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Review of

Penfold, Steve. 2008. *The Donut: A Canadian History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Pp. 256, black and white illustrations, acknowledgments, introduction, notes, index, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8020-9797-2, \$24.95.

I am so thoroughly sick of donuts, I could die (ix). So begins Steve Penfold's history of the snack item in modern Canadian society. The book proceeds much as the opening sentence suggests: it is confident, engagingly-written, often anecdotal and occasionally humorous, but based on the authors' decade of original research.¹

Penfold's thesis is simple and intriguing: the ordinary donut has virtually become an iconic object in the daily social lives and even the self-identities of Canadians, especially among residents in the suburbs and ex-urbs of Ontario, Quebec and the Maritimes. The argument contains two components: first, this greasy, sugar-laden food has come to enjoy a special status in Canadian popular cuisine; second, and more importantly, the typical donut shop has long ceased to be a simple bakery, but has become a common gathering place and informal community centre for a clientele that spans most of Canadian society.

As a piece of literature, *Donuts* rides on a crest of food history monographs of the past decade or so, including *Booze* by Craig Heron (2003), Penfold's colleague at York University's History Department. Together Penfold and Heron previously authored *The Workers' Festival: A History of Labour Day in Canada* (2005), and this interest in workers' experiences influences Penfold's approach as a food historian.² In *The Donut*, he is concerned primarily with people and their social interactions around this snack food, but also with the economics and technologies that affect donut production and consumption, as well as such matters as the location, function and marketing of donut shops. Oral histories of donut shop workers, urban histories that touch on automotility and the growth of suburbs, and social histories on the popularity of drive-in and fast-food restaurants in Canada since the end of the Second World War combine to make the book more than a food history per se. It contains almost no discussion of donut ingredients, recipes or a nutritional analysis of the food item. Rather, Penfold's work derives its narrative thrust from

the stories of those who labour to make donuts and who operate donut shops. Combined with studies of modern marketing, franchising and advertising of fast-food restaurants in general, Penfold is well able to illuminate the social and physical role of the donut shop on the Canadian cityscape and in Canadian popular culture.

As Penfold puts it, *The Donut* is a "business history of a product and the institutions that produced and sold it, a social history of the people who shaped them, and a cultural exploration of their meaning in everyday life" (15). In the process, he takes care to consider the layers of decisions that have led to the ongoing popularity of donuts in Canada. Everything from the interior layouts of donut shops, their placement at prime, traffic locations and the introduction of expanded menus beyond baked treats have all evolved since 1945 to make the donut—and especially the franchised donut shop—a regular part of everyday life for many Canadians.

In the 1950s, according to his research, Canadians either made donuts at home on special occasions, or purchased them at bakery-restaurants. These largely independently-operated, blue-collar venues, were often located in rundown areas, and offered menus with limited food choices. Penfold demonstrates that the clientele of the post-War donut shop tended to be transient and male-dominated, and the shops themselves carried vaguely-disreputable associations. By the 1990s, however, donut shops in Canada had become mainly franchised restaurants, built to standardized designs dictated by corporate head offices. These shops were conveniently situated for a drive-by community on the way to or from strip malls, hockey arenas and other such amenities. Many donut shops—and especially the large chain franchises—now strive to be family-friendly, offering full meals as well as a repertoire of baked goods, all at reasonable prices.

Penfold makes the case that to go to a donut shop today in Canada is to participate in a populist community ritual. The statistics he cites are persua-

sive: There are now an estimated 6,000 donut shops in Canada, with about one-third belonging to the Tim Hortons chain. Indeed, with 2,000 branches, Tim Hortons is more ubiquitous in Canada than McDonald's; it alone sells about half of all the bagels sold in Canada, and what may have been the first (1983) smoke-free restaurant in Canada was an outlet of Tim Hortons in Hamilton, Ontario.

Yet Penfold is more than a statistician or student of marketing techniques. Tables, charts and maps are enlivened with humour and anecdote provided by front-line service workers in donut shops. As such, *The Donut* contains valuable labour histories that add to our understanding of the social and political place of the donut in modern Canada. Many donut shop staff members are immigrants, underlining the fact that, for new Canadians, donuts are a common reference point in their new diets, as well as to their economic realities, their vocational opportunities and social lives. A job in a donut shop may provide the first paid employment for newcomers to this country, particularly in the multicultural urban locales that Penfold cites, such as the Scarborough, Hamilton and Vancouver sites that comprise his case studies.

With *The Donut*, Penfold has achieved a small miracle in translating a doctoral dissertation into a book; and he has made the task seem easy. Food historians, social historians and labour historians, as well as urbanists and cultural theorists, should anticipate his next book.

Notes

1. See Penfold (2002).
2. Other recent food histories include Cooke (2009) and Driver (2008).

References

- Cooke, Nathalie. ed. 2009. *What's to Eat? Entrées in Canadian Food History*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill Queen's University Press.
- Driver, Elizabeth. 2008. *Culinary Landscapes: A Bibliography of Canadian Cookbooks, 1825-1049*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Heron, Craig. 2003. *Booze: A Distilled History*. Toronto: Between the Lines.
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Comptes rendu de

Graham-Dixon, Andrew, rédacteur. 2009. *Art : L'histoire de l'art en images*. Montréal: Les Éditions Hurtubise.

Pp. 612, ISBN : 978-2-89647-197-3.

Cet ouvrage énorme est la traduction française de *Art : The Definitive Visual Guide*, publié initialement en Angleterre par Dorling Kindersley (un éditeur affilié à Penguin Books), en 2008. Un an plus tard, il paraît presque simultanément au Québec et en France sous le même titre — mais avec une couverture et une jaquette différentes chez Flammarion (et avec ce ISBN : 13-978-2081227781). Les auteurs, tous critiques d'art, universitaires ou historiens de l'art, ont voulu offrir le plus vaste panorama imaginable de l'art, couvrant toutes les grandes périodes, depuis la préhistoire jusqu'à nos jours. Leur pari est parfaitement réussi et pour le moins admirable. Ici, chaque courant artistique, chaque grand peintre, chaque école esthétique se retrouvent représentés sommairement, par le texte et une icon-

ographie abondante (2500 reproductions d'œuvres, souvent en très petit format, mais presque toujours en couleurs). Si la peinture se taille dans ces pages la part du lion, on trouvera aussi des sculptures, des photographies, des exemples de divers mouvements architecturaux.

Les auteurs ont procédé chronologiquement, choisissant habituellement un seul exemple pour illustrer chaque courant ou artiste. C'est probablement la seule limite à s'imposer si l'on veut couvrir tant de courants, de créateurs et de siècles dans un seul ouvrage. La première section fournit quelques outils usuels pour mieux observer et comprendre les œuvres en expliquant différents aspects comme la perspective, l'organisation de la lumière, l'harmonie des couleurs et la texture des