Document generated on 04/25/2024 5:19 a.m.

Labour
Journal of Canadian Labour Studies
Le Travail
Revue d'Études Ouvrières Canadiennes

Jack Reid, Roadside Americans: The Rise and Fall of Hitchhiking in a Changing Nation (University of North Carolina Press 2020); Linda Mahood, Thumbing a Ride: Hitchhikers, Hostels, and Counterculture in Canada (University of British Columbia Press, 2018)

Christopher Powell

Volume 86, Fall 2020

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1074484ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/llt.2020.0048

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)
1911-4842 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this review

Powell, C. (2020). Review of [Jack Reid, Roadside Americans: The Rise and Fall of Hitchhiking in a Changing Nation (University of North Carolina Press 2020); Linda Mahood, Thumbing a Ride: Hitchhikers, Hostels, and Counterculture in Canada (University of British Columbia Press, 2018)]. *Labour / Le Travail*, *86*, 195–198. https://doi.org/10.1353/llt.2020.0048

All Rights Reserved © Canadian Committee on Labour History, 2020

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

https://www.erudit.org/en/

priority in this publication because even the image on page 138 does not correspond to the caption, both in content and time.

Ultimately, Jones overplays the role of the few Americans (Fred Mott, Milton Roemer, Leonard Rosenfeld), imported into Canada owing to political reasons, who helped to organize the Saskatchewan health care system. Without clearly accounting for contributions of dozens of other agents instrumental in this collective effort, one cannot claim that "Canadians have been schooled in a quasi-nationalist notion that they have had nothing to learn from the US on health care" (329). Exaggerations of this sort may not be acceptable to the reader. This point aside, *Radical Medicine* has a diverse thematic range: Drs. Frederick Banting and Norman Bethune's impact on the popularization of socialized medicine, London's borough health centres and the challenges of the National Health Service in the UK, private health insurance plans in the US and the Farm Security Administration. This book could be of interest to readers skeptical of shared values associated with the historical identity-building around Medicare in Canada, and Jones' history has a potential to prove those skeptics wrong.

Fedir Razumenko
University of Calgary

Jack Reid, *Roadside Americans: The Rise and Fall of Hitchhiking in a Changing Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2020)

Linda Mahood, *Thumbing a Ride: Hitchhikers, Hostels, and Counterculture in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press 2018)

Two recent books explore the history of hitchhiking in North America. Jack Reid's *Roadside Americans: The Rise and Fall of Hitchhiking in a Changing Nation* provides an American perspective, while Linda Mahood's *Thumbing a Ride: Hitchhikers, Hostels, and Counterculture in Canada* gives a Canadian one. Both explore the practice from its beginnings in the late 1920s to its demise in the late 1970s and 1980s.

In the absence of a historiography of hitchhiking, Reid borrows from Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, to argue that the disappearance of hitchhiking is symptomatic of the decline of trust. By the 1980s, says Reid, "(i)deas of social trust simply carried less weight than in previous decades." (189) Tim Cresswell's *The Tramp in America* and Todd DePastino's *Citizen Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America* also inform Reid's work, but whereas both authors concern themselves with working-class demographics, *Roadside Americans* is largely about a middle-class phenomenon.

Hitchhiking first appeared in the 1920s with the emergence of mass vehicle ownership. Americans viewed the practice largely as "the frivolous hobby of young elites." (16) During the Great Depression its legitimacy increased. A 1938 poll indicated that 43 per cent of Americans approved the practice. (21) It gained further popularity with America's entry into the war. Millions of uniformed US military personnel relied on it to get to and from base. (45) With gas and tire rationing, hitchhiking bordered on patriotic. A government poster of the time showed a lone driver with the outline of Hitler in his passenger seat. The caption in part read, "When you ride alone, you ride with Hitler." (48-49) Postwar prosperity led to a dramatic decline in hitchhiking. More Americans than ever before purchased their own cars. Family vehicle ownership rose from 50 per cent in 1948

to 77 per cent by 1960. Many considered thumbing a ride no longer necessary. (75-76) Fear contributed to hitchhiking's decline. In a period dominated by the Cold War and the threat of nuclear annihilation, motorists increasingly viewed hitchhikers as "a threat to personal safety." (93) Sources, however, do not bear out either a rise or decline in hitchhiking-related crime. The 1950s, in fact, was the safest decade ever, with the lowest rate of violent crime on record. (95-96)

From the late 1950s to the 1970s hitchhiking experienced a renaissance. American highways saw the appearance of "sport hitchhiking" – long-distance hitchhiking as a form of vacation. Its popularity grew. Sport hitchhikers were "predominantly well-educated and ambitious young people looking to escape the seemingly predictable and regimented climate of their suburban upbringing." (107) Joining them were others, inspired by the literature of the Beat generation, in particular Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, in search of authentic experience. (116-117) Hitchhiking peaked between 1968 and 1975. No longer well-dressed, well-groomed, young men, riders were commonly adorned with the accoutrements and style of the counterculture. One quarter of them were women. (135-159). But as the counterculture receded, so too did hitchhiking as a middle-class phenomenon. The fear of the 1950s returned, but not its prosperity. "(C)ommunity-oriented values of the sixties youth culture began to wither," argues Reid, "and were increasingly replaced by more conservative and individualistic sensibility." As a result, "by the 1980s most middle-class Americans turned away from hitchhiking, associating the practice with the emerging underclass of the Reagan era." (160)

There is much to like about *Roadside Americans*. Reid begins his narrative with a young Ronald Reagan hitchhiking outside of Dixon, Illinois, in search of work in 1932. A recent college graduate, he was a seasoned hitchhiker. (1-2) Reid's bookending of his work between Reagan the unemployed hitchhiker of the 1930s and Reagan the President of the 1980s provides the book creative parallelism. It was Reagan who presided over the economic restructuring of the United States that resulted in among other things the end of hitchhiking as a popular form of mobility. Reid's decadal chronology is easy to follow. Also, the book is succinct – less than 200 pages of text, not including notes and bibliography, both of which are exhaustive.

Reid's sources include a half dozen archival collections in Albuquerque, Berkeley and San Francisco, giving the book a decidedly western flavor. This is offset by a plethora of monographs and articles. What is somewhat curious is the absence of oral history, a question he never addresses. Still, *Roadside Americans* is pioneering and a welcome addition to postwar American history.

Linda Mahood's *Thumbing a Ride* follows the same chronology as Reid, but her focus is the counterculture of the late 1960s and early 1970s. As such, it is informed by an established historiography of Canada in the 1960s, including, but not limited to, Doug Owram's *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation*, Bryan Palmer's *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era*, and in particular Stuart Henderson's *Making the Scene: Yorkville and Hip Toronto in the 1960s* and Lawrence Aronson's *City of Love and Revolution: Vancouver in the Sixties*. Mahood places hitchhiking within the larger historical context of "coming of age" or "rite of passage" travel. (12-13) She argues that "'hitchin' a ride' and youth hosteling during liminal moments in early adulthood came together in the 1970s when the so-called 'transient youth

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/llt.2020.0048

movement' was formed in response to the intervention of social workers and government programs." (5)

Mahood covers the period 1928 to 1947 in one chapter. While the American and Canadian narratives are similar, it is interesting that significantly lower numbers of uniformed armed forces personnel hitchhiked in Canada during the war. While bordering on patriotic south of the border, many Canadians considered it degrading to the uniform. (52) As in the United States, hitchhiking in Canada plummeted during the late 1940s and early 1950s, but began to climb again at the end of the decade. What Reid calls "sport hitchhikers," Mahood refers to as "adventure hitchhikers." Like their American cousins, they appeared on Canadian highways in the late 1950s, their numbers climbing each year, especially after the completion of the Trans-Canada Highway in 1962. (66) The American and Canadian narratives diverge in the late 1960s with the state taking a more active role north of the border. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau encouraged the practice (97-98) and federal funding followed to increase the number of youth hostels throughout the country.

Youth hostels had existed in Canada since the 1930s with the founding of the Canadian Youth Hostels Association (CYHA). In exchange for a nominal charge, performance of simple chores, and adherence to some basic rules under the authority of a houseparent, young travelers could access dormitory accommodations. (137-140) In 1970 the Canadian Welfare Council initiated discussions that eventually led to the federal government creating additional hostels for summer travelers across the country independent from the CYHA. (102) These hostels were free of charge, run more informally, and affiliated through the Independent Hostel Association (IHA). Many resented what they called "Trudeau hostels," considering them "'crash pads,' 'hangouts,' and 'a place for drifters.'" (165) A number of these hostels were located in properties requisitioned from the Department of National Defense, such as the drill hall in Vancouver's Kitsilano neighbourhood. At the end of the summer, authorities informed the hostellers that the facility would be closing. In response, hostel guests, now considering the facility their home, barricaded themselves inside and refused to leave. Authorities agreed to continue accommodating the young people until 2 October on the condition they move to a facility at the Jericho Beach Garrison. (121) The occupiers dutifully moved, but when the time came to vacate the premises, authorities once again found themselves facing barricades. A two-week standoff ensued until authorities carried out the eviction by force and a riot resulted. (125-128) Mahood uses "The Battle of Jericho," to illustrate "how a travel and tourism problem became a pressing moral and social issue that turned young travelers into transients." (102) It is only surprising that it took until the fall of 1976 for the federal government to merge the two hosteling organizations under the model of the CYHA. (170)

There are two primary criticisms of *Thumbing a Ride*. The first is the layout. There is no bibliography, nor is there any list of archival collections, oral histories or periodicals consulted. The reader must carefully review Mahood's notes for such information. Although she makes liberal use of oral histories, as well as personal e-mails, most are anonymous, rendering their subjects inaccessible to future historians. Another concern is Mahood's sloppiness with the facts. She often takes source material at face value. For instance, she begins the book by quoting a letter to Vancouver Mayor Tom Campbell in the summer of 1970 from

"Faro, Northwest Territories." (4) Faro is in Yukon. Such errors are numerous.

Thumbing a Ride ends with a series of horror stories, seemingly one after another after another, of mostly young women hitchhikers being sexually assaulted and often murdered. Problematically, Mahood presents a discourse on the subject reflected in the media without addressing whether such incidents were actually increasing in number, or merely being sensationalized. The result was a massive propaganda assault on hitchhiking. She concludes in asserting that the popularity of hitchhiking in Canada ended in the late 1970s "due to pressure on provincial and federal police to enforce restrictions on hitchhiking on highways and due to new municipal bylaws that banned hitchhiking in towns and cities." (248) However, her conclusions seem somewhat unsupported given her focus on sexual violence rather than political lobbying and legislation. Based on Mahood's own argument, the demise of hitchhiking likely resulted from a campaign of terror conducted in the media. Possibly Reid is closer to the truth in that by the 1980s the element of social trust was simply in short supply.

Christopher Powell
Edmonton, AB

Ted McCoy, *Four Unruly Women: Stories of Incarceration and Resistance from Canada's Most Notorious Prison* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press 2019)

Ted McCoy's *Four Unruly Women* sheds light on some of the darkest moments of Kingston Penitentiary through the stories of four women incarcerated during the 19th and 20th centuries. Adopting a critical legal studies approach and a feminist framework, he invites us to look at the prison in a broader social context in order to understand how patriarchy shaped both Canadian law and penology in response to crime, gender, and marginality.

McCoy draws a gloomy picture of the everyday life at the penitentiary for the inmate population over the period from 1835 to 1935, using penitentiary records as his main source. The originality of his work stems from disciplinary reports produced by the administration on inmate infractions and the punishments inflicted to unruly prisoners, a source that contrasts with the dryness of usual penitentiary records and offers insight into human relationships inside. Bridget Donnelly, Charlotte Reveille, Kate Slattery, and Emily Boyle (pseudonym) are the four women McCoy chose to support his story. As the author warns us, these might be exceptional cases, but they illustrate what every woman incarcerated at Kingston could potentially face during their incarceration: corporal punishment, physical restraint, solitary confinement, a bread and water diet, and sexual violence.

McCoy's biographical approach to these four lives also informs us about the development of the Canadian penitentiary system in relation to the development of industrial capitalism, and the elitist anxiety towards the working-class. McCoy's book shows the extent to which patriarchy and paternalism were central to Canadian society and to the microcosm of the prison. McCoy's effort to draw the portrait of the central figure of the matron is another of his original contributions to the understanding of women's carceral environments. He shows unambiguously that far from embodying the maternal and caring ideal presented by reformers and penologists alike, she rarely protected women from prison abuses, including sexual abuses from male staff or other forms of torture. The matron was the women prisoners'

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/llt.2020.0048