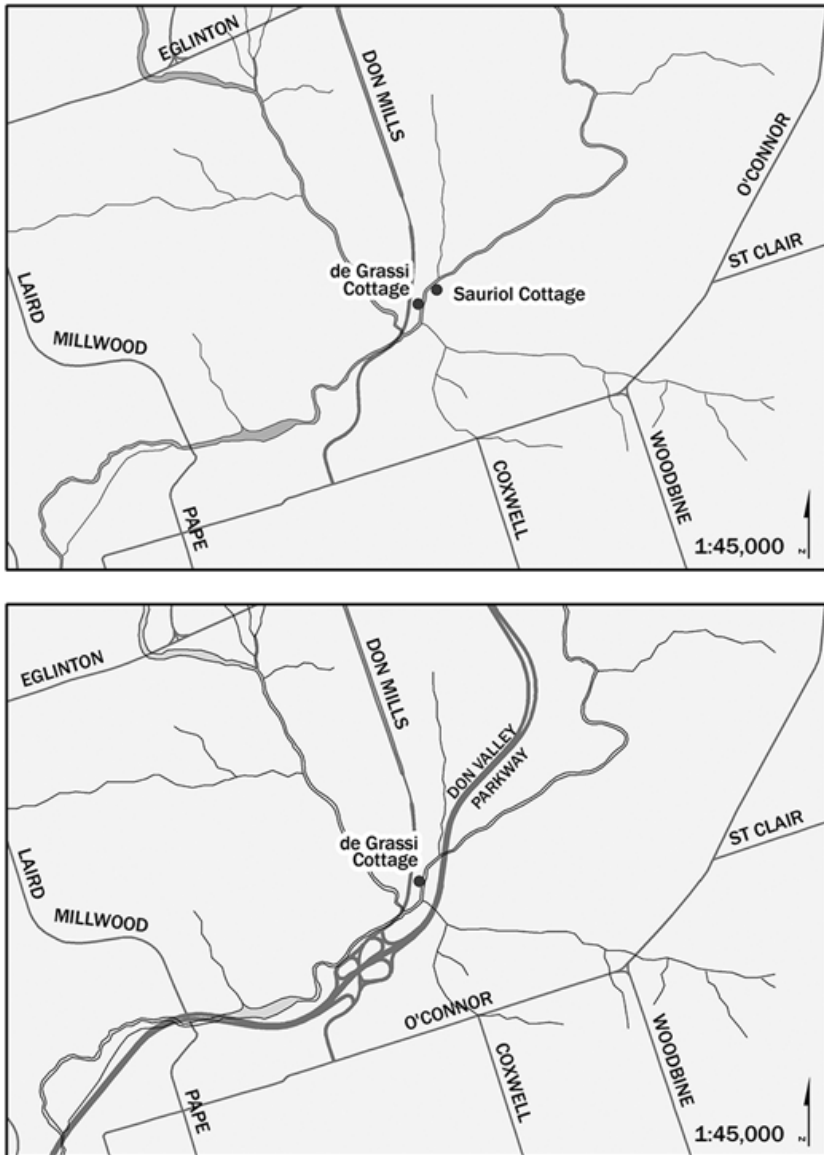


FIGURE 6 Sauriol cottage locations, before and after the construction of the Don Valley Parkway. Upper map, ca. 1950, lower map, ca. 1970.

Source: Prepared by Jordan Hale.

as moral and physical rejuvenation achieved through experience in an 'unspoiled place.'⁴³ For the river system, the consequences were more dramatic still. As Gardiner's recollections suggest, highway construction forced the alteration of the river's course in places, removing ox-bows and softening curves. For the lower river, already strait-jacketed by a railway line along its western bank, the highway further cemented its future as a canal bolstered by steel piling and divorced from its floodplain. Most significantly, the project sent a ribbon of pavement through sensitive riparian lands south of the Forks, compromising the river's function as a wildlife corridor and adding a further source of oil-laced road run-off to the watershed. For all its deleterious effects, however, the parkway also acquainted thousands of Torontonians with valley landscapes as a backdrop to their daily commute. Never before had so many people experienced the valley; this connection, however passive, would make itself felt in future efforts to protect valley green space.

For Sauriol, the loss of the cottage in the late 1950s coincided with a period of major transition in his working life. In December 1956, about a year before the cottage was torn down, he received a call from Frederick Gardiner asking if he would represent Metro on the future Metropolitan Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (MTRCA). Sauriol was stunned, and deeply honoured. 'For years,' he later recalled, 'I had been humiliated, ignored, and put to one side, with no clout ... to do what I thought should be done.'⁴⁴ Especially humiliating and perplexing for Sauriol was his exclusion from the MTRCA's predecessor, the Don Valley Conservation Authority. Sauriol accepted Gardiner's invitation, and in February 1957 took up the (unpaid) position of chair of the MTRCA's Conservation Areas Advisory Board. Working with an annual budget of \$500,000, Sauriol was expected 'to assemble land for conservation areas' across the Metropolitan Toronto region. 'A more pleasant task could not have been handed to me,' he recalled in 1991.⁴⁵ Sauriol held the position for fourteen years, stepping down in 1971.

Six years later, Sauriol faced change of a more destabilizing nature. Having worked for Poirier Bessette since the early 1930s, Sauriol left

43 DVCA, 'Presentation of a Plan.'

44 Charles Sauriol, *Green Footsteps: Recollections of a Grassroots Conservationist* (Toronto: Hemlock, 1991), 13.

45 Ibid.

as the result of 'changing fortunes' in 1963.⁴⁶ He found himself without an income for three years, a situation that in retrospect created the space for him to devote himself more fully to conservation. Later in 1963, Sauriol accepted a position as the first executive director of the MTRCA Foundation, the fundraising arm of the MTRCA. The position granted him travel expenses as well as a 5 per cent commission on monies raised. Three years later, Sauriol parlayed his experience with the MTRCA into a job with the newly established Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC), where he remained for the next twenty-one years, taking up the role of executive director from 1982 to 1986, before his retirement in 1987. These personal triumphs reflected a growing environmental awareness within Canadian society that built momentum, much like Sauriol's conservation career, through the 1960s. As Samuel Hays has concluded for the American context, a key difference between the environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s and its pre-war predecessors was the broad popular support it achieved.⁴⁷ Public concern for the environment stemmed in part from the gravity of ongoing problems, including, in the urban context, air and water pollution, consumption and waste, and the shrinking availability of what was then termed 'open space.' In the loss of meadows, forests, and popular children's play areas close to home, American historian Adam Rome argues, lay the origins of postwar environmentalism. 'The desire to preserve wilderness was ... [only] the most visible part of a much larger concern about the destructive sprawl of urban civilization.'⁴⁸ For Torontonians, such concerns came to focus increasingly on the Don. By the late 1960s, the river had emerged as a potent symbol of environmental degradation and mismanagement.

Despite major improvements to sewage treatment and disposal following Hurricane Hazel, the Don remained dangerously polluted. Local industries continued to discharge harmful effluents into the sewage system, and combined sewers in the older parts of Toronto, including most of the Lower Don, continued to overflow during periods of heavy rain, sending raw sewage into the river. Fecal coliform levels soared as high as 61 million counts per 100 mL in the late 1960s, 25,000 times the safe swimming level of 2400 counts.⁴⁹ The river

46 Sauriol, 'Sauriol, Charles, 1932-1995,' folio 3, file 28, box 103027, series 103, General Subject Files of Charles Sauriol, Charles Sauriol Fonds, CTA.

47 Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

48 Rome, *Bulldozer in the Countryside*, 7-8.

49 Thomas Claridge, 'Pollution Probe Mourns for Beloved, Dead Don,' *Globe and Mail*, 17 Nov. 1969, 1.

had also become increasingly inaccessible to Toronto residents, especially in its lower reaches. The construction of the Don Valley Parkway and other arterial roads in the late 1950s and early 1960s had cemented the perception of the Lower Don as an urban wasteland criss-crossed with rail and road arteries and littered with abandoned industrial buildings, road salt storage sites, and equipment storage yards. Fences erected along the freeways made public access to the lower river valley very difficult, further sealing the fate of the Don as out of sight, out of mind.

Sauriol's approach to conservation, which combined public education about the wonders of Toronto's 'back yard wilderness' with efforts to shame offenders, was joined in the late 1960s by a new and more playful brand of activism. In November 1969, an ad hoc group of University of Toronto professors and students organized under the name of Pollution Probe brought the plight of the Don to public attention.⁵⁰ Declaring the river 'dead' as a result of years of pollution and detrimental development, Probe members led a hundred-car cavalcade, including a hearse, from the university grounds to a funeral ceremony on the river, north of the Bloor Street Viaduct. Funeral organizer Martin Daly detailed for a crowd of about two hundred the history of abuses to the river, while a student dressed as eighteenth-century writer and artist Elizabeth Simcoe played the role of the river's widow, weeping as she read excerpts from her diary describing a river once teeming with salmon and water fowl. As subway passengers looked on from the viaduct above, Daly concluded the event by tossing a wreath into the river. 'And now,' he announced to the mourners, 'we await the resurrection.'⁵¹

Pollution Probe's tactics were connected to larger trends in environmental activism in this period, where groups such as Greenpeace (established 1971) employed guerrilla theatre, stunt-work, and other unconventional techniques to capture public attention and bring a sense of urgency to their cause.⁵² Close to mind for many observers would have been the June 1969 oil fire on the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland, brought to international attention by *Time* magazine in the

50 For more on the history of Pollution Probe and its influence on environmental politics in Ontario, see Ryan O'Connor, 'Toronto the Green: Pollution Probe and the Rise of the Canadian Environmental Movement' (PhD diss., University of Western Ontario, 2010).

51 'Mock Rites Mourn Death of Don River Killed by Pollution,' *Toronto Star*, 17 Nov. 1969, 21; Claridge, 'Pollution Probe.'

52 Robert Gottlieb, *Forcing the Spring: The Transformation of the American Environmental Movement* (Washington, DC: Island, 2005), 252-3.



FIGURE 7 Pollution Probe's Funeral for the Don, November 1969.
 Source: Courtesy of Tom Davey.

summer of 1969.⁵³ The funeral for the Don received widespread media coverage and fuelled new demands from individuals and community-based organizations for a cleaner and more accessible Don River. Sauriol's response was dismissive: 'All of my associations with the Don were reasonable and rational,' he wrote in 1991, aligning himself with an earlier generation of sober conservationists. 'I avoided such misfits in common sense as the burial held for the Don, complete with coffins and mourners.'⁵⁴ Probe's message reiterated what long-established groups such as the Toronto Field Naturalists (and Sauriol's own DVCA, defunct since the early 1960s) had been saying for years: the Don had the potential to be a vibrant green space in the heart of the city, a refuge for wildlife, and a destination for recreation, and it was worthy of protection. Unlike earlier groups, however, who struggled to deliver their message to a largely uninterested public, Pollution Probe spoke for a new generation that refused to accept the degradation of the environment as an inevitable consequence of development.

53 'America's Sewage System and the Price of Optimism,' *Time*, 1 Aug. 1969, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,901182,00.html> (accessed 18 July 2010).

54 Sauriol, *Green Footsteps*, 21.



FIGURE 8 De Grassi cottage, Winter 1955.

Source: File 7, Series 80, Photographs of the Don Valley, Charles Sauriol Fonds, City of Toronto Archives.

The 1969 funeral was followed by a brief surge of interest in the Don, and a 1971 campaign by the Ontario Water Resources Commission to reduce phosphates in Ontario waterways was successful in raising oxygen levels in the Don and improving aquatic habitat.⁵⁵ In the summer of the same year, college students hired for the MTRCA's 'Don Patrol' removed more than two hundred tons of litter from the river and surrounding valley. It wasn't until the late 1980s, however, that heightened public concern for the environment generated new and sustained visions for a restored river environment.

As the public awakened to deplorable conditions in environments close to home, Sauriol learned of a new threat to his holdings in the valley. Ironically, the threat would come from initiatives close to his own heart. 'I am somewhat fearful for the cottage,' he wrote in his diary 19 September 1966. 'Acquisition is in the [MTRCA's] 25 years plan.' With his children grown, the cottage had become more a place

55 Toronto Area Watershed Management Study and Paul Theil Associates Ltd, *Strategy for Improvement of Don River Water Quality: Summary Report* (Toronto: Queen's Printer, 1989), 4.

of solitary retreat and communion with friends than the active hub of family life it had once been. Nevertheless, he resolved to 'put up a fight to keep the old place.'⁵⁶ In January 1967, Sauriol received the expropriation papers for de Grassi, and he was crushed. Still chair of the MTRCA Conservation Areas Advisory Board, he understood well the Authority's policy of removing dwellings from risky floodplain areas in the aftermath of Hazel, and of divorcing parklands from past signs of human occupation. He had held out hope, however, that his efforts in the valley would be celebrated rather than erased. 'I would like to hold the dwelling's hands these next few years,' he wrote 25 January 1967, 'watch the things I have planted grow, and take an interest in their affairs, so they are truly mine... There will be a price [per] acre... But the appraisal will not take into account the tiny pocket of bullrush that ... brought the swamp tree frogs... nor the border where my herbs grow... This is the value I place on it.'⁵⁷ By the fall of 1967 Sauriol had purchased property in eastern Ontario's Hastings County, upon which he planned to rebuild a summer retreat. The MTRCA took possession of de Grassi in 1968, bringing to an end over forty years of summering in the Don Valley. Over those years, Sauriol had seen the valley change from a rural borderland of farms and woodlands to an increasingly threatened corridor of urban green space. In the ironic loss of the cottage to conservation initiatives of his own making lay a recurrent tension in Sauriol's life between private nature appreciation and the public good, and, for this newly created urban parkland, a tension frequently observed in parks historiography between the desire to create both a space for human recreation and a wilderness devoid of human influences. That this wilderness should exist just a few hundred metres from a major expressway, and within one of Canada's most urbanized watersheds, only furthered this irony.

VALLEY REMEMBERED

In September 1989, Sauriol's beloved East Don Valley received protection as a nature reserve within the Toronto Parks system. Sauriol recalled the dedication as 'the most rewarding, significant day in [his] long career as a conservationist.'⁵⁸ Named in his honour, the Charles Sauriol

56 Sauriol, 'Diary,' 1964-9, file 27, box 123692, series 292, Diaries of Charles Sauriol, 1926-1994, Charles Sauriol Fonds, CTA.

57 Ibid.

58 Sauriol, *Green Footsteps*, 279.

Conservation Reserve stretched from the Forks northeast to Eglinton Avenue, encompassing sixty-seven hectares of signature valley lands. Fittingly, it commemorated both his lifelong commitment to valley conservation and a valley landscape mostly lost. Later that fall, Sauriol received the Order of Canada for his life's work to protect natural spaces in Canada. 1989 also marked a turning point in citizen efforts to revitalize the Don. In February, Toronto City Council responded to concerns from local residents associations by endorsing a recommendation 'that the Don River and its related recreation and wildlife areas be made fully useable, accessible and safe for the people of Toronto no later than the year 2001.'⁵⁹ Two months later, *Toronto* magazine hosted a day-long public forum on the future of the Don at the Ontario Science Centre. Attended by about five hundred people, the forum represented a watershed in public awareness about the Don. Later that spring, the newly created Task Force to Bring Back the Don presented a vision for a clean, green, and accessible Don – a resurrection, of sorts, of a long-neglected urban river. Since its establishment, some ten thousand Task Force volunteers have planted tens of thousands of trees, shrubs, and wildflowers in the Lower Don Valley, removed many tons of garbage and debris, and thrown their muscle behind forty restoration projects throughout the central and lower valley.⁶⁰ The slow process of de-industrialization had created space for new possibilities. By the time of Sauriol's death in 1995, the river had re-emerged as a symbol of urban health – specifically, the health of the relationship between urban residents and the natural environment upon which they depend.

Looking back on Sauriol's remarkable life, and on the parallel history of the river in this period, one can discern the impressions of key moments in the environmental and cultural history of twentieth-century North America. As Sauriol planted trees to reforest his holdings and restore his land to health, he did so within the context of the early 1930s Dust Bowl in prairie Canada and the midwestern United States, and the conservationist ideologies of Aldo Leopold and others that emerged in response to such disasters. In the 1940s, when

59 Toronto City Council Proceedings, 23 Feb. 1989, cited in Mark J. Wilson (chair of the Task Force to Bring Back the Don 1991–8), 'How Did the Task Force to Bring Back the Don Get Started?', <http://www.toronto.ca/don/faq.htm>.

60 A number of other citizen-led groups have since formed to address concerns about habitat degradation, access, and pollution in the watershed. See Jennifer Bonnell, 'Bringing back the Don: Sixty Years of Community Action,' in *H2O: Toronto's Water from Lake Iroquois to Lost Rivers to Low-flow Toilets*, ed. Wayne Reeves and Christina Palassio (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2008), 266–83.

Sauriol spearheaded a campaign to protect the Don Valley from urban encroachment, and to kindle in Torontonians a sense of respect for the 'wilderness at [their] doorsteps,'⁶¹ he benefitted from (and contributed to) the shift toward watershed-level management of natural resources in Ontario. The construction of the Don Valley Parkway, with its huge reverberations in Sauriol's life, had larger consequences still for the ecology of the watershed – the parkway constituting the largest single piece of infrastructure in the river valley. The turn toward floodplain protection following Hurricane Hazel and its consequences for Sauriol's remaining holdings on the Don transformed remaining valley-bottom lands into public recreational amenities, reflecting at the same time an established trend in parks management of erasing signs of past habitation from the landscape. Finally, in Sauriol's trajectory from conservationist-practitioner on his valley holdings to local activist to 'conservation professional,' we can chart the parallel development of the environmental movement in Canada, with its deeply pragmatic farmer-scientist roots.

Historical participants in Toronto's tumultuous twentieth century, both Sauriol and the Don emerged as hybrids: glancing backward to a rural, pre-modern past while moving inevitably toward an urban, modern future. Inasmuch as Sauriol's 'paradise' was itself a hybrid landscape, part natural system and part cultural artifact, Sauriol himself personified this hybridity in his identity as part urban professional, part 'back-fence producer.' This ambivalence also emerged in his choice to live out his dream of the 'simple life' not in the wilds of Algonquin Park, but within a threatened rural landscape on the urban periphery. Witness to so much dramatic change through his long twentieth-century life, Sauriol gave voice to a profound sense of loss in his reflections about the river and its past. 'One by one I have seen the landmarks of my day and of my surroundings disappear. . . . The farmlands, the trails, the trees, buried in, covered over or chopped down,' he wrote in 1981.⁶² Facing the loss of this *milieu de mémoire*, Sauriol drew comfort from his personal archive of experience – the documents, photo albums, books, and decades of diaries that comprised a personal *lieu de mémoire*, a symbolic representation of lived past experience. 'I need but go to any one of them,' Sauriol wrote in 1991, to 'relive . . . those days when, as a young fellow, I . . . hefted a pack on a trek up the Don.'⁶³

61 Sauriol, *Remembering the Don*, 18.

62 *Ibid.*, 140.

63 Sauriol, *Green Footsteps*, 6.