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The Labours of Leisure Work and Workers at the Annual Encampments of the American Canoe Association, 1880–1910

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Article abstract

The late 19th century witnessed an explosion of interest in canoeing as sport, recreation, and leisure in Canada, the United States, and Britain. One of the enduring legacies of the “canoe boom” was the American Canoe Association (ACA), a transnational organization established in 1880 to “unite all amateur canoeists for the purpose of pleasure, health, or exploration.” Annual meetings were central to realizing this mission. For two weeks in August, hundreds of enthusiasts from Canada and the United States came together to camp out, socialize, and race canoes. The encampments would not have occurred – or at the very least they would have looked drastically different – without the carpenters, cooks, servers, performers, and general labourers the organization hired to do the heavy work of construction, maintenance, and service. In spite of their importance, these workers exist, at best, on the margins of the official accounts of the meets; in most cases, they are altogether ignored. Recovery of this labouring past is difficult, and admittedly fragmentary. However, it is critical to the history of labour and of sport.

ARTICLE

The Labours of Leisure: Work and Workers at the Annual Encampments of the American Canoe Association, 1880–1910

Jessica Dunkin

AMONG THE HUNDREDS OF PHOTOGRAPHS that are part of the American Canoe Association (ACA) collection at the New York State Historical Association (NYSHA) Library in Cooperstown is an image by amateur photographer George Warder of Springfield, Ohio, taken at the 1887 meeting on Lake Champlain. Entitled “Work and Fun in Camp,” the photograph (fig. 1) depicts R.W. Gibson of the Mohican Canoe Club, at work on his boat; the others in the frame wrap themselves in flags and blankets, and strike tableaux-like poses.¹ Although its tone is clearly tongue-in-cheek, the image simultaneously represents the annual regattas and encampments of the ACA as spaces of leisure and of labour. However, it suggests a very narrow understanding of work, defined only as preparation for the canoe races that were the highlight of the yearly events. In other words, the image is silent about the myriad other forms of labour that were necessary to the smooth functioning of the meets.

While not disparaging the efforts of Mr. Gibson and the other canoeists, my concerns in this article are with the work and workers largely excluded from written and photographic accounts of the yearly encampments and regattas of the American Canoe Association. The ACA was founded in 1880 to “unite all amateur canoeists for the purpose of pleasure, health, or exploration.”²

1. George Warder, “Work and Fun in Camp,” 1887, 1.1/24, New York State Historical Association (hereafter NYSHA).

2. *American Canoe Association Yearbook*, 1883, 83-014/1, Trent University Archives (hereafter TUA). This article joins an emergent body of work on transnational sporting practices. See, for example, Colin Howell, “Borderlands, Baselines, and Big Game: Conceptualizing the



Figure 1. George Warder, “Work and Fun in Camp,” 1887.
Photo courtesy of the New York State Historical Association (NYSHA).

Annual meetings were central to realizing the transnational organization’s mission. For two weeks in August, hundreds of enthusiasts from Canada and the United States came together to camp, compete, and socialize. The encampments would not have occurred, or at the very least would have looked drastically different, without the carpenters, cooks, servers, performers, and general labourers hired to do the heavy work of construction, maintenance, and service. In spite of their importance, these workers exist, at best, on the margins of official accounts of the meets; in most cases they are altogether ignored.

Recovery of this labouring past is difficult and admittedly fragmentary. However, it is critical to the history of labour and sport. Scholarship at the intersection of these two sub-fields has been concerned with a number of issues, among them amateurism versus professionalism, labour organizing in professional sport, and working-class forms of sport and leisure.³ What

Northeast as a Sporting Region,” and Bill Parenteau and Richard W. Judd, “More Buck for the Bang: Sporting and the Ideology of Fish and Game Management in Northern New England and the Maritime Provinces, 1870–1900,” in Stephen J. Hornsby and John G. Reid, eds., *New England and the Maritime Provinces: Connections and Comparisons* (Montréal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2005), 264–279, 232–251.

3. See, for example, S.F. Wise, “Sport and Class Values in Old Ontario and Québec,” in W.H. Heick and Roger Graham, eds., *His Own Man: Essays in Honour of A. R. M. Lower* (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1974), 93–118; Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860–1914* (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1979), 35–70; Alan Metcalfe, *Canada Learns to Play: The Emergence*

remains unexplored are the ways in which dominant sporting practices, but particularly organized sport, have been made possible by the labour of "others," including the working class, women, and people of colour.⁴ In this article, I seek to show what other kinds of histories of work and sport are possible and, I believe, necessary, while recognizing the challenges that exist in meeting such an end. Not least is the question of how to recover pasts seemingly without histories.

Given the limited attention paid to the workforce in the ACA archive, and the one-sided nature of accounts of the annual meetings, it is difficult for the historian to know with any certainty the extent to which or the exact ways that these women and men contributed to camp life. I have yet to uncover a description of the annual meetings produced by a labourer. Other scholars facing similar challenges, including historians of tourism, have turned to census material to determine, for example, the number and kind of workers at hotels and resorts.⁵ However, the men and women employed at the ACA meets were rarely in attendance for more than a few weeks, which was not enough time to be counted and recorded by census takers. Likewise, my efforts to find out more about workers whose names do appear in the historical record have proven fruitless. Rather, to piece together the complex of people and practices that enabled the canoeists to travel, camp, and compete, I read against the grain of periodical accounts and memoirs, and paid close attention to those at the edges of photographs.

Photographs were one of the first and most important places that I encountered work and workers at the annual meetings.⁶ The ACA collection includes more than 500 loose photographs, as well as two official scrapbooks and

of Organized Sport, 1807–1914 (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987); Martin H. Blatt and Martha K. Norkunas, eds., *Work, Recreation, and Culture: Essays in American Labor History* (New York: Garland Publishing Company, 1996); Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure, and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); Gerald Gems, "Welfare Capitalism and Blue-Collar Sport: The Legacy of Labour Unrest," *Rethinking History* 5, no. 1 (March 2001): 43–58.

4. One exception in the Canadian context is Frank Abbott, "Cold Cash and Ice Palaces: The Quebec Winter Carnival of 1894," *Canadian Historical Review* 69, no. 2 (June 1988): 167–202.

5. LouAnn Wurst, "'Human Accumulations': Class and Tourism at Niagara Falls," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 15, no. 2 (June 2011): 256–257.

6. I understand photographs simultaneously as "records of visual facts and as sites where those visual facts are invested with, and generate, meaning." My reading of the ACA collection paid "critical attention to the content of the images themselves, as well as to the contexts of their conception, production, dissemination, consumption and preservation." Joan M. Schwartz and James R. Ryan, eds., *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 7. Particularly important for this project are the ways in which, to borrow from Allan Sekula, photographic practices and images "serve to legitimate and normalise existing power relationships." Sekula, "Photography Between Labour and Capital," in Benjamin H.D. Buchloh and Robert Wilkie, eds., *Mining Photographs and Other Pictures, 1948–1968* (Halifax, NS: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1983), 193.

three personal albums documenting the encampments between 1880 and 1910.⁷ Among the photographs are official images sanctioned by the ACA and reproduced in organizational literature; pictures taken by commercial photographers that were sold at the meets and through mail order; and snapshots produced by amateur photographers for their personal albums. In some cases, the photographer is named, which enabled me to better understand the context of production. However, more than a few images are anonymous. The regatta is the most common theme in the photographs, followed by pictures of the campsite and camp life. It is at the periphery and in the background of images of camp life that we encounter workers. Perhaps not surprisingly, they are more likely to appear in snapshots or commercial photographs than in official pictures, just as they are more often mentioned in personal accounts of the meets than in association records. Even though the visual record has been crucial to this project, I do not want to overstate the degree to which workers were photographed at the encampments. Where workers do appear, their presence is remarkable, for the visual narrative offered by the photographic archive of the ACA constructs the annual meetings as spaces of white middle-class sport.

Clearly workers were not absent from the encampments of the ACA, but they and the work they performed were often rendered invisible. As Thomas G. Andrews notes, “it takes work to erase labor from a landscape.”⁸ This, he argues, is a testament to the “two distinct but intertwined modes of constructing landscape: as built environments produced by physical labor and as representational spaces produced by cultural work.”⁹ What Andrews is documenting in the case of Colorado landscapes at the turn of the 20th century was not specific to the American West, but was evident in different ways in the “emerging leisure retreats of industrializing America” and Canada. What had once been understood as sites of labour and production were increasingly being recast as spaces of leisure and consumption, a process that continues today. “It has become second nature for many of us to ignore the work that sustains our lives and the labor that constructs the landscapes we inhabit.”¹⁰

More than engaging in an act of recovery and re-placement, in this article I seek to understand why workers and particular kinds of work are invisible in the archive of the ACA encampments. The answer lies, at least in part, in the evolving and increasingly complex class structure of the late 19th century.

7. The photographic archive owes much to the collecting practices of association member and amateur historian C. Bowyer Vaux, who amassed the loose photographs, and former commodore Fred Saunders, who created the official scrapbooks and acquired the three personal albums belonging to Thomas Hale, Walwin Barr, and Leo Freide.

8. Thomas G. Andrews, “Made by Toile? Tourism, Labor, and the Construction of the Colorado Landscape,” *Journal of American History* 92, no. 3 (December 2005): 837.

9. Andrews, “Made by Toile,” 840.

10. Andrews, “Made by Toile,” 841.

Beyond creating a sizeable population of waged workers, industrial capitalism stimulated the rapid expansion and consolidation of a middle class dominated by educated and salaried professionals with the time and money to engage in an ever-widening range of leisure activities, including organized sport.¹¹ While by no means homogenous, the middle class tended to imagine leisure as the antithesis of work, an escape from the realities and demands of the office floor.¹² This produced the conditions for overlooking or obscuring the very labour that enabled middle-class folks to play. When such labour was performed by women and racialized men it was even easier to ignore, a testament to the powerful intersections of class, gender, and race in the late 19th century. The relationship between the middle-class canoeists and the workers at the encampments was one of inequality. However, following Cecilia Morgan, we should not overlook another important dimension of this history, the canoeists' reliance on the workers, nor should we forget the workers' agency.¹³ As Tina Loo has observed of hunting guides in Western Canada, many of whom were Indigenous, some capitalized on the "stereotypes" and "authenticity that had been claimed for them" by their clients.¹⁴

The American Canoe Association

THE LATE 19TH CENTURY WITNESSED an explosion of interest in canoeing as sport, recreation, and leisure in Canada, the United States, and Britain.¹⁵ Greater disposable income, increased leisure time, and a growing belief in the ameliorative effects of nature contributed to this "canoe boom."¹⁶ Equally important, however, were the efforts of boosters and boat-builders. The former included a cadre of influential men, many with ties to newspapers or publishing. Individuals like William Alden and Nathaniel Holmes Bishop worked hard to reimagine the canoe, until that point a craft primarily associated with the continent's Indigenous peoples, as a respectable boat worthy of white

11. See, John Ehrenreich and Barbara Ehrenreich, "The Professional-Managerial Class," *Radical America* 11, no. 2 (March-April 1977): 7–31; Andrew Holman, *Sense of Their Duty: Middle-Class Formation in Victorian Ontario Towns* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000).

12. Peter Bailey, "A Mingled Mass of Perfectly Legitimate Pleasures: The Victorian Middle Class and the Problem of Leisure," *Victorian Studies* 21, no. 1 (Autumn 1977): 7–28.

13. Cecilia Morgan, *'A Happy Holiday': English Canadians and Transatlantic Tourism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 57.

14. Tina Loo, *States of Nature: Conserving Canada's Wilderness in the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 55.

15. A good overview of the popularity of canoeing in the late 19th century can be found in Jamie Benidickson, *Idleness, Water, and a Canoe: Reflections on Paddling for Pleasure* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

16. "The Canoe Boom," *The New York Times*, 19 June 1880.

middle-class attention and use. They did so by rhetorically distancing the “modern” canoe from its Aboriginal past. In the same period, boat-builders used new processes, such as rib and batten, and lapstreak and adapted materials like tin and copper for their productions, resulting in a patently “modern” craft. Borrowing from David Roediger’s work on race and labour, I regard these entwined processes of conceptual and material re-imagination and reworking as the “whitening” of the canoe.¹⁷

One of the enduring legacies of the “canoe boom” and a testament to the success of the boosters and builders was the American Canoe Association (ACA), which gathered for the first time at Lake George, New York, in 1880. Like other voluntary associations in this period, the ACA, despite its professed desire to “unite *all* amateur canoeists,” was largely peopled by white, middle-class men from the United States and Canada, although women of the same social class and race were welcomed as “honorary members” beginning in 1882.¹⁸ Unlike other voluntary associations, the ACA rarely met beyond the annual encampment and regatta. Initially, the annual meeting was a mobile event; between 1880 and 1902, the association visited fifteen different locations in New York, New England, and Ontario. In 1903, however, the ACA established a permanent encampment on Sugar Island in the Thousand Islands. Most years, the first week of the meet was devoted to preparing for the races, exploring the surrounding area, and socializing. The second week, by contrast, “was given up to the serious business of racing.”¹⁹ Before crowds of enthusiastic onlookers, paddlers and sailors tested their craft and skills in a varied assortment of races.²⁰

Preparing for the Annual Encampment

PLANNING FOR THE SUMMER meet began in the fall with the Executive Committee’s announcement of the site for the next year’s meeting.²¹ It was

17. David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America’s Immigrants Became White; The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

18. *American Canoe Association Yearbook*, 1883, 83-014/1, TUA. The organization largely “excluded by design,” charging annual fees and offering little in return beyond the annual meetings, which required both time and money to attend. However, it also excluded by intent. For example, prospective members were required to submit a reference from an existing member with their application, and all memberships were voted upon by the Executive Committee.

19. “Canoeists’ Annual Meet,” *New York Times*, 26 August 1900.

20. The boat races were a highlight of the annual meeting for members and visitors alike, at times drawing upwards of 1,000 spectators. The 1889 regatta at Stave Island apparently boasted over 2,000 visitors on one day. “The Thousand Isles: Canoeists, Stenographers, and Fisherman Taking Their Outings,” *New York Times*, 25 August 1889.

21. The ACA employed a hierarchical administrative structure that echoed both the form and some of the nomenclature of yachting clubs and naval squadrons. At the helm of the

not the association's brass that took charge of arrangements, but a separate organizing committee. Initially comprised of three members, at least one of whom lived near the campsite, the organizing committee eventually expanded to include subcommittees devoted to the campsite, regatta, transportation, ladies' camp, and entertainment and music. Accounts detailing preparations for the meets emphasize the labours of the committee members. They highlight revisions to the regatta program, letters written to government officials regarding border crossings, correspondence with railway companies about travel discounts, and surveys made of the campsites and race courses. What has been largely occluded from these accounts is the extent to which the organizing committee depended heavily on local resources, particularly local labourers, to prepare for and realize the encampments.²²

The site surveys were one of the first occasions that local people were called on to aid in the preparations. These usually took place in the winter months when the ice was still on the water. An article describing the survey undertaken for the 1883 meet on Stony Lake is an unusually thorough account of the labour performed by those outside of the ACA.²³ According to author Robert Tyson, the regatta committee departed from Peterborough, Ontario, at 6:15 a.m. on 30 March in a sleigh driven by Joe Vasseur, a "shrewd, good-humored French Canadian." Also in the sleigh was James W. Fitzgerald, Crown surveyor. The author had little to say about Fitzgerald who, given his occupation, was likely perceived as holding a similar class and race position to Tyson and the other ACA official in the sleigh, Commodore E.B. Edwards. However, a good-sized paragraph was devoted to describing Vasseur. Even as Tyson recognized the driver as an "excellent teamster," he painted him as simplistic and crude: his English was broken, his commentary obscene. He made special note of Vasseur's recreational pastimes, shooting a "saw-log slide" in "a narrow, log canoe" for "pure reckless fun," an ostensibly less rational and respectable canoeing activity than the cruises and races that appealed to members of the ACA.²⁴ Finally, Tyson called into question Vasseur's full humanity by referring

organization was the commodore, who was assisted by the vice-commodore, rear-commodore, and secretary-treasurer. Collectively, these men (and they were always men in this period because women were prevented from running for office) formed the Executive Committee.

22. This article is concerned with work at the annual encampments. However, the ACA also purchased goods that were the products of another's labour. Local farmers were approached for perishable items such as produce, milk, eggs, and meat to be served in the mess tent and sold in the camp store. Area residents were also valued for their wood, both as lumber for the camp buildings and as fuel for the nightly campfires. O.K. Chobee, "Echoes from Stony Lake," *American Canoeist* 2, no. 8 (September 1883): 114; "The ACA Meet of 1887," *Forest and Stream*, 2 June 1887; "Executive Committee Meeting," *Forest and Stream*, 3 November 1900.

23. Robert Tyson, "Laying Out the Course on Stony Lake," *American Canoeist* 2, no. 5 (June 1883): 66–68.

24. Peter Bailey, *Leisure and Class in Victorian England: Rational Recreation and the Contest for Control, 1830–1885* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978).

to him as a “half-amphibious creature,” a consequence of his time working as a log driver in the lumber industry. Tyson’s description of Vasseur resonates with J.I. Little’s observation that urban campers visiting Lake Mephremagog in the same period described local men “not as heroic individualists,” as was sometimes the case in hunters’ accounts of guides, “but as rustic and often amusing folk figures.”²⁵ Such portrayals established a certain distance between the canoeists and the people they employed, and underscored the otherness of workers.

Vasseur was not the only person engaged by the committee that day. Before arriving at Stony Lake, they collected Mr. McCracken, a farmer valued for his knowledge of the local environment, particularly his familiarity with the “unfailing springs of excellent water” near the campsite. McCracken did more than share his local knowledge, he also lent his manual skills to the project by acting as surveyor’s assistant to Fitzgerald. It is not clear if the farmer had performed these tasks before. However, Tyson observed, in the paternalistic parlance of contemporary labour relations, McCracken “proved himself a handy, willing, and cheerful worker.”²⁶ Also assisting with the survey was another farmer, Mr. Crow, and his son, Willie; Tyson’s report on these two individuals is cursory at best.

The attention paid to Vasseur and McCracken in this report of the 1883 surveying trip is uncharacteristic of ACA accounts, which more typically record the activities of members than workers. Thus, in naming these men and describing the work they performed, Tyson was pulling back the cover of obscurity commonly assigned to the people whose labour made the encampments possible. How might we explain this anomalous account? Certainly more attention is afforded to work and workers in the early years of the encampments; later reports tend to focus almost exclusively on the regatta. This shift likely reflects the routinization of the organization, preparation, and execution of the annual event. However, ultimately I think this account is a story about the survey, which functions here as a tool of legitimation.²⁷ Still in

25. J.I. Little, “Scenic Tourism on the Northeastern Borderland: Lake Memphremagog’s Steamboat Excursions and Resort Hotels, 1850–1900,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 35, no. 4 (October 2009): 290.

26. Daniel J. Walkowitz, *Worker City, Company Town* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978); Patrick Joyce, *Work, Society, and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in Late Victorian England* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1980); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, James L. LeLoudis, Robert Rodgers Korstad, Mary Murphy, Lu Ann Jones, and Christopher B. Daly, *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cottage Mill World* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

27. More than tools of legitimation, surveys, like maps, are also tools of dispossession. The surveyor, to borrow from J.B. Harley, “replicates not just the environment in some abstract sense but equally the territorial imperatives of a particular political system.” In late 19th-century North America, the territorial imperative was to colonize. At the 1883 meet on Stony Lake, the ACA followed the very same formula that the government and local land companies had used since the 1820s to settle this southern edge of the Canadian Shield: survey, map,

its infancy in 1883 when this article was published, the ACA could only have benefited from positive associations with the scientific tool, particularly as the organization sought to establish itself as *the* premier (inter)national canoeing club. Local colour, which Vasseur, McCracken, and the Crows ostensibly offered in abundance, was necessary to properly tell the tale of the survey as a travelogue for readers of *American Canoeist*.²⁸

More common in the ACA archive are accounts that erase the work of others altogether. This is perhaps most visible in descriptions of the campsite. Despite the organization's claims that members were visiting wild places, it took no small amount of work to produce these landscapes: trees had been cut down, brush removed, and paths graded.²⁹ Yet few accounts describe how this work was performed or who performed it. The fact that much of this landscaping was undertaken before the campers arrived on site would have contributed to its invisibility. That said, when it was not carried out to the satisfaction of the campers, notes were made and accusations levelled. The 1900 meet in Muskoka, for example, was derided for being "too rough."³⁰ Poor performance made the invisible suddenly visible. This reinforces Thomas Andrew's point that if the "small armies of maids, waiters, cooks, and porters ... did their jobs properly," they could be overlooked.³¹

In addition to clearing underbrush, removing rocks, and laying out walking paths, labourers assembled the camp infrastructure: digging wells and sinks; constructing the camp wharf; erecting buildings for the mess, kitchen, and

occupy. They were also using the same personnel. James Fitzgerald had surveyed the Burleigh Colonization Road (1860–1861), which facilitated settlement in the area north of Peterborough. That some of the visitors to the encampment would later purchase land on Stony Lake for cottages reinforces this connection between sport tourism and colonization. Thus, even as the ACA was only taking temporary control over these landscapes (at least until 1903), we should understand the surveys of the campsite and race courses in their colonial context. See Harley, *The New Nature of Maps: Essays in the History of Cartography* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 54; and John C. Walsh, "Landscapes of Longing: Colonization and the Problem of State Formation in Canada West," PhD thesis, University of Guelph, 2001.

28. Vladimir Kapov argues that "by virtue of a 'generic pact' typical of nineteenth-century travelogue and its eye-witnessing mode, local colours came to designate factual accuracy." Kapov, *Local Colour: A Travelling Concept* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 132.

29. There is a growing literature on labour and the construction of leisure landscapes. See, for example, Bill Waiser, *Park Prisoners: The Untold Story of Western Canada's National Parks, 1915–1946* (Saskatoon, SK: Fifth House, 1995), and Richard A. Rajala, "From 'On-to-Ottawa' to 'Bloody Sunday': Unemployment Relief and British Columbia Forests, 1935–1939," in Dimitry Anastakis and P. E. Bryden, eds., *Framing Canadian Federalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 118–150.

30. D.J. Howell, "The International Canoe Meet," *The Canadian Magazine* 15, no. 6 (October 1900): 513–520.

31. Andrews, "Made by Toile," 848. See, also, Morgan, *A Happy Holiday*, 7; Karen Dubinsky, *The Second Greatest Disappointment: Honeymooners, Heterosexuality, and the Tourist Industry at Niagara Falls* (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 1999), 74–83.

camp store; and building tent floors and landing stages for individual campers.³² Whereas general labourers undertook landscaping duties, skilled carpenters appear to have performed much of this other work. With the move to the permanent encampment on Sugar Island, the number of workers engaged in advance of the meet likely declined. Temporary structures were replaced with more permanent buildings, and landscaping became a matter of maintenance rather than yearly re-invention. Of course, there were always unexpected jobs to be performed. High water on the St. Lawrence in 1908 caused a number of the canoeists' personal docks to be washed away. According to the yearbook from that year, "it was necessary to do quite a little work to get the Island in shape."³³ We can assume that much of this work was passed off to local labourers. The permanent encampment, and specifically concerns about leaving the association's property unattended for much of the year, also warranted a new position. In 1904, the organization hired a local lighthouse keeper, Manley Cross, to serve as the site's first caretaker. Cross was expected to watch over the site and perform general maintenance tasks. In the warmer months, he was also responsible for welcoming visiting canoeists to the site – Sugar Island was to be available to ACA members at all times.³⁴

Travelling Assistance

MOST OF THE CANOEISTS TRAVELLED a day or more by train, steamer, or canoe to arrive at the meets. Each stage of the journey from home to the campsite was facilitated by another's labour. At the front end, domestic servants assembled the luggage and kit of the well-to-do members.³⁵ Domestic service, while on the decline at the turn of the 20th century, was still a relatively common feature of middle-class life in Canada and the United States, and two weeks at a canoeing encampment required special preparations.³⁶ Some canoeists and clubs travelled to the annual meetings with domestic workers. The *British Daily Whig* reported that Alderman Skinner's valet filled a bathtub

32. "The ACA Meet," *Forest and Stream*, 31 July 1884; "The Association Meeting," *Forest and Stream*, 21 August 1884; "The Executive Committee Meeting," *Forest and Stream*, 18 November 1886; "The ACA Meet, Lake George," *Forest and Stream*, 23 August 1888.

33. "1908 Meet," in Oscar J. West, ed., *American Canoe Association Yearbook* (Chicago: Press of De Land, Coles and Putnam, 1909), 48.

34. "Secretary Treasurer's Report, 1904" in H.M. Stewart, ed., *American Canoe Association Yearbook* (Rochester, NY: Morrison's Press, 1905), 47.

35. Paul Vernon, *Tales of the ACA*, 1940, 83-014/2, TUA.

36. Susan Williams claims that almost 25 per cent of all American households, urban and suburban, had help in 1880. See Williams, *Savory Suppers and Fashionable Feasts: Dining in Victorian America* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 153. See also, Eric W. Sager, "The Transformation of the Canadian Domestic Servant, 1871–1931," *Social Science History* 31, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 512–513.

for him each day at the 1893 meet at Brophy's Point because he could not swim.³⁷ In the 1880s and 1890s, Paul Butler of the Vesper Boat Club in Lowell, Massachusetts, was accompanied to the encampments by "an old colored man, a body servant of [his father], whose duty it was to look after the sails."³⁸ I also found a photograph of the Knickerbocker Canoe Club at a division meet with an African American boy seated in the foreground. The image bears the following note, "Rastus, the camp chore boy."³⁹ That there were domestic workers on site is further underscored by plans to include servants' quarters among the permanent buildings at the Sugar Island encampment.⁴⁰ But these examples are exceptions in the ACA archive; domestic servants are otherwise absent from campers' accounts of the events. As a fact of life for many middle-class and particularly upper-middle-class families, the presence of domestic servants at the encampments was likely unremarkable.

For journeys to the meets made by train, baggage handlers and porters were a necessity, if a frustrating one. Interactions between the canoeists and the baggage handlers were particularly fraught. The canoeists routinely complained about the poor treatment that their beloved craft received in the baggage car.⁴¹ This may explain why in 1884, one of the New York clubs had their janitor travel to Grindstone Island in a special car at the forward end of the train that carried the canoes, ostensibly to keep an eye on them, while not coincidentally keeping travellers' eyes off of him.⁴² By contrast, accounts of travel to the encampments are universally silent on the role of porters, in spite of the fact that they would have been present in the canoeists' first-class cars.⁴³ This should not surprise us. Andrews observes that by the late 19th century, "luxury trains had become domestic spaces where pullman [*sic*] porters and other men performed precisely the types of feminized and racialized work that travelers were most likely to overlook."⁴⁴ Porters also cultivated invisibility as they worked, both at the behest of employers and for personal

37. "At the Canoe Camp: The Fishing and Swimming is Fine – Laying a Course," *British Daily Whig*, 15 August 1893.

38. W.P. Stephens, *Traditions and Memories of American Yachting: The 50th Anniversary Edition* (Brooklin, ME: WoodenBoat Publications, 1989), 173.

39. *Meets and Camps Scrapbook, 1900–1940, 1.5/3*, NYSHA.

40. "A Permanent Camp," *Forest and Stream*, 18 December 1890.

41. "The Great Canoe Meet," *Outing* 9, no. 2 (November 1886): 164–166; C. Bowyer Vaux, "The American Canoe Association, and Its Birthplace," *Outing* 12, no. 5 (August 1888): 410–421.

42. "Canoe Sailors in Camp," *New York Sun*, 4 August 1884.

43. Beth Tompkins Bailey, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America, 1925–1945* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

44. Andrews, "Made by Toile," 849.

reasons. Invisibility, Beth Tompkins Bailey argues, could function as a protective mechanism, and a strategy to attract tips.⁴⁵

For those who travelled to the meets by canoe, the assistance of local people was less likely to be overlooked, although their labour was usually framed as an act of kindness rather than work. Travelogues describe the goods purchased from farms passed on the route, the local people contracted to transport canoes between waterways, the rental of land for tenting, and the appeal for assistance when the next stage of the journey was uncertain. Much like descriptions of the labourers at the encampments, the canoeists' accounts paint local people as "folk"-like.⁴⁶ They emphasize, for instance, the unfamiliar accents, the colourful vocabulary, and the perceived simplicity of their lives and personalities. Florence Watters Snedeker's slim volume, *A Family Canoe Trip*, is perhaps the best example of this. The book, which is an account of her family's journey to the 1891 meet on Lake Champlain, often reads like an anthropological expedition, offering commentary on the many types of people the family encountered along the way. Early on, for example, Snedeker observes of the roadside, "instead of Indians, there were lots of farmers' children offering us peaches and apples," who provided "choice pictures for our camera."⁴⁷ She also makes note of the mule drivers who worked along the canal: "we became acquainted with our fellow travelers.... In face they were less moral than the mules they drove: now a sallow Yankee with a hint of lost estate in his unquiet eyes; now an all-brutal, shaggy foreigner.... We found them civil, even obliging. But they whacked their beasts viciously."⁴⁸ Finally, Snedeker includes dialogue that, intending to capture the distinctive cadences of the speaker, universally constructs her subjects as uneducated and uncultured.⁴⁹

Ostensibly, travel brought the canoeists into contact with difference, providing the opportunity for a readjustment of established assumptions about the other. More often than not, however, such encounters only reinforced notions of difference. In addition, the labours of those they met were rarely interpreted as work, but rather as quaint performances of otherness.

45. Bailey, *Pullman Porters*, 19, 22. See also Sara-Jane (Saje) Mathieu, "North of the Colour Line: Sleeping Car Porters and the Battle against Jim Crow on Canadian Rails, 1880–1920," *Labour/Le Travail* 47 (Spring 2001): 9–42.

46. Ian McKay, *Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994).

47. Florence Watters Snedeker, *A Family Canoe Trip* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1892), 30.

48. Snedeker, *A Family Canoe Trip*, 24.

49. Snedeker, *A Family Canoe Trip*, 37–42.

At Work During the Meet

THEIR JOURNEYS TO THE ANNUAL MEETING complete, the canoeists turned their attention to settling into camp life. Cindy Aron observes that while early proponents of outdoor living highlighted the opportunity for relaxation that camping afforded, in the late 19th century, advocates were celebrating the work of outdoor life.⁵⁰ The ACA appears to have followed a somewhat different trajectory. By 1900, few of the canoeists did the work associated with camping out. Local carpenters built tent floors in advance of their arrival, and in some cases raised the canvas structures that would serve as their homes away from home. Cooks and kitchen staff were hired to provide meals and wash dishes. Performers were employed to amuse.

Although much of the work of readying the campsite took place before the campers arrived, typically one or more of the carpenters remained on site during the annual meeting to provide assistance. The few extant references to the “camp carpenter” suggest the indispensability of this individual. A visitor to the 1889 meet on Stave Island claimed, “Jackman was not only the carpenter, he was the flagpole raiser, fire builder and general utility man of the camp. He was an institution, and if he could be an annual institution that would be a good thing.”⁵¹ At the 1892 meet, handbarrows built by the camp carpenter were praised for aiding canoeists moving boxes and bundles from tent to steamer.⁵² There were also more general labourers on site who delivered firewood and carted goods around the encampment, although their efforts were rarely acknowledged.⁵³

Some of the most visible work was related to food planning, preparation, and service. Operating the camp mess was no easy feat, given that the cook and servers had to feed, in some cases, a few hundred campers three meals a day.⁵⁴ Early on, local people were responsible for the kitchen. Mr. Marvin Truesdell of nearby Hillview oversaw food service at the 1881 encampment on Lake George, while the mess shed on Grindstone Island operated under the watchful eye of Mrs. Delaney.⁵⁵ By the 1890s, the responsibility for meals was

50. Aron, *Working at Play*, 176–177.

51. The article described Jackman as an “experienced carpenter with a good staff of assistants.” “Snips from Snaps at the '89 Meet,” *Forest and Stream*, 19 September 1889.

52. “The ACA Meet of 1892,” *Forest and Stream*, 8 September 1892.

53. Rare examples include, “The Meet of 1884,” *Forest and Stream*, 8 November 1883; “The Executive Committee Meeting,” *Forest and Stream*, 18 November 1886; and “Untitled,” *Forest and Stream*, 25 February 1892.

54. See, for example, “The Lively Canoeists Are Coming Out in Numbers,” *British Daily Whig*, 12 August 1893.

55. *Camp Circular for Lake George*, 1881, Collection 291, Box 23, Folder 2, Mystic Seaport Collections Research Center (hereafter MSCRC); *Camp Circular for Grindstone Island*, 1886, St. Lawrence County Historical Association (hereafter SLCHA).

increasingly the purview of professionals, and also of men. D. McElveny and Sons, a well-known catering company from Albany, New York, managed the mess at a number of the encampments between 1897 and 1910.⁵⁶

Even as the administration of the mess was professionalized, local people, the majority of whom were women, continued to work in the kitchen performing tasks consistent with their contributions to the family economy.⁵⁷ With the exception of the 1890 meet on Long Island and the 1893 meet near Kingston, Ontario, the wait staff also appear to have been young white women like those pictured in the background of the mess tent photograph at the 1898 meet on Stave Island (fig. 2).⁵⁸ The fact that servers were women was out of step with other hotels and resorts in this period. Lou Ann Wurst claims that in the same period, “without exception, the waiters were all men and the domestics were all women” at hotels in Niagara Falls. Moreover, while “the vast majority of female workers were white ... most of the males were black or mulatto.”⁵⁹ The canoeists offer some other clues about the servers, hinting at a greater degree of contact between servers and served than between canoeists and workers elsewhere on site. For example, they note that most were local teachers or farmers’ daughters.⁶⁰ Certainly, some of the women workers appear to have been incorporated into the encampments in a way that male labourers, particularly those of colour, were not. In his memoirs of the ACA, D.B. Goodsell recalled “dances given for the waitresses of the mess tent.”⁶¹ According to R.B. Burchard, though, it was “woe to the luckless Johnny who attempted to be flirtatious,” suggesting that at least some female workers sought to keep their distance from the canoeists.⁶²

56. Amasa Junius Parker, *Landmarks of Albany County, New York* (Syracuse, NY: D. Mason and Co., 1897), 17–18.

57. This move to professionalize the oversight of food services while continuing to use marginal labour for supporting tasks in the kitchen and dining hall was echoed in summer camps, although in a somewhat later period. Abigail Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness: Summer Camps and the Shaping of American Youth, 1890–1960* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 137–143. On young women and the family economy, albeit in an urban context, see Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montréal* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 118–151.

58. A.A. Lewis, “Dinner Time in the Mess Tent,” 1898, 1.2/27, NYSHA. This photograph was produced by the organization’s official photographer, A.A. Lewis. On servers at the 1890 and 1893 meets, see Goodsell, *A Canoeing Reminiscence* (1936), p. 3, 1.6/2, NYSHA, and *British Daily Whig*, 15 August 1893.

59. Wurst, “Human Accumulations,” 257.

60. Flip, “The Lake Champlain Canoe Meet,” *Outing* 11, no. 3 (December 1887): 262.

61. Goodsell, *A Canoeing Reminiscence*, p. 4, NYSHA.

62. Burchard, “Back to Grindstone,” 141. As I have found no records from the caterers, we have no way of knowing if the servers were instructed to avoid any kind of indiscretion, or if they behaved in this way of their own volition.



Figure 2. A.A. Lewis, "Dinner Time in the Mess Tent," 1898.
Photo courtesy of NYSHA.

Not everyone ate at the mess tent. In some cases, the canoeists visited a nearby farmhouse for their meals, further strengthening dependencies on local farms and farmers.⁶³ Still others set up a "club mess" and hired a cook. Club cooks came from both near and far. At the 1893 meet on Wolfe Island, the Brooklyn Canoe Club "hired a man" from nearby Kingston.⁶⁴ The previous decade, Frank Baker of the exclusive Down Town Club travelled from New York to oversee the Brooklyn mess.⁶⁵ Not an insignificant number of the camp cooks had experience in lumber camps, where they would have "prepared and served three gigantic meals for forty to two hundred men."⁶⁶ Textual records tell us that some of the club cooks were French Canadian, including the unnamed "presiding genius" of the Deseronto Canoe Club mess in 1890.⁶⁷ Photographs,

63. C. Bowyer Vaux, "Canoe Meet at the Thousand Islands," *Outing* 14, no. 5 (August 1889): 348.

64. Vernon, *Tales of the ACA*, TUA.

65. "To Camp on Bow Arrow Point," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 6 August 1887.

66. Adam Tomczik, "'He-Men Could Talk to He-Men in He-Men Language': Lumberjack Work Culture in Maine and Minnesota, 1840–1940," *Historian* 70, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 706.

67. He also had experience in lumber camps. "The ACA Meet: Camp Circular," *Forest and*

meanwhile, illustrate the presence of African American men as cooks. Figure 3 was produced by commercial photographer Seneca Ray Stoddard for the Brooklyn Canoe Club during the 1887 meet on Lake Champlain.⁶⁸ Captioned by Stoddard the “Sneak Box Mess,” a reference to a canoe-like craft made prominent by founding ACA member Nathaniel Holmes Bishop, the photograph depicts five members of the club “seated in front of colored cook,” to borrow from the note on the back of the image.⁶⁹ Even as the cook is visible and positioned somewhat above, if still behind the members, this unofficial caption speaks to the racial politics of the encampments. Whereas the white canoeists are identified, signaling their full inclusion in the experience of the meets, the Black cook goes unnamed, leaving him beyond the imaginary bounds of the event, even as he occupies a physical place within it. The profile of club cooks at the ACA meets fits with Abigail Van Slyck’s work on children’s summer camps in the US in the decades around the turn of the 20th century. She argues that lumber camp and sea cooks were favoured choices for overseeing dining halls, as were African Americans.⁷⁰ According to Van Slyck, African American cooks, in particular, “preserved the all-male environment while also reinforcing the idea that some kitchen chores were beneath the dignity of white males.”⁷¹

The relative visibility of the club cooks, like the servers, suggests that not all labourers were perceived as “workers” (and ignored as such) in the same way. Even if the canoeists were more attentive to cooks in their accounts of encampment life, a good deal is left unsaid. Moreover, the more detailed portraits tend to frame the cooks, not as capable practitioners, but as sources of amusement, much as Robert Tyson portrayed Joe Vasseur, the driver for the 1883 survey delegation. The most notorious of the club cooks was “the venerable Sergeant Billings” who was in attendance at a number of ACA meetings, including the 1883 encampment on Stony Lake and the 1888 meet on Lake George.⁷² Following the 1883 camp, O.K. Chobee opined, “no one who camped with the A.C.A.’s on Juniper Island will forget the stentorian tones with which, each morning, Billings, the cook, strove to arouse the drowsy Mohican

Stream, 10 July 1890.

68. S.R. Stoddard, “The Sneak-Box Mess: Camp of the Brooklyn Canoe Club,” 1887, 1.1/25, NYSHA. Stoddard was a prominent canoeist and commercial photographer in the late 19th century. He was also a fixture at the ACA meets from 1881 to 1896. He did much to shape the visual narrative of the encampments through his production and sale of images of the annual meetings. Jeffrey L. Horrell, *Seneca Ray Stoddard: Transforming the Adirondack Wilderness in Text and Image* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1999).

69. Nathaniel Holmes Bishop, *Four Months in a Sneak Box* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1879).

70. Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness*, 129.

71. Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness*, 129.

72. “The ACA Meet of 1888: The Camp and the Association,” *Forest and Stream*, 6 September 1888; “A Trip with the Knickerbockers,” 1883–1884, 1.6/11, NYSHA.



Figure 3. S.R. Stoddard, "The Sneak-Box Mess: Camp of the Brooklyn Canoe Club," 1887. Photo courtesy of NYSHA.

and Knickerbocker men who belonged to his mess: 'Breakfast, Morcans! Niggerboggers, breakfast! Dod rat them sleepy Yankees!'"⁷³ A loud, bossy cook from the shanties may have fulfilled the canoeists' desire for an authentic outdoor experience. However, such representations also reinforced the cook's position as other within the white middle-class world of the encampments.

Of course, as the example of the cooks makes clear, the boundary that surrounded the annual meetings was a permeable one. Even as the canoeists sought to police membership in the association and limit visitors to the site, they allowed "others" access to the campsites as labourers. Framed in this way, the ACA meets recall the "peculiar tensions" that defined domestic service in the late 19th century.⁷⁴ Magda Fahrni argues that, on the one hand, "service was crucial to the creation of a respectable bourgeois home and lifestyle," a "hallmark" of middle-class status.⁷⁵ On the other, servants, because of their class and race position, were perceived as "dubious intruders into the bourgeois domain." Domestic service, she concludes, was a "unique spatial process that transgressed the physical segregation of the classes perceived and defended in

73. Chobee, "Echoes from Stony Lake," 115.

74. Magda Fahrni, "'Ruffled' Mistresses and 'Discontented' Maids: Respectability and the Case of Domestic Service, 1880–1914," *Labour/Le Travail* 39 (Spring 1997): 70.

75. Fahrni, "'Ruffled' Mistresses," 72.

late-19th-century Canada.”⁷⁶ The encampments also transgressed the physical segregation of the races.

Most of the workers who traversed this boundary were engaged in various forms of manual labour. However, the campers also benefited from more artistic kinds of work. Whereas the majority of camp workers were rural whites, most of the entertainers were visible minorities. At the 1884 meet on Grindstone Island, for example, “a number of Indians” from the area “represented scenes of Aboriginal life,” as part of Lafayette Seavey’s annual spectacle.⁷⁷ Six years later, members of the ACA hired a “Coon Band,”⁷⁸ a group of three African American men, in nearby Sag Harbor to provide musical entertainment for the camp.⁷⁹ The most famous of the ACA performers, however, was E. Pauline Johnson, who became an honorary association member in 1893.⁸⁰ Her appearance in full Indian costume was one of the most unusual and noteworthy aspects of the Wolfe Island encampment. Spectators watched as “this Indian girl, daughter of a Mohawk chief, stepped into the glare of the red lights, dressed in the ornamental garb of a Mohawk maiden ... and recited her own poem, wherein an Indian wife bids her warrior husband go to war with the whites.”⁸¹ The *New York Times* deemed the performance “all very stirring and tragic.”⁸² Given the publicity of these performances, it is difficult to claim that the performers were invisible. However, few of the canoeists likely perceived their contributions to encampment life as work.

In the 1880s, Indigenous people were also called on to perform in the canoe races. In this case, payment depended on the performance. At the 1881 meet, for instance, spectators watched as canoes paddled by local Indigenous men competed for a purse.⁸³ That “Indians” apparently provided some authenticity

76. Fahrni, “Ruffled’ Mistresses,” 70.

77. “Canoeists Break Camp,” *New York Sun*, 16 August 1884.

78. Schroeder argues there was a “coon song craze” in the 1890s. Patricia R. Schroeder, “Passing for Black: Coon Songs and the Performance of Race,” *The Journal of American Culture* 33, no. 2 (June 2010): 139.

79. D.B. Goodsell outlined the circumstances of the event in *A Canoeing Reminiscence*, p. 3, NYSHA. Photographs of the band were also included in S.R. Stoddard, *Glimpses of the ACA* (Glens Falls, NY: printed by author, 1890).

80. *Meeting of the Executive Committee*, 4 November 1893, Collection 291, Vol. 3, MSCRC.

81. “Around the Pine Camp Fire,” *New York Times*, 20 August 1893.

82. Our knowledge of E. Pauline Johnson’s career as a performer owes much to Veronica Strong Boag and Carole Gerson, *Paddling Her Own Canoe* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), and Cecilia Morgan, “A Wigwam to Westminster: Performing Mohawk Identity in Imperial Britain,” *Gender and History* 15, no. 2 (August 2003): 319–341. On the phenomenon of the “performing Indian” more broadly, see Phil Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998) and Elizabeth Bird, ed., *Dressing in Feathers: The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).

83. “The Second Day of the Regatta,” *New York Times*, 13 August 1881. Aboriginal men and

to early meets is evident in a letter penned by the meet organizer, Nathaniel Holmes Bishop:

Captain Lee Harris, the owner of the little steamer Owl, who is an Adirondack guide, and lives in Caldwell, will “enthuse” the Indians – some half dozen or more who live in the outskirts of the village. He will try to find them birch trees large enough to make canoes, and if we offer a prize for an Indian canoe race, we may coax them into dressing in savage style and putting on the war paint. As their leader is thoroughly Christianized, and the best member of one of our churches, it may require the persuasive eloquence of Rev. Mr. H— ... but we must have an Indian canoe race on the Horicon of Cooper, if we have to import the Indians from Canada.⁸⁴

Clearly, Bishop was not interested in the participation of contemporary Native people on their own terms and as equals, but was more concerned with reproducing a mythological and quasi-historical stereotype.⁸⁵ This use of Indigenous people as a means of authenticating sporting events echoes Gillian Poulter’s writing on lacrosse tours in the same period.⁸⁶

The question of participation has long troubled historians studying Aboriginal and African American performances for white audiences. Scholars in both fields tend to agree that participation in minstrel shows and World’s Fairs, to name just two of the more popular venues for racialized performers at the end of the 19th century, offered economic benefits for participants.⁸⁷ Such venues also provided Black and Indigenous performers with opportunities to affirm their culture and “reverse stereotypes” constructed by whites.⁸⁸ In some cases, groups “performed with more irony than their white audiences appreciated, enjoying their status as tricksters by performing expected roles and subverting them.”⁸⁹ In this way, performances were more than “capitulation to the forces of popular consumer culture,” they were a “form of political activism,” an opportunity “to challenge the racial status quo and thus participate in the creation of modern discourse.”⁹⁰ Of course, white audiences would not have recognized the complexity of such performances. Rather, they

women had long been performing in canoes for white audiences. In Halifax, for example, see articles about such races in the *Halifax Free Press*, 11 July 1826; *Halifax Nova Scotian*, 29 June 1831; *Halifax Nova Scotian*, 10 August 1831.

84. “The Canoe Congress,” *Forest and Stream*, 22 January 1880.

85. I borrow this notion of authenticity from Paige Raibmon, *Authentic Indians: Episodes of Encounter from the Late-Nineteenth-Century Northwest Coast* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 3–9.

86. Gillian Poulter, *Becoming Native in a Foreign Land: Sport, Visual Culture, and Identity in Montreal, 1840–1885* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009).

87. Schroeder, “Passing for Black,” 143; Raibmon, *Authentic Indians*, 51.

88. Raibmon, *Authentic Indians*, 72; Schroeder, “Passing for Black,” 143.

89. Schroeder, “Passing for Black,” 143.

90. Schroeder, “Passing for Black,” 139.

functioned as confirmations of preexisting assumptions about the racialized other. Paige Raibmon, in her work on Kwakwaka'wakw participation in the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago, notes that even as the performers "ingeniously combined cultural affirmation and adaptation, they contributed to the identification of Kwakwaka'wakw culture as a static relic of the past."⁹¹

The Labourers

GIVEN THE PAUCITY OF RECORDS on the subject, it is impossible to offer even a rough estimate of the number of people hired to work at the ACA encampments on a yearly basis. The cook/caterer was in charge of hiring and paying staff for the camp kitchen and mess hall, so there is no record of their labour in association accounts. Similarly, some years the responsibility for arranging construction and landscaping workers was farmed out to the property owner or a local merchant.⁹² The accounts for the 1900 meet in Muskoka and the 1905 encampment on Sugar Island are unique for naming the labourers responsible for landscaping and construction.⁹³ Even as attempts to find further information about the named individuals have proved fruitless, these records are instructive. For example, they offer some sense of the scale of the workforce, listing payments to nine and seven different individuals for manual labour, respectively. Moreover, the 1905 records specify a rate of pay for three of the workers. Thomas Nicholson and Alexander Sherby worked for 19.5 days at \$3.50 and \$2.00 per day, respectively. Donald McLennan was paid \$1.50 per day for 15 days of work. These accounts suggest that the association paid skilled manual labourers relatively well. According to the 1901 census, the average male clerk in Canada earned \$496.49 annually, while the average production worker took home \$375.00.⁹⁴

While the ACA may have paid some members of their staff relatively well, these wages were only temporary. Work at the encampments, which may have been welcomed by local people, was likely one component of a larger household or family economy that existed for rural folks on both sides of the border in the late 19th century.⁹⁵ Women had long played an important economic

91. Raibmon, *Authentic Indians*, 72–73. See also Constance Backhouse, *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900–1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 56–102.

92. See, for example, "The ACA Meet of 1887," *Forest and Stream*, 2 June 1887. See also, *Camp Circular for Sugar Island*, 1910, 1.6/11, NYSHA.

93. "Executive Committee Meeting," *Forest and Stream*, 3 November 1900; "Camp Site Committee Report, 1906," Collection 291, Vol. 4, MSCRC.

94. Graham S. Lowe, "Class, Job, and Gender in the Canadian Office," *Labour/Le Travail* 10 (Autumn 1982): 11.

95. Marjorie Cohen, *Women's Work, Markets and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988); Nancy Grey Osterud, *Bonds of*

role in sustaining families through the production of goods such as butter, buttons, and hats, the sale of services such as laundry, and the taking in of boarders. Joan Jensen goes so far as to suggest that farmwomen, in particular, “*expected* to undertake work that would bring in money to the household economy.”⁹⁶ Such tasks were important in an era when farms existed at a mid-point on the continuum between subsistence production and the capitalist economy. Farm men were also known to take on wage labour intermittently to supplement their family incomes.⁹⁷ One of the primary sources of seasonal labour for the Ontario lumber camps were agriculturalists.⁹⁸ Conversely, the examples of Joe Vasseur and the camp cooks suggest that the encampments also occasionally provided ancillary work for rural men engaged in seasonal resource industries.⁹⁹ Still other workers may have been employed in nearby factories. Few of the campsites were spatially distant from industrial production. The Thousand Islands – the site of ten of the mobile encampments and the permanent campsite – boasted “small-scale processing industries,” “metal-fabricating plants,” and “extractive industries” that produced everything from stoves and sandstone to meat and lawnmowers.¹⁰⁰ Occupational plurality, in other words, was a likely reality for many of the men and women that the ACA employed.

Just as accounts of the meets offer few specifics about the women and men whose labour made the encampments possible, they are relatively silent on encounters between the canoeists and workers. Some of the organizers’ comments hint at tensions between the two groups. This friction may have resulted from differences of class, race, nationality, and location (rural versus urban). Following the 1896 meet, for instance, an editor at *Forest and Stream* commented, “the great difficulty in the choice of a new site each year is that entirely new arrangements for preparing the site, transporting and catering for the members must be made; and thus, under most disadvantageous conditions,

Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

96. Joan M. Jensen, “Cloth, Butter, and Boarders: Women’s Household Production for the Market,” *Review of Radical Political Economics* 12 (Summer 1980): 15. Emphasis added.

97. Joy Parr, “Ontario Agricultural Wage Labour in Historical Perspective,” *Labour/Le Travail* 15 (Spring 1985): 91–103; Rusty Bittermann, “Farm Households and Wage Labour in the Northeastern Maritimes in the Early 19th Century,” *Labour/Le Travail* 31 (Spring 1993): 13–45.

98. Ian Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900–1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 27–29.

99. Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses*, 26–27.

100. Gregory S. Kealey, *Workers and Canadian History* (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995), 249; Morton Schoolman and Alvin Magid, *Reindustrializing New York State: Strategies, Implications, Challenges* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 132.

the officers have to deal with local men entirely unknown to them.”¹⁰¹ Similarly, although the ACA publicly praised the relationship they had with the Delaneys of Grindstone Island – the encampment was held on this site in 1884, 1885, 1886, 1896, and 1897 – there was not universal satisfaction with the arrangement. In 1885 and again in 1886, the executive committee deemed the bills presented by the family to the organization “excessive” and “exorbitant,” respectively.¹⁰² Such interactions were likely frustrating for the Delaneys as well, who could have felt the ACA was trying to undercut them. Moreover, given the canoeists’ penchant for pranks and late-night fun, the organization may not have always made the best guests or neighbours.

Conclusion

THE AMERICAN CANOE ASSOCIATION’S dependency on local labour was not unique. Rather, it was (and remains) a characteristic of tourist economies and organized sport, although the literature on the former is much better developed. Dona Brown has explored the complex tourist industries that emerged in New England over the course of the 19th century to accommodate, feed, and outfit the many visitors to the area.¹⁰³ More intimately, J.I. Little’s work demonstrates how a small group of “city folk” who summered on Lake Mephrmagog around the turn of the 20th century “relied on the easy-going local men who knew how to build boats and cabins, fix engines, and fulfill other traditionally male tasks that [the campers were] somewhat incompetent at.”¹⁰⁴ Despite such dependencies, visitors to each of these spaces, the ACA encampments included, rarely remarked on the local people and economies that sustained them.

The relative invisibility of work and workers at the annual meetings of the ACA was, in part, a function of the mythology of the encampments: the canoeist was imagined as self-sufficient, and the real work of the meet was undertaken by the organizing committee and those preparing for and participating in the regatta. In practice, however, the canoeists delegated tasks they were unable or unwilling to perform to people they could easily overlook: men and women from different socioeconomic and racialized groups. Here again, the ACA was not unique. As Thomas Andrews argues, in the late 19th century tourists were set up to ignore the work around them in two ways. First, if the “small armies of maids, waiters, cooks, and porters ... did their jobs properly,” they would be scarcely noticed. Second, the travel industry “surrounded bourgeois travelers with the sort of labor they were least likely to consider work:

101. “The American Canoe Association,” *Forest and Stream*, 5 December 1896.

102. “The Executive Committee Meeting,” *Forest and Stream*, 12 November 1885; “The Executive Committee Meeting,” *Forest and Stream*, 18 November 1886.

103. Dona Brown, *Inventing New England: Regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995).

104. Little, “Scenic Tourism,” 290.



Figure 4. "Keys, Kanoe, Kaptor, and Kowboy," 1887.
Photo courtesy of NYSHA.

the household work of women and the menial labor of racialized others."¹⁰⁵ At the ACA encampments, women, working-class and rural whites, African Americans, French Canadians, and Indigenous peoples performed tasks that were either too demanding or too demeaning for the canoeists. In their efforts to make work and workers invisible, the canoeists also sought to maintain the fiction of the encampment as a space for white middle-class men, and to a certain extent, white middle-class women. This served to distance sport and leisure from the politics of everyday life, while also ignoring the physically and (likely, at times) emotionally demanding contributions made by workers. Ultimately, it further marginalized the men and women who devoted their time and energies to the encampment.

That I am able to write this article at all suggests that the organizers and members were not entirely successful in their efforts to elide workers and work from the historical record of the meetings. In a photograph from the 1887 meet on Lake Champlain that bears much resemblance to "Work and Fun in Camp," the members of the Mohican Canoe Club are gathered once again in a tableau to the left of a decked canoe in full sail (fig. 4).¹⁰⁶ While the eye is drawn to the scene being performed by the canoeists, a closer look reveals

105. Andrews, "Made by Toile," 848.

106. "Keys, Kanoe, Kaptor, and Kowboy," 1887, 1.2/26, NYSHA.

a Black man to the right of the sail of the canoe, his eyes trained directly on the camera held by George Warder. The photograph, thus operates as a scene of resistance to the broader, systemic pattern of historical erasure that one encounters in the ACA's archive.

Workers have not only been overlooked in accounts of the ACA encampments. They have also been marginal figures in scholarly writing on the history of sport. Whereas historians have capably shown how organized sport through membership systems and amateur clauses (re)produced inequitable social relations in the Victorian era, they have largely ignored the ways in which the sporting practices of the middle and upper classes, but particularly organized sport, were made possible by the work of "others." In this way, sport historians have been complicit in sport's marginalization of labour, and also in the (re)constitution of social divisions and hierarchies along lines of class, race, and gender. To counter such tendencies, we must tell the stories of the women and men whose labour has enabled middle-class forms of leisure, to make visible the deep dependencies that organized sport historically and in the present day has on workers, many of whom occupy marginal positions in society. The goal is not only to counter the "enormous condescension of posterity" but also to draw attention to the ways in which sport is constitutive of the politics of everyday life.¹⁰⁷

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107. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: V. Gollanz, 1963), 12.