

## Urban History Review Revue d'histoire urbaine

URBAN HISTORY REVIEW  
REVUE D'HISTOIRE URBAINE

Dubé, Philippe, *Charlevoix: Two Centuries at Murray Bay.* Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990. Pp. 271

Wetherell, Donald G., with Irene Kmets, *'Useful Pleasures': The Shaping of Leisure in Alberta 1896–1945.* Regina: Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism/ Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1990. Pp. 430

Sandy Campbell

---

Volume 19, Number 3, February 1991

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1017601ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1017601ar>

[See table of contents](#)

---

Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (print)

1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

---

Cite this review

Campbell, S. (1991). Review of [Dubé, Philippe, *Charlevoix: Two Centuries at Murray Bay.* Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990. Pp. 271 / Wetherell, Donald G., with Irene Kmets, *'Useful Pleasures': The Shaping of Leisure in Alberta 1896–1945.* Regina: Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism/ Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1990. Pp. 430]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 19(3), 237–239. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1017601ar>

---

All Rights Reserved © Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine, 1991

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/>

---

**é**rudit

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/>

treatment; and the aristocratic vice (drug addiction) and its medical treatment in the nineteenth century.

Warsh not only presents a picture of the Homewood Retreat, its methods of treatment, financial and staffing problems and changing population, but also portrays the changing urban climate and family situations that led to the admission of many of the patients. There is a tendency today to think of family and urban problems as being a product of the post-second world war period. In this study, however, we see the effect of nineteenth century urban development, the decline of the extended family and the increased social redundancy of widows and spinners on the mental health of many members of the middle class (especially the females). Whereas for the middle class female patients this frequently resulted in a diagnosis of neurasthenia, for the middle class male patients alcoholism and drug addiction were significant problems. During the period of study the presenting problems recorded for 424 females and 450 males illustrate the differences. The most frequent presenting problems for the females were bereavement (36), exhaustion from overwork (42), stress (26) and debility following illness (49). For the male patients, the most frequent presenting problems were alcoholism (159), addiction to drugs (35) and syphilis (32). Male patients with alcohol problems tended to dominate the early years of the Homewood Retreat, but by the turn of the century the "more normal" pattern of females being over-represented as patients was finally established at Homewood.

The most frequent psychiatric diagnosis over the years was neurasthenia with respectability concerns on the part of the family being a significant reason for

families having patients committed ("better that people should think you insane than think you a bad immoral woman"). Also, by the turn of the century, many dependent women were seen as socially redundant (particularly after the death of the family member they had cared for) and their subsequent stays in the retreat were lengthened if they were not seen as being useful in the family setting. Some of the females (particularly widows) were kept in the retreat by relations eager to control their finances.

During this period, the fundamental treatment feature was the rest cure (isolation from over-indulgent relatives, bed rest, limited mental diversion, over-feeding and massage), but as the years passed this approach was augmented by hydrotherapy (continuous warm water baths), electrotherapy (the application of direct and alternating currents to various parts of the body), sexual surgery for females (based on the philosophy that the reproductive organs were central to a woman's mental and emotional well-being), and chemotherapy (salvarsan) for syphilis. Hereditarianism (the theory that the major cause of mental problems, including substance abuse, was hereditary) was a major causal philosophy for much of the work at the retreat.

Warsh's work is primarily a scholarly thesis, one that is thoroughly researched and footnoted. It provides a detailed study of a slice of Canadian psychiatric practice and the conditions that contributed to mental problems in the middle class at the turn of this century. The notes and bibliography provide a significant source for those interested in further investigation of this topic.

David K. Bernhardt  
Department of Psychology  
Carleton University

Dubé, Philippe, *Charlevoix: Two Centuries at Murray Bay*. Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990. Pp. 271

Wetherell, Donald G., with Irene Kmets, *'Useful Pleasures': The Shaping of Leisure in Alberta 1896-1945*. Regina: Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism/Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1990. Pp. 430.

Leisure is serious business in Canada, as in all societies touched by the heavy hand of the Protestant ethic. Whether on the shores of the St. Lawrence at glorious Murray Bay or in wild rose county, a society's recreations tell us much about its values.

In 'Useful Pleasures': The Shaping of Leisure in Alberta 1896-1945, authors Donald G. Wetherell and Irene Kmets examine "social, economic and technological influences on leisure in Alberta," in the light of the political, economic and social evolution of the province. They succeed admirably. The book hypothesizes that the hegemony of the British/Ontario values of the province's anglophone elite groups (whose numbers fluctuated around 50% of the population between 1901 and 1945) infused the spectrum of leisure activities in Alberta. The work ethic was paramount in society in the period, and most leisure activities were implicitly conceived as enhancements or inducements to productivity, good citizenship and related virtues. Wetherell and Kmets examine leisure in its many forms, from the development of libraries, parks, playgrounds, rodeos, fellowship organisations and the performing arts in the province to the evolution of radio and film, as well as the history of bars, poolrooms and

cafes. (In a delightful chapter, the latter thrée “hangouts” are described as either sturdy bastions of resistance or official scapegoats in the valorisation of work.)

In the course of the study, the role and influence of leisure—defined as any activity “characterized by a feeling of (comparative) freedom” carried out during the time “free from work and other obligations”—on the various ethnic communities of the period is examined. It is clear that, while leisure organisations such as ethnic clubs and folk dancing groups may have helped preserve some old world traditions among such groups as Ukrainians and Germans, the trend of leisure and its concomitant social indoctrination was toward integration to the values of the dominant group.

These “British/Ontario values” valorised the need for private property, the market economy, liberal individualism and self-initiative. The emphasis on these values even transcended the rural-urban divisions that characterised Alberta society. As the authors observe pointedly: “It seems to have been assumed that to understand and observe English Canada was to love it and yearn for assimilation into it.” Some of the book’s many photographs capture the blatant incarnation of these values: “Miss Canada, Vegreville, 1927” and “Loyal Orange Lodge (parade), Wetaskiwin, 1937.” The text traces Sabbatarianism and temperance, good English Protestant tenets both, on the history of Alberta leisure: no dancin’ on Sunday and drinkin’ any time, any where, nosirree! In the face of such militant virtue, the reader feels a sneaking sympathy for the six lazy louts pictured loitering outside a Big Valley poolroom, 1927.

Wetherell and Kmets also address the effects of American values and immigrants on Alberta leisure. For example, the fascinating chapter on agricultural fairs and rodeos shows how the itinerant Wild West Shows from the United States influenced the development of the rodeo, and its apotheosis, the Calgary Stampede, as much as did nostalgia for the ranching era in Southern Alberta. Mass media, like the cinema and radio, and the spread of the automobile carried for the most part the stamp of American values. Of course, radio in Alberta was the vehicle for Social Credit and the voice of ‘Bible Bill’ Aberhart.

The authors tackle their subject with the “glad heart and vigorous mind” so dear to the hegemonous group in Alberta. Their study, originally commissioned for Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism, is detailed, convincing and lively—no mean feat. If only the book had the format it deserves: the pedestrian typeface and design do it a disservice. In content, one wishes that the book had been able to trace in depth, the leisure history of one immigrant group—the Ukrainians, for example—or make more comparisons with the history of leisure in Saskatchewan or Manitoba. As a literary historian, I regretted that the authors scanted as source material the popular fiction of Alberta writers like Nellie McClung and Ralph Connor, both hardy Ontario transplants.

To turn from ‘Useful Pleasures’ to the opulent pages of Philippe Dubé’s *Charlevoix: Two Centuries at Murray Bay* is to marvel at an Eastern elite and its pleasures in scenic Charlevoix County on Quebec’s North Shore. Dubé’s study of Charlevoix County, whose heart is the golden age of the summer visitors and their residences, c. 1870–1925, is an eloquent labour of

love originally published in French (*Deux cent ans de villégiature dans Charlevoix: L’Histoire du pays visite* (1986)). Tony Martin-Sperry’s deft translation has captured the lyricism and erudition of the original French, and the wonderful design and photographs of the volume (book design award juries, please note) ensure that Charlevoix will grace both academic library shelves and the blanket box tables of the summer homes of Murray Bay.

Dubé, a historian at Laval, writes in the spirit of his epigraph from Arthur Buies: “A little volume about La Malbaie . . . on rose-tinted silk paper, where the smell of seaweed lies mingled with the perfume of heliotrope.” In his foreword, childhood summer resident Timothy Porteous refers to Dubé’s blend of “nostalgia and discovery.” Indeed, Dubé gives us the evolution of present-day Charlevoix County, from a remote seigneurie of New France to the post-Conquest property of Jacobite Scots British officers Malcolm Fraser (Mount Murray) and John Nairne (Murray Bay), to the summer playground of an elite by the mid-19th century, thanks to its natural beauty and improved water and then rail transportation to Quebec City and Montreal. Dubé masters local history, cartography and architecture (with the aid of photographer Jacques Blouin), thanks in part to the resources of the region’s Musée régional Laure-Conan.

The shores of La Malbaie have long been the playground of leading Montreal and Quebec City families, and some members of the Ontario and Eastern seaboard well-to-do. From the 1870s, increasing numbers of the mercantile and financial elite of Montreal, like the Molsons (beer), the Buchanans (law and finance) and the Caverhills (hardware),

were joined by francophone financiers and politicians, like Sir Rodolphe Forget and politician Sir Lomer Gouin. To this heady mixture were added Ontario politician Edward Blake and his family and rich Americans of the ilk of U.S. President William Howard Taft. (The latter's birthday party on September 12 traditionally marked the end of the Murray Bay social season in its heyday.) In their activities on water and golf links, Dubé sees a "worth ethic relaxed."

Yet the visitors built like beavers, and the book celebrates "the shared tastes and values of the builders and occupants" of the homes and hotels of Charlevoix 1895–1925, its golden (and gilded) age. Dubé blends architectural, social and local history to trace the evolution of summer architecture in Charlevoix, tracing its origins in the English villa, the American colonial house and local habitant construction, among other sources. His material is rich: summer homes in the region included designs by American architects Stanford White, Charles McKim and William Adams Delano, and Canadian architects Louis Auguste Amos and Mackenzie Waters of the nationalist Diet Kitchen group of the Twenties. Dubé traces the work of Charles Warren, a native of Charlevoix who studied building in the United States and returned to Charlevoix in 1894 as a vernacular architect to build some of its most charming and harmonious summer homes until his death in 1929.

In fact, 1929 was a crucial point in the chronology of Charlevoix. It brought not only the Depression (always bad for resorts) and the death of its premier builder, but the opening of the second, vast, chateau-like Manoir Richelieu hotel, a reminder both of the grandiose structures that had begun to be erected by

the rich at rest there and a mass automobile tourism different from the long summers of the turn-of-the-century elite. Transportation, houses, gardens, personalities—Dubé neglects little of the Charlevoix summer in his ethno-historical study.

There is a whisper of unease in this blend of romance and scholarship. Dubé chose to concentrate on the tourist: "I took this stranger as my target and observed him as the principal actor in an activity, tourism, which had long been part of the life of Murray Bay. No longer was my gaze to be directed at the customary object of ethnography; the local, abandoning his passive role as the object of his attention, would be studying the outsider."

Yet the social attitudes of the summer visitors—within their own circles and without—are not examined with the fidelity devoted to their residences. In the history of a resort, more evolves than architecture. What were the social attitudes, for example, to francophones (both the local residents and rich visitors), to Jews, or to the servant class? The servants' quarters are squirrelled away in perpendicular wings in many of these houses—what was being said in the sitting room? Dubé touches on these topics in a positive light, evoking a kind of benign paternalism on the part of the visitor. Local people found work in the brief summers—as domestic servants, hotel staff, carpenters, guides . . . in what negative as well as positive ways did holidayers perceive worker?

Dubé gives us the sun of Charlevoix summers, but there must have been cloud as well. An American couple, the artists Patrick Morgan and his wife Maud Cabot, seem to have been the outsiders who did

the most to encourage the gifted local artisans. The sources Dubé quotes on the region are at times paternalistic and condescending, and the habitant humour about the fortunate few in their midst during the good weather seems touched with irony. Architect and summer resident Isaac Stokes, in 1895, after the first of many visits, observed: "The Minturns (American sojourners) knew most of the summer residents, many of them Canadians, and we went on numerous picnics and informal evening parties, where the habitants sang their native songs and danced their simple, rather awkward, dances."

There are passing references to the disquiet of local curés at the erection of Protestant churches and Sunday golf. Little is said of changing demographic and linguistic patterns of summer residents from the mid-nineteenth century down, although one notes with interest that Charlevoix was first nicknamed the Scotland of British North America, then the Newport of Canada and finally the Switzerland of Quebec. Blue Cottage is now "Porte-Bonheur." Eh bien, M. Dubé?

This fine book does leave one large stone unturned, but its text and superb bibliography (alas, no index!) point the way for others to enlarge on Philippe Dubé's achievement. And, as Dubé reminds us, Charlevoix summers have already given us such classics as George Wrong's *A Canadian Manor and Its Seigneurs* (1908) and W. H. Blake's *In a Fishing Country* (1922), and translation of Maria Chapdelaine.

Sandy Campbell  
Department of English  
University of Ottawa