

What Nudism Exposes: An Unconventional History of Postwar Canada by Mary-Ann Shantz

Catherine Carstairs

Volume 115, Number 2, Fall 2023

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1106176ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1106176ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (print)

2371-4654 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Carstairs, C. (2023). Review of [*What Nudism Exposes: An Unconventional History of Postwar Canada* by Mary-Ann Shantz]. *Ontario History*, 115(2), 369–371. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1106176ar>

the author justifies the exclusion of Mennonites from his analysis is by stating that, although adding Mennonites “could prove fruitful” his “preliminary research and secondary sources suggest that such an approach would not fundamentally change the main findings of this book” (6). While Bryce could be right that including Mennonites might not “fundamentally change” the main findings of the book, an engagement with Mennonite scholarship such as Marlene Epp’s *Mennonites in Ontario: An Introduction* suggests that the inclusion of Mennonites would challenge at least some of the main findings. The author’s final jus-

tification for the exclusion of Mennonites is the most convincing; the fact that there is already a substantial body of literature on Mennonites and a comparable body does not exist on German speaking Catholics and Lutherans (6).

The Boundaries of Ethnicity is an impressive contribution to multiple areas of historical research, furthering understandings of crucial concepts such as ethnicity, identity, education, religion, and the state.

Krenare Recaj

PhD Candidate, Department of History,
Carleton University

What Nudism Exposes *An Unconventional History of Postwar Canada*

by Mary-Ann Shantz

Vancouver: UBC Press, 2022. 254 pages. ISBN: 9780774867207

What Nudism Exposes reveals the history of nudism and naturism in Canada with a focus on the 1950s, '60s and early '70s. Mary-Ann Shantz argues that this unconventional practice was led by remarkably conventional people, who upheld heterosexual marriage, emphasized the importance of family, and posed little threat to racial, gender and sexual norms of the time period.

Led primarily by European, especially German, immigrants to Canada, the nudist movement opened private clubs, primarily in Ontario and British Columbia. Ontario became the home of the London Sun Club (1955), Glen Echo (1955) near Newmarket, the Ponderosa Nature Resort (1964) outside Hamilton, the Four Seasons Nature Park (1969) close to Guelph, and the Lakesun Club (1959) near King-

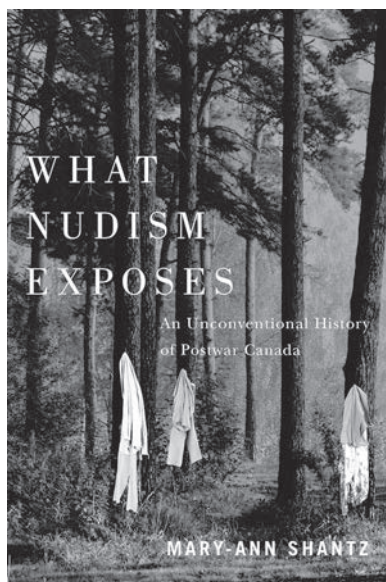
ston. In British Columbia, some of the more prominent clubs were the Van Tan Club (1959 - North Vancouver) and the Sunny Trails Club (Surrey). There were a few clubs in the Prairie provinces and one in New Brunswick. In Quebec, the movement stalled after a police raid on the Quetans Club, which had been established in 1951. Although the leader of the Quetans, Gaetan Couture, was acquitted, the police raid put an end to organized clubs in Quebec until 1969. Some of the clubs started as cooperatives, but eventually became private resorts, as people wanted more amenities and had more desire to spend their weekends at leisure instead of working on projects to improve the club.

The clubs were linked together by the Canadian Sunbathing Association (1947-1960), a publication, *Sunbathing for*

Health (originally titled *Sunbathing and Health*), which was published monthly in Toronto from 1947-1958, as well as a series of nude beauty contests. The movement, especially the beauty contests, received widespread publicity in the mainstream press.

The clubs were a family affair and there were strict rules against touching members of the opposite sex and making suggestive comments. Erections were banned—men were told that they could control them through self-discipline. In the early years, alcohol was prohibited out of fear that it would lead to bad behavior, although clubs began lifting this ban in the mid-1960s. Organizers were aware that women might feel uncomfortable in an overwhelmingly male atmosphere and the application process discriminated against the single men who were most eager to join the movement. Some clubs prohibited single men altogether, while others only allowed highly “eligible” young men to join. Gay men were banned. The clubs were keen to avoid any hint of scandal, so much so that they hid evidence of the misconduct of a former president of the Canadian Sunbathing Association, Gerald Eaton, who was charged with the murder and sexual assault of an eight-year-old girl in 1956 (56). Despite leaders’ claims that they welcomed a diverse range of peoples, the clubs seem to have attracted (and admitted) a homogeneous group.

This is an institutional history of the nudist movement and a greater diversity of sources might have complicated her story.



I would have liked more biographical information about the key players and the other movements they may have been associated with. Two of the key players, Ray and Mildred Connett, died in what the coroner suggested was a double suicide after Mildred’s struggle with Alzheimer’s at their resort in California, which they opened after leaving Canada in 1963.¹ This suggests that they were a couple that were willing to violate other social taboos as well.

Shantz makes little of the fact that Mildred published under her maiden name, an unusual choice for the 1950s. There is very little material about the German immigrants who were instrumental in establishing many of the clubs, although Shantz does make the interesting point that they characterized themselves as “pioneer settlers” in Canada.

Shantz claims that the leaders of the nudism movement in Canada disavowed the eugenic elements that had characterized German nudism in the interwar period. This is surprising and worthy of greater investigation, especially since positive eugenics was still very much alive in Canada in the 1950s and 60s. I was intrigued by her discussion of early pageants, which often featured naked families and emphasized physical health, which suggests linkages with earlier eugenic ideals and the interwar tradition of “fitter family” contests.

I also wanted more about the experiences of women and children at the clubs. While the book does include quotes from female co-founders of the clubs, there is rel-

actively little from female members. Shantz makes it clear that men were far more interested in joining than women—did women who joined to please their spouses come to truly enjoy the experience? Shantz speculates that women’s motivations might have been complicated, but her sources do not allow her to explore this in much depth. The clubs and *Sunbathing for Health* identified children as “natural nudists,” and welcomed and featured children, but did children embrace the clubs to the same degree as their parents, especially when they realized that their peers’ parents did not spend their weekends naked? It might have been hard to find people to interview who were not leaders in the movement, but the book reflects the beliefs of the founders about what they were doing; it would have been fascinating to learn more about what people with less investment in nudism thought of their experiences in these clubs.

With the exception of her chapters on nude beauty contests and Wreck Beach,

the book focuses primarily on the 1950s and 1960s. The latter chapters show how the counterculture started to change the culture of nudism, but it would have been interesting to trace these developments in more detail and to extend her examination of the culture of nudism into the 1970s and 1980s. What happened as this initial generation aged? Who took over and how did this change the clubs and the movement more broadly?

This book provides our first peek at nudism in Canada. It provides an excellent mapping for future historians of the subject.

Catherine Carstairs, Professor
University of Guelph

¹ Stephanie Simon, “Couple Who Championed Nudism Found Dead in Spa” *Los Angeles Times* 18 April 1997 <<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1997-04-18-mn-50099-story.html>> Checked 1 May 2023.

Our Long Struggle for Home The Ipperwash Story

by Aazhoodenaang Enjibaajig

Vancouver: On Point Press, 2022. 208 pages. \$24.95. ISBN 9780774890571.
(<https://www.ubcpress.ca/our-long-struggle-for-home>)

It has been more than sixteen years since the report of the Ipperwash Inquiry was released, which examined the police shooting death of Anthony “Dudley” George. *Our Long Struggle for Home: The Ipperwash Story* takes a much longer view of land reclamation, detailing the Stoney Point community’s fierce determination to reclaim their territory since it was appropriated in 1942 by the Canadian Armed Forces through the War Measures Act.

This is a beautifully-told community-based story and is reflected in the book’s authorship. Aazhoodenaang Enjibaajig translates to the “ones who come from Aazhoodena,” also referred to in the book as Stoney Point. Community members, including Dudley George’s relatives, worked in collaboration with settler writer Heather Menzies, who “took on the work of recording and transcribing their stories, editing them together, wordsmithing possible narrative links