

Scientia Canadensis

Canadian Journal of the History of Science, Technology and Medicine
Revue canadienne d'histoire des sciences, des techniques et de la médecine

Scientia
Canadensis

The Raftsmen of the Ottawa and St. Lawrence Rivers. By Léon A. Robidoux. (Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue: Shoreline, 2008. 192 p., ill., maps, bibl. ISBN 978-1-896754-38-3 \$22.95)

Ken Favrholt

Volume 33, numéro 2, 2010

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1006160ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1006160ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

CSTHA/AHSTC

ISSN

0829-2507 (imprimé)

1918-7750 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Favrholt, K. (2010). Compte rendu de [*The Raftsmen of the Ottawa and St. Lawrence Rivers*. By Léon A. Robidoux. (Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue: Shoreline, 2008. 192 p., ill., maps, bibl. ISBN 978-1-896754-38-3 \$22.95)]. *Scientia Canadensis*, 33(2), 139–141. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1006160ar>

technical problems and requirements and attempt to organize solutions. SHARE became an early site where users could define a new discipline and expertise of computer use.

Chapters eight and nine deal with the attempts at MIT and University of Michigan to rationalize university computer services and later to create timeshare systems. The chapters contrast the MIT's approach as an elite private research university to Michigan's approach as a large public university. This not only depended on the way research and other activities were funded at the university, but also debates about the nature of engineering and the place of technology in campus and American culture. Timesharing proved to be a technology where expectations outstripped what could be delivered and this necessitated renegotiating objectives.

Akera's conclusion relates the narrative he has given to broader ideas in innovations studies and social constructivist accounts of knowledge. Akera's book is an excellent history of the events he chronicles and a fascinating glimpse at cold war era research. His emphasis on rhetoric and research culture allows him to trace a compelling narrative. The account is all the more impressive because it does not ignore more technical elements of the story. Also, he convincingly demonstrates how we can understand innovation in terms of the reapplication and modification of existing practices.

ALLAN OLLEY
University of Toronto

***The Raftsmen of the Ottawa and St. Lawrence Rivers.* By Léon A. Robidoux.** (Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue: Shoreline, 2008. 192 p., ill., maps, bibl. ISBN 978-1-896754-38-3 \$22.95).

The Raftsmen of the Ottawa and St. Lawrence Rivers deals with the development of the logging and rafting industry on the Ottawa and St. Lawrence rivers between the 17th and 20th centuries. Its focus, however, is mainly the 19th century when this industry was at its apex. Léon A. Robidoux, author of two earlier works on aspects of the subject, *Les Cajeux* (1974) and *Le Vieux Prince* (1988), combines those previous French-language works to expand on the colorful and significant history of the individuals and companies that opened up the wilderness of Ontario and Quebec to develop a commerce in timber exported to Europe.

The book is divided into three sections. The first section, "The Early Days," sets the stage, discussing the forest industry after the British Conquest of Quebec, although the history of the industry's beginnings date from the tenure of Intendant Jean Talon in late-17th century New France. The

industry expanded with the creation of Upper and Lower Canada in the late 18th century. Robidoux describes in great detail the shantymen, as the rough and tough woodcutters who lived in the early lumber camps were called.

The second section, "Timber and Steamship Pioneers," describes the construction of the rafts made up of cribs and drams. Cribs consisted of 25 or 30 pieces of squared timbers, made for shooting the slides constructed along rough parts of the rivers. The larger drams, comprised of 25 cribs lashed together, were made for running the rapids.

Robidoux then introduces some of the notable individuals who began the industry including New Englander Philomen Wright who settled at what became Hull in 1791. Wright's pioneer raft trip of 1806 was the start of the timber trade on a large scale. Also introduced is Colonel By, of Rideau Canal fame, who built a log channel around Chaudière Falls. Scottish-born James Gillies established a mill on the Little Clyde River; his sons rafted timber down the St. Lawrence to Quebec where the timbers were loaded on to ships, largely for the English market. Another personage was D.D. Calvin, also an American who later became a British subject, who established Garden Island near Kingston as the centre of his business. Robidoux goes on to describe the Quebec scene, specifically Rue Sainte Pierre, the heart of the timber trade business in that city, where Donnelly's was the favourite haunt of the raft bosses. Ending this section is a description of the sidewheelers and steamships built to tow the rafts most of the way down the St. Lawrence. The Calvin Company owned its tugboats including one ocean-going ship, *The Garden Island*.

The third and final section of the book, "The Raftsmen," is the heart of the story. The raftsmen were "hearty men, with plenty of nerve, they spoke a rough language and had ready fists" (p.110). It was a tradition that an Indian pilot would run the lead dram through the Lachine Rapids. The Kahnawake people such as Big John and Michel are described as natural-born river drivers. French-Canadian pilots such as Edouard Ouellette, taught by Big John, also excelled in navigating the dangerous passage through Lachine. The visit of the Prince of Wales, who came to Canada to open the Victoria Bridge in 1860, highlights the nature of river rafting as spectacle.

The two most famous river bosses, Joseph (Jos) Montferrand and Aimé Guérin, the author's great grandfather are profiled. Montferrand of Montreal was a legendary figure: voyageur, construction man, and strong man who came to fisticuffs with men of rival companies; Guérin, nicknamed 'the Old Prince,' who worked 56 years for the Calvin Company, Robidoux calls "the most respected and experienced foremen of the era of rafts" (p.156).

A subsection on canals is included in this section although this might have been better placed in the Appendix. The Appendix includes stories of Joe Beef and his infamous tavern in Montreal, and the canoes and other boats used on the waterways.

A useful bibliography is included but some notable sources are missing such as Joan Finnigan's *Giants of Canada's Ottawa Valley* (Burnstown: General Store Publications, 1981) which profiles Joseph Montferrand, and David Lee's *Lumber Kings & Shantymen : Logging and Lumbering in the Ottawa Valley* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Ltd. 2006).

Robidoux's book is in general entertaining but is difficult to follow as a historical treatment of the subject. The book presumes some knowledge of Ontario and Quebec, especially the St. Lawrence and Ottawa River valleys. For outsiders, a fuller description of the geography and historical context would help situate the logging and rafting activities, although Robidoux does try. The two maps are useful, showing the location of slides and dams on the Ottawa River, and location of falls and rapids on the Ottawa and St. Lawrence, but some names mentioned in the text are missing, which may lead some readers to look elsewhere for toponymy such as Hull, the Clyde and Timigami rivers, and the canals mentioned in the text. Another map or two would have been desirable.

Finally, the cover illustration, "Riding the Waves," does not immediately make a connection with the subject of the book—the raftsmen themselves. Many of the book's images may have made a better choice for the cover.

The main criticism is that the book suffers from organizational matters and much repetition. While the book is rich in data, the material could have benefitted from the use of side-bars to deal with the many facts, dates, and names. The illustrations are captivating, even stunning, and although most are self-explanatory, captions would have been helpful.

The most serious issue for the academic researcher is that few of the quotations or sources are referenced, although the bibliography is good. The appendices are interesting but not obviously connected to the rest of the topics.

Robidoux's book is difficult to use as a source of data, even though it is full of valuable information for the researcher on the topic of how the lumber and transport of logs to market was organized. Despite its shortcomings, the book is a valuable resource about an era fundamental to the economic growth of central Canada, and the technology of the time.

KEN FAVRHOLDT
Thompson Rivers University

***Power Struggles: Scientific Authority and the Creation of Practical Electricity Before Edison.* By Michael Brian Schiffer. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008. ix + 420 p., tab., ill., bibl. ISBN 978-0-262-19582-9).**

Michael Schiffer's *Power Struggles: Scientific Authority and the Creation of Practical Electricity Before Edison* explores the history of electricity before Thomas Edison. Edison has been credited with developing the first