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Introduction by Kara Murphy Schlichting, Queens College CUNY

This roundtable on **Andrew Watson's *Making Muskoka: Tourism, Rural Identity, and Sustainability, 1870-1920*** explores the concepts of "rural identity" and "sustainability" on the Canadian Shield. Watson, as this roundtable explains, takes a materialist approach to the concept of "rural identity." He focuses on the term's malleability over generations and among different groups, including settler-colonists who began to change Muskoka's landscape through agricultural production, First Nation hunters and trappers, lumber interests, and tourists and cottagers. In terms of "sustainability," Watson shows that, when compared to farming or commercial logging economies, tourism fostered relatively more sustainable relationships among humans and between humans and the non-human world. *Making Muskoka* challenges readers to approach rural sustainability as a continuum of "more" or "less" rather than as a binary of success or failure. The roundtable's four contributors productively build conversations around methodology and the historian's craft and the topics of tourism, political ecology, social-ecological systems.

Michael Dawson and **Camden Burd** both reflect on Watson's contributions to tourism history. Dawson applauds Watson's keen attention to local lives and Indigenous and settler interactions within a growing tourism economy. Reflecting on tourism's evolving impact on local communities, Dawson situates Muskoka's history of settler colonialism and tourism in a brief overview of how these issues also intersect on the Canadian Prairie and in British Columbia. Dawson asks Watson to further reflect on how cultural and political identity evolved as tourism reshaped Muskoka's economy and restructured relationships to the land. Burd builds on this idea, pointing out that nineteenth- and twentieth-century settlers embraced tourism as a way to sustain themselves in the face of economic and technological change. Burd also engages the second core theme of this roundtable, that of sustainability. He highlights and reflects on Watson's claim that a perfectly sustainable, utopian-like Muskoka never existed.

Jocelyn Thorpe and **Maureen G. Reed** both respond to the way Watson combines social and physical geographies in *Making Muskoka*. The region's lands and waters dictated the region's economic and developmental possibilities—and economic and developmental limits changed over time. Thorpe points out that Watson focuses mostly the perspectives of settlers and asks perceptive questions about Watson's archival materials and the challenges of sourcing Indigenous perspectives. Like Watson, Reed studies themes of rurality, identity, and sustainability, albeit in contemporary settings as a geographer. Reed explains the value of histories like *Making Muskoka* for scholars engaged in contemporary efforts to achieve more sustainable social-ecological systems. Reed, like Dawson, also commends Watson for his careful attention to individual lives and social groups in teasing out how class relationships were reproduced on the physical landscape.

In his author response, Watson further explicates his framing of “sustainability” and “rural identity.” Defining sustainability as a historic process, Watson explains why he identifies only a twenty-year era as more sustainable than the rest of the history he covers. Levels of sustainability change, he explains, as people make decisions to move towards or away from sustainable relationships with each other and the natural world—and not all communities have equal power in this decision-making. Watson also further reflects on how the roles of gender and political ideology impacted rural identity in Muskoka.

This roundtable takes a striking approach to the human beings behind the craft of history—both scholars and the subjects they study. In his acknowledgements, Watson reflects on being a settler historian writing about settler history and the emotional hurdles he faced while writing *Making Muskoka*. Thorpe applauds Watson’s candid assessment of his positionality as a settler scholar. Reflecting on her own similar position, she explains how, for settler historians, “the work of unsettling settler colonialism is not a distant enterprise, but is the work of unsettling home.” Thorpe provocatively questions how historians can (and must) approach academic research while knowing they are “implicated in the injustices of history that we are trying to expose and change.” Watson replies to Thorpe with a mediation on why scholars must recognize how “personal history...informs the questions” we all ask of the past. I can see using this conversation in the classroom to engage students in the big question of how to fit lived experiences into how we ask questions about, and tell, history. I suspect many readers will be, as I was, moved by the sensitivity and honesty that this roundtable fosters. December is a time of year when we are often asked to be thankful. I am thankful for this conversation and the (larger, ever-growing) community of H-Environment Roundtable participants.

Before turning to the first set of comments, I would like to remind readers that as an open-access forum, *H-Environment Roundtable Reviews* is available to scholars and non-scholars alike, around the world, free of charge. Please circulate.

Comments by Michael Dawson, St. Thomas University

In July 1913, Toronto poet Katherine Hale recounted her conversation with a supply-boat captain in Ontario's Muskoka region. Reflecting on his father's experiences a generation earlier, the captain drew a clear distinction between the region's settlement and tourism phases. "Twas a different country from what we know to-day," he suggested. "Then one or two Toronto people came up to camp... liked it, and came again to build cottages, and they brought others. And so Muskoka began" (149).

Visitors (and perhaps many settlers) in Muskoka today can be forgiven for equating the region's origins with the early-twentieth-century antimodern rush for family cottages and summer wilderness vacations. Indeed, so closely is the region identified as an alluring retreat for well-to-do outsiders that by 2005 a *New York Times* report had dubbed Muskoka "The Malibu of the North" in recognition of its growing number of celebrity second homes.¹ However, as Andrew Watson deftly illustrates in his engaging examination of the region's social, economic, and environmental history, equating Muskoka's origins with tourism obscures as much as it reveals. To fully understand tourism's impact on the region requires a detailed understanding of what came before, how tourism altered existing relationships to the land, and the impact of these alterations on local populations.

The key to Watson's approach is his focus on the local inhabitants. "The version of Muskoka that most people know," he explains, "privileges the tourist's experience" and "obscures the experiences of the people who made tourism possible" (3). Watson grounds this approach by meticulously documenting how the local population's experiences were shaped by the region's unforgiving environment and vice versa. The result is a nuanced study that tells us a great deal about identity and place, about Indigenous experiences and settler colonialism, about resource extraction, and (my primary focus here) about the development of the region's tourism economy.

One of Watson's key contributions rests on the insistence that tourism's impact on local communities was complex and changed over time. Indeed, Watson takes the traditional 1870-1920 ("antimodern") time period and divides it into two, related, eras. The first, ending in roughly 1900, saw local settlers embrace tourism as a sustainable and reasonably empowering method of subsistence. As outsiders sought tranquility and escape in Muskoka, small-scale local labour provided fuel (wood), transportation, food, local knowledge, and a wide variety of essential supplies. For a brief period, then, something akin to an equilibrium existed – one in which both insiders and outsiders benefitted reciprocally from Muskoka tourism and tourism's impact on the environment was muted. The second phase, however, witnessed a pronounced shift in the balance of power. As tourism became more fully enmeshed within consumer culture, the nature of tourism changed. External fossil fuels (coal

¹ Denny Lee, "Muskoka: The Malibu of the North," *New York Times*, 16 September 2005, F1, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/16/realestate/muskoka-the-malibu-of-the-north.html>.

and then gasoline) replaced local wood supplies. Mail order catalogues displaced local suppliers. And, in due course, visitors built second homes as alternatives to renting rooms from local hosts. Gradually, “and in subtle ways,” Watson explains, “the resiliency of local interdependencies was eroded,” and this would have profound impacts on human relationships with the local environment and on local identities (163).

The author’s attention to local identity (re)formation is admirable. Watson is armed with both an insider’s perspective and an enviable grasp of a wide range of scholarly literature. And so I am eager to know more about how the developments addressed in this study may have shaped the region’s political identity. (How) did the resulting shift away from interdependence and local control produce overt expressions of regional alienation? (How) has tourism-related resentment or the difficulties involved in pursuing a sustainable living in a relatively unforgiving environment produced identifiable expressions of regional identity in local, provincial, or federal elections? There are hints scattered throughout the book. Some locals in the nineteenth century publicly chastised the provincial government for limiting their ability to sell their pine trees (41). And more than one settler in Muskoka arrived with an exaggerated sense of its agricultural possibilities (24).

On the Canadian Prairies, frustration with a far-away government combined with a sense that state and railway publicity agents had sold settlers an unrealistic image of what could be accomplished on newly purchased land.² This set the stage for generations of western alienation. And the arrival of mail order catalogues out west added to a sense of grievance as local merchants railed against the evils of Eastern chain stores. In Muskoka, did similar frustrations combine with the destabilizing impact of tourism to feed a regional sense of grievance? Did local merchants embrace a populist critique of outside capital as they saw their grip on local commerce loosen? And, if so, how did a combination of regional alienation and populism in Muskoka compare to expressions of regional alienation or populism elsewhere?

My second key observation is similarly comparative. In British Columbia, tourism abetted colonialism in two ways. First, between the 1890s and 1920s, tourism promoters contributed directly to settler colonialism by luring travellers to the province in the hope that they would embrace the opportunity to establish farms, build factories, and establish businesses. Tourism promotion, in this context, shared a great deal with immigration campaigns and thus contributed directly to the displacement of Indigenous peoples and the establishment of European dominance over the environment. By the 1930s, though, tourism’s connection to immigration had dissipated. The economic dislocation of the Great Depression highlighted a need for an infusion of spending power and so tourism promoters rethought their approach (and rewrote their copy) to encourage temporary visits and to maximize consumer expenditure. In doing so, they reinforced the power of settler colonialism by

² Doug Owsram, *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

employing some selective amnesia. While early tourism campaigns in search of settlers were loath to mention Indigenous peoples, advertising initiatives in the middle of the 20th century deliberately showcased both Indigenous and British culture. Moreover, the campaigns offered a conflict-free and easily consumable depiction of the province's history that suggested that these cultures were easily reconciled. British Columbia's colonial realities were thus sanitized and effaced.³

Something similar seemed to be happening in Muskoka – even without the efforts of tourism promoters and advertising agencies. By the 1980s, Watson notes, “environmental concerns...became increasingly important to second-home property owners in Muskoka” (173). As a result, “certain types of work and land use, such as short-term cabin rentals or resort and time-share developments, which generated important occupational opportunities for permanent residents, were perceived by tourists as a threat to their property values and enjoyment of the environment.” “A century earlier,” Watson explains, when visitors “had relied on the land and labour of residents, they would have better understood how their interests aligned. Now, however, they had trouble imagining how the rural identity of residents might complement their own ethos and perceptions of Muskoka” (173).

In British Columbia, tourism promoters had actively promoted an alternative reality that limited visitors' (and hosts') ability to recognize the very real patterns of human activity that had transformed the province. In Muskoka, it seems, the impact of consumerism and transportation technology similarly restructured reality to make it very difficult for modern visitors to step outside their own immediate self-interests to preserve or recognize the potential for interdependent relationships with local Indigenous and settler communities. Tourism reshaped the local economy and restructured daily life in Muskoka. But, over time, it also reshaped and restructured history and memory in ways that made it difficult to think critically about how Muskoka “began” and how it changed over time. If the author deems this a suitable forum, I would be keen to learn more about how Muskoka's structural economic transformation has shaped contemporary relationships between local and visiting settler populations as well as contemporary perceptions of colonialism in the region.

Making Muskoka is a thoughtful, engaging, accessible, and innovative book that deserves a wide audience both domestically and abroad. It asks (and answers) big questions while remaining resolutely grounded in the realities of daily life. I look forward to reading the other reviewers' thoughts as well as the author's responses.

³ Michael Dawson, *Selling British Columbia: Tourism and Consumer Culture, 1890-1970* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004).

Comments by Maureen G. Reed, University of Saskatchewan

I am not a historian, but some days I wish I were. Attention to detail and immersion in the details of people's everyday lives are hallmarks of a historian's narrative. Andrew Watson's monograph, *Making Muskoka*, doesn't disappoint. Rather, it encouraged me to think about sustainability and rurality in fresh ways and demonstrated the value of historical thinking and evidence when addressing pressing global challenges. My own research has focused on similar themes (rurality, identity, and sustainability) in contemporary settings and my teaching has aimed to provoke students to engage with subject matter with a sense of sympathetic skepticism. While weaving a compelling historical narrative using evidence far distant in time and place, Watson does both. I found the result particularly appealing to my training as a geographer. *Making Muskoka* imbued a very rich and impactful sense of place and masterfully explained the way in which landscapes and people become intertwined in complex and ever-changing relationships.

Watson traces the rise of European settlement and tourism in Muskoka to illustrate how the physical, social, and cultural environments of Muskoka were imagined, created, altered, and re-imagined during a formative period in Canada's colonial past. He deftly weaves together identity, sustainability, and changing patterns of resource extraction and use through more than 50 years bracketing the turn of the 20th century to help us understand the constant pattern of change that characterizes "sustainability" in this region. Two concepts are particularly key to the narrative: rural identity as a material – if malleable – concept (see p. 4); and sustainability as a "temporary state of equilibrium" (p. 14), requiring continuous work and re-work (play and re-play) by a diverse set of local and extra-local actors.

In successive chapters, Watson turns a lens on different groups who brought to the region different imaginaries of place that simultaneously altered both the landscape and human relations, among them re-settlers who began to change the landscape through agricultural production (failed and successful); First Nations who used the region for fishing, hunting, trapping, and small-plot gardens; large and small-scale wood-resource harvesters whose efforts dramatically altered regional biodiversity; and, of course, tourists and cottagers who proliferated throughout the 20th century. His penultimate chapter focuses on how the rise of consumer culture and use of fossil fuels once more began a round of social-ecological change that reconfigured the social relations and rural identities that had been shaped by rounds of tourism in the region.

To me, Watson's explanation of the "making of Muskoka" offers an excellent example of an emergent social-ecological system. This system involves the interplay among diverse actors. Indigenous Peoples were forced to alter or abandon longstanding governance traditions and livelihood practices. Euro-Canadian settlers introduced new practices to an unfamiliar landscape by trial, error, and learning (with some successes), while Euro-Canadian colonial governance norms and regulations were applied to enabling settlement, restricting or dispossessing Indigenous Peoples from

lands and resources, and open up the landscape to Euro-Canadian resource use and (over)exploitation. Tourists and “cottagers” continuously required accommodations and provisions, but in different configurations due to increasing wealth, transportation options, modern amenities, and consumer expectations. Last, due to changing water and land uses and resource extraction, the biophysical landscape also acted on economic decisions made by social actors and on their ability to reproduce their rural identity. New forms of energy, resource extraction, and resource extractors were introduced and reshaped the biophysical landscape, which, in turn, acted as a catalyst for settlement, tourism, and enactment of rural livelihoods for some groups, while serving to inhibit the same for others.

Indeed, Watson describes a very human story in which there were distinct “winners” and “losers”, including those whose fortunes shifted as the social, economic, biophysical, political, and technological conditions changed. His stories of individuals and social groups breathes life into the narrative. I was engaged by the originality of source materials and the analysis he undertakes. For example, to compare the inputs and outputs of small-scale forestry to those of industrial forestry camps established in the 1870s, he calculates the calories needed to sustain an individual logger. The results are comparable to those of an Olympic athlete today! This calculation is then used to determine the requirements of food and energy to be transported to support the camps. This example gave me pause to consider my own food practices in a way that no other academic or popular appeal has. Separate calculations of the number of hemlock trees needed to maintain the tanning industry offers a similar eye-opening revelation. This creative analysis explains a great deal about why and how two key tree species were so quickly decimated in the region. It also reveals significant differences in the social-ecological changes brought about by large-scale and household-based timber felling, respectively.

As a geographer by training, I was intrigued by the social and physical geography of fortune. Watson shares a keen understanding of the physical and social geography. The maps he generates illustrated how class relations were reproduced on the landscape – literally. Wealthy tourists arrived and were supported by those settlers who resided and laboured in the lower lakes of the region. Those who had settled in the backwoods were not as prosperous – a pattern that emerged early and has since remained. First Nations were faced with increasing government regulation that precluded their involvement in agriculture and then excluded them from favoured fishing grounds. They made strategic decisions to become tour guides and sell handcrafts to eager consumers so as to maintain key cultural practices. Watson explains how shifting energy sources, transportation networks, and social expectations altered relationships between local people (both settlers and Indigenous) and tourists from one of mutual dependency to one where tourists no longer relied on local labour, expertise, or provisions. These changes altered the distribution of economic benefits and the ability of locals to maintain their rural identities and livelihoods.

Watson's thesis revolves around the point that these interactions offered ways and means for rural and Indigenous peoples to reproduce their rural identity, albeit in new configurations as circumstances changed. This is a point that deserves more discussion. I was left asking myself several questions. For example, was identity built on rural ideals of self-reliance? If so, how did this ideal change as resource extraction effected resource depletion? Did new ideals about identity replaced this notion of self-reliance or was this maintained in a new way? To what extent was rural identity in this time and place gendered? For example, was identity for men and women created from particular forms of masculinity and femininity, respectively? If identity for rural men and rural women differed, how did changing configurations in the economic and social geography of the region alter rural identities and gender relations? Were these elements of identity sustainable and did they contribute to how sustainability is understood? I realize that these questions are not the focus of the book, but they demonstrate how Watson's work provokes new questions and opportunities for informed discussion.

Returning to my first point, I am not a historian. I admit that my academic interest lies in what this history means for *contemporary* efforts to move us towards more sustainable social-ecological systems. (I know this appeal to "contemporary application" causes many historians to cringe). Watson gestures to the contemporary context in the final chapter which begins by explaining the findings of "Vital Signs" – a national program of Community Foundations of Canada to assess community health and vitality. His book explains the origin and stubborn persistence of the bifurcation of wealth and poverty in a high amenity region. Although his aim is not to judge whether tourism "has been 'good' or 'bad' for Muskoka" (p. 165), his observations in this chapter put me in mind of another high-amenity region with a similar trajectory – Clayoquot Sound, British Columbia. Clayoquot Sound is another region that has adopted the Vital Signs program. Although settlers came to Clayoquot Sound later than in Muskoka, it has a similar juxtaposition of opulence and poverty, colonial practices that dispossessed and marginalized Indigenous Peoples, reliance on forestry and fishing for both Indigenous and settlers, and a tourism sector that has contributed to changes in how local people pursue identity and sustainability. The history Watson shares offers a window to better understand how our past has shaped the landscapes, identities, and search for sustainability in other social-ecological systems today.

In short, the book left me feeling both reflective and eager to learn more. I intend to discuss the definition of sustainability in one of my graduate courses this year to see how it resonates with the next generation of sustainability scholars. History offers significant value for understanding the emergence, endurance, dynamism, and sustainability of human-environment and human-human relations. Presently, the field of sustainability science is dominated by natural scientists, with a solid showing of social scientists. Watson's contribution demonstrates that to generate informed debate and pathways towards a sustainable future, we need more historians.

Comments by Camden Burd, Eastern Illinois University

Andrew Watson's *Making Muskoka: Tourism, Rural Identity, and Sustainability, 1870-1920* provides a fresh approach to tourism studies. Instead of focusing on the burgeoning industry from the lens of the tourist, Watson centers the experiences of nineteenth- and twentieth-century settlers whose embrace of tourism was a result of the social, economic, and environmental realities they faced in Muskoka. What results is a compelling history examining how technological and environmental factors shaped the ways settler-colonists sought, developed, and maintained economic autonomy on the Canadian Shield.

Watson's main project in *Making Muskoka* is to examine settler-colonists' economic activities during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. By tracking land-use patterns over time, Watson recovers the transformation of Muskoka at granular detail. This approach, he writes, provides a "methodology for analyzing changes to the relationship between identity and environment found in Indigenous lifeways, Euro-Canadian resettlement, resource extraction, and tourism" (14). Watson's approach was influenced by Brian Donahue's *The Great Meadow: Farmers and the Land in Colonial Concord*.⁴ Donahue's book, among other things, connects generational land traditions to questions of environmental sustainability. In short, he wanted to know if colonial Concord husbandry degraded the land and, if so, when. Donahue's use of sustainability provides a lens to look at the relationship between environmental practice and social changes over the course of several generations. By tracking land-use over an extended period of time, Donahue finds that those practices were largely sustainable and dynamic until the early-nineteenth century when social and economic pressures pushed this system past a tipping point. In short, the market overcame the meadow.

But Watson's nineteenth-century settler-colonists never lived in much of an agricultural landscape. In fact, he is quick to note that "Muskoka's agricultural potential was uniformly poor" (20). Rather than tracking agricultural sustainability, Watson seeks to find the social and environmental balance that settlers developed while undertaking a slew of backwoods economic activities. This included very small-scale agriculture, seasonal employment in agroforestry industries, and other income-forming occupations that helped to sustain life in Muskoka. Muskoka residents understood, early-on, that their lives were tied to the economic happenings of other places. In an incredible display of historical GIS work, Watson demonstrates that one's economic well-being in Muskoka was directly correlated to proximity to transportation networks and economies of Southern Ontario and northeastern North America. As such, land claims and settlements in southern Muskoka and along waterways—later railways—proved to be the sites where settlers could carve out some form of economic security.

⁴ Brian Donahue, *The Great Meadow: Farmers and the Land in Colonial Concord* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

The early hardship also explains why settler-colonists adopted tourism. The industry served as an essential piece of the Muskoka economy for those homesteaders who could adjust “the poor agricultural potential of the Shield by turning the region’s environmental limitations to their advantage to construct a rural identity based on tourism” (78). By the close of the nineteenth century, the environments that had proven so difficult to sustain life for a generation of homesteaders had become a destination for wealthy urban residents to reside during the warmer months of the year. The adjustment took different forms. Some residents sold crops from their gardens to tourists and hoteliers. New cottage goers relied on local labor to build, stock, and maintain their idyllic getaways on the Shield. This new economy provided some semblance of stability for those who tried to make Muskoka home in the final decades of the nineteenth century. The burgeoning tourism industry provided a space for residents to acquire economic stability after two decades of struggle and agricultural disappointment.

The adoption of tourism-based economic activity also allowed settlers to maintain their connection to a rural identity—one defined “in terms of the private property, agrarian ideal” (12). In doing so, Watson seeks to understand and measure how identities shifted as a result of sustainable economic relationships. Though many associate this term to correlate to particular relations between humans and the natural world, Watson expands the definition of sustainability to explore concepts of identity embedded in place. “I use the concept of sustainability to characterize and evaluate how rural identity changed in Muskoka,” he writes, “because it enables me to consider the constantly evolving circumstances of economy, society, and environment, rather than the static conditions of their interaction” (12). At times the terminology is jarring. The concept of identity is already a murky one that must take into account an array of ever-changing social, economic, and environmental factors. Sitting with Watson’s definition, I found myself asking additional questions. How long does it take for a rural identity to form? Did settler-colonists understand themselves as distinctly rural upon entering (from other places) Muskoka? Does identity pass down, unchanged, through generations? Did different generations see themselves as less rural as technological and social changes altered the way of life for settlers? These questions are more cultural than social and not within the scope of *Making Muskoka*. Identity to Watson means one’s ability to find economic autonomy within this rural setting. My hang-up is on vocabulary, not concept. Because regardless of the terminology used, Watson correctly and expertly tracks how degrees of economic and technological change shaped the ways that local populations found and sustained themselves in Muskoka.

Watson’s investigation of the Anishinaabeg adoption of tourism-based economic activity further reveals how the author tracks change over time. Displaced by British and Canadian authorities as well as settler-colonists, First Nations throughout Canada saw their seasonal cycles of movement disrupted. Though this was also the case with the Anishinaabeg, Watson notes that the uniquely poor soil and agricultural opportunity of Muskoka offered a unique space to hold on to traditional hunting practices. Serving as guides for tourists provided opportunities for the Anishinaabeg

to maintain connections to hunting and fishing practices—relationships that might have otherwise been further disrupted with more robust agricultural development. “Muskoka had provided a variety of strategies for alleviating some of the most intense colonizing pressures,” Watson writes. “Its unsuitability for agriculture meant Indigenous people could return to Muskoka on a seasonal basis to reproduce their identity and access resources in much the same way generation after generation” (75-76). Watson does not seek to minimize the horror and devastation of empire and settler-colonialism but he is interested to see how those dynamics played out in Muskoka. What he finds is that early tourism provided a space for Anishinaabeg to preserve particular traditions and knowledge.

Then things changed. The tourism-based economy that had provided opportunities for settlers to maintain particular ways of life gave way during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Fossil fuels including coal oil and kerosene remade the ways tourists interacted with settlers. Steamships traveled further with the new fuel which cut-out local residents’ and their own fueling stations across the region. The advent of motor boats provided individual autonomy for tourists, wresting guide services from locals. New consumer goods and refrigeration technologies meant hotels and cabins could be stocked with perishables sourced from outside the Shield, often eliminating the settlers’ remnant agricultural opportunities. “Relationships between settlers and tourists that had been so important less than a generation earlier weakened and sometimes dissolved,” Watson writes. “Tourists now had new choices, and the local economy was subject to enormous pressures and competition from larger networks of exchange” (163). The tenuous but established balance that settlers had developed in the early tourism economy had gotten away from them. The tourists made Muskoka theirs.

Watson is not in search of a sustainable utopia. There never was one. Muskoka of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries was a world of social hierarchies where power gradually flowed upward, over time. But for a brief moment, Watson finds some semblance of social and ecological balance between rural residents, indigenous hunters, wealthy tourists, and the landscape where they all derived meaning. Only through a granular examination of this place over time can we see how social, economic, and environmental pressures shaped those dynamics—and that is significant. “This history matters because it helps to articulate what a more sustainable rural identity might look like in a place that is unsuited to agriculture but where environmental limitations can be turned to the advantage of residents” (174). By recovering this history Watson prompts readers to imagine a Muskoka lost but also a Muskoka that still might be: one where residents live empowered lives, where power and capital flow back to workers, and where Muskoka residents can preserve the landscapes that they call home.

Comments by Jocelyn Thorpe, University of Manitoba

In *Making Muskoka: Tourism, Rural Identity, and Sustainability, 1870–1920*, Andrew Watson presents a detailed history of how Indigenous peoples, settlers and tourists made their lives in a rocky, lake-filled region around the turn of the last century. Like Watson, I am a settler scholar working in a history department in a Canadian university. My family, like his, owns a cottage in the region discussed in the book, although my family's place is further south than his, on Lake Simcoe. Watson says in his acknowledgements about his family's cottage, "The people who had it built, and each generation of settler families who spent their summers there since, including my own, have dispossessed the Anishinaabeg people who called (and continue to call) this part of the world home" (xxiv).

I begin my response to Watson's book with settler colonialism both because this is where Watson begins and because I want to recognize that, for settler historians like Watson and me, the work of unsettling settler colonialism is not a distant enterprise, but is the work of unsettling home. Watson says that his book cannot undo the injustice of colonial dispossession, but that "it can acknowledge that my own past, and my ongoing relationship with a place that means everything to me, is part of a larger history of colonialism, dispossession, and violence that shaped, and continues to shape, the lives of Indigenous peoples in Canada" (xxiv).

Watson leaves the discussion about the relationship between his family's cottage and colonialism there, turning to thank yous, acknowledgements of funding, and a rare and appreciated paragraph on the mental-health costs of his academic work on him and those closest to him. I can't help but think that the seemingly unrelated paragraphs on colonialism and mental health are in fact connected to one another and to the academic work that follows. In both, Watson reveals a certain vulnerability, a recognition that the work is not separate from the researcher, and that the researcher does not have all the answers. As a result of Watson's opening, I found myself considering questions that stray far from a history of Muskoka, but that are broadly relevant to all of us doing research today: How do we do our academic work knowing that we are implicated in the injustices of history that we are trying to expose and change? How do we find new ways of living in relation to what we learn in and through our work? How do we stay balanced in an unbalanced world, full of exploitation, uncertainty and environmental harm? How do we remember what is truly important when we have too many things on our to-do lists?

Making Muskoka does not provide clear answers to big questions about how we might collectively live "sustainably," or indeed what that term means in the abstract, but it does show how people lived with and in a specific more-than-human world in a particular time. In so doing, it offers examples of living more and less sustainably, and allows readers a chance to consider how we all might live now. It also gives environmental historians the opportunity to think about how we can provide

accounts of the past that render all people equally human and show the significance of the rest of the world at the same time.

What I most appreciate about the book is Watson's attention to detail, which allows readers to gain a sense of what life was like for people about whom he writes. When, for example, after the signing of the 1850 Robinson-Huron Treaty, representatives of the British Crown attempted to force Anishinaabeg communities onto reserves, the communities selected reserves beside fisheries that had sustained them for generations. Yet? the 1857 Fisheries Act "introduced a bureaucracy that transferred fisheries rights from Indigenous to non-Indigenous people" (64). By paying close attention to how Anishinaabeg communities survived and thrived through their intimate knowledge of and relationships with the more-than-human world, Watson is able to show the devastating effects on Indigenous communities of legislation that disrupted such relationships.

In his chapter on wood-resource harvesting, Watson's attention to detail makes clear the environmental damage of logging and tanning in Muskoka, which led to "the removal of almost every mature tree of two key species in Muskoka" (106). The photos that accompany his writing underline the scope of the extraction, and the degree to which the cutting and processing of pine and hemlock transformed the region's land and waters. Watson describes in detail, for example, the processes involved in tanning leather using hemlock bark, which included the dumping of "enormous amounts of waste" into the Muskoka River, "releasing a toxic soup of animal fats, biodegradable organic matter, heavy metals, and poisonous chemicals that flowed downstream" (126). By the early twentieth century, industries dependent on pine and hemlock had left the region or begun to acquire materials from elsewhere, with the Anglo-Canadian Leather Company importing hides and tannins and using Muskoka solely "as a sink for its waste" (131). For those of us concerned about the more-than-human world, it is upsetting if not surprising to read about both the amount of environmental harm described and the lack of concern on the part of settlers and business owners about the effects of industry on the lands and rivers. Watson makes it clear that the history of colonialism in Muskoka is a history of resource extraction and pollution.

Making Muskoka also shows the extent to which the land and waters themselves dictated the possibilities for the region. Watson describes how Indigenous peoples travelled in and out of Muskoka, living their lives according to cyclical patterns that made ecological as well as social sense, until oppressive laws and their enforcement interrupted Anishinaabeg lifeways. He also explains how settlers tried to convert forests to farms, and many gave up when thin soils made agriculture challenging. Certainly one of the jobs of environmental historians is to show how much the more-than-human world shapes human activity, and Watson does an excellent job in this regard, making it impossible to think about human history of the region in human-only terms.

Chapter 5, on fossil fuels, consumer culture and the tourism economy, demonstrates how quickly socio-environmental change can happen. While the changes described in this chapter are mostly negative for the settlers who had learned to survive in Muskoka—the introduction of fossil fuels and shopping catalogues made tourists less dependent on settlers and therefore made settlers’ lives more precarious—the fact of the changes and their speed serve as reminders of how much of life and history are about change. Whether the changes appear positive or negative depends on the perspective of the teller. Watson’s account offers mostly the perspectives of settlers, a purposeful strategy since, as he states, histories of Muskoka usually focus on tourists’ perspectives.

Watson does attempt to bring Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous perspectives into his account, an endeavour that is constrained in part, I suspect, by the sources available to him in doing his work. Chapter 2 focuses on relationships among Indigenous identity, settler colonialism and tourism. In it, Watson shows that tourism as well as resource extraction contributed to the colonization of Indigenous peoples and territories. For the most part, however, Indigenous perspectives on changes in their lives do not come across as clearly as settler perspectives. Watson includes as an appendix a note on sources, and I am curious to hear why the author decided to include this part in the text. From the note on sources as well as from the endnotes, I noticed that many sources he drew from for settler accounts were directly from settler narratives, whereas most sources he drew from for Indigenous accounts were from Department of Indian Affairs records and ethnographic studies conducted by non-Indigenous people. Certainly these choices reflect what is available in the historical record, which begs the larger question for historians about how we can do our work in a fair way when the record itself is shaped by the histories, including the history of settler colonialism, that produced it. I wonder whether one strategy might include explicitly stating in our writing the limits of our sources and the resulting constraints on the stories we can tell.

Two main themes Watson explores in his text are sustainability and identity. Identity, he says, “is a malleable concept” that provides a way to investigate “the emergent properties of a way of life” (4). Sustainability, Watson continues, “provides a helpful framework because it allows for a comparison of economic, social, and environmental dimensions of rural identity across space and over time” (4). I invite the author to say more about these concepts and how they helped him in writing his book. I considered while reading the malleability of the concept of sustainability as well as of identity. For example, if the sustainability of one community depended on the dispossession of another, how is it possible to measure its overall sustainability? With identity, I found myself wondering about the term’s relationship with survival. Does maintaining an identity mean surviving as a people? If so, what does “identity” as a category open up that “survival” does not?

I’m also curious to hear the author’s thinking behind his choice to place chapter 1, “Rural Identity and Resettlement of the Canadian Shield, 1860–80,” before chapter 2, “Indigenous Identity, Settler Colonialism, and Tourism, 1850–1920,” when chapter 2

starts earlier in time. This choice has the effect of centring, by placing first, settler rather than Indigenous stories. After chapter 2, Indigenous peoples disappear from the account until the book's conclusion. I thought that this disappearance might connect with my query about sources. It is challenging to put everyone who was there into the frame, and to treat everyone as equally human when the record does not reflect a similar goal. Not everything can fit inside a book, and so all authors must make choices, choices which in turn are shaped by available materials. I appreciate how much Watson stretched to find materials to base his work upon, as well as how he raises questions about sources and the stakes of doing research in his appendix and acknowledgements.

I'm glad that I had a chance to read *Making Muskoka*. It has made me consider in particular the behind-the-scenes work and decision-making that goes into historical research and writing, and whether it makes sense to bring this work to the surface of the writing. The move of situating oneself inside the work is argued by feminist scholars such as Donna Haraway to be an important challenge to the "god trick of seeing everything from nowhere."⁵ I wonder if it might also be a way of taking off some of the pressure for perfection. As researchers and writers, we know that expertise is elusive and writing is never perfect. We write what we know in the best way we can, understanding that what we think and write will change over time as we learn more, in part through the process of research. Maybe being up front about our challenges and learning will make it easier for writers and readers alike to understand that our research, like our lives, is always work in progress.

⁵ Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 581.

Response by Andrew Watson, University of Saskatchewan

As I was making final preparations for my PhD dissertation defence in 2014, a mentor offered reassurance by reminding me that there are very few moments in your career when a group of peers whom you greatly respect will discuss your work with you. It helped and I ended up enjoying my defence. I felt fortunate that my committee had engaged with my work so closely and thoughtfully. And so, it is a great honour to have an opportunity to talk about the book that came out of that dissertation with a group of scholars whose work I admire. I am very grateful to Kara Schlichting for organizing this roundtable, and to Michael Dawson, Maureen Reed, Camden Burd, and Jocelyn Thorpe for such generous, insightful, and constructive reviews of *Making Muskoka*. I can hear my mentor's voice in my head: "Enjoy this! It might never happen again."

Dawson, Reed, Burd, and Thorpe raise many valuable points and questions in each of their reviews. I would like to respond to all of them, but for the sake of space, I will confine my comments here to those that relate to the concepts of "identity" and "sustainability," since all four reviewers engage with these central ideas from the book. But before that, I will share a few thoughts about the relationship between the work and the researcher, which Jocelyn Thorpe considers with so much care and openness.

If readers linger over any of the words in this roundtable, I hope they are the final two sentences from Thorpe's review: "We write what we know in the best way we can, understanding that what we think and write will change over time as we learn more, in part through the process of research. Maybe being up front about our challenges and learning will make it easier for writers and readers alike to understand that our research, like our lives, is always work in progress." I cannot recall a more profound reflection on the historian's craft. I can say from my own experience that it is much easier to read or hear these thoughts after having finished (and published) a project than it was before or during. In the acknowledgements to the book, I reflect on the work of being a settler historian writing about settler history and about being a researcher who struggled to see the value in himself much less the value in his work. When Thorpe read the acknowledgements she could not "help but think that the seemingly unrelated paragraphs on colonialism and mental health are in fact connected to one another and to the academic work that follows." I think this is true, although I had not considered that connection at the time.

I am heartened that what I included in the acknowledgements resonated enough to include them in this forum. Thorpe writes: "Watson reveals a certain vulnerability, a recognition that the work is not separate from the researcher, and that the researcher does not have all the answers." I agree, although "work" can have two meanings here. In the sense that I think Thorpe intends, the work is the process a researcher goes through to create their scholarship. My own personal history as a settler informs the questions I ask, my approach to answering those questions, and what is missing from

my interpretation as a result. But the work could also refer to the scholarship itself. And in this sense, I think it is important to separate the work from the researcher. Researchers need to be accountable for their scholarship, and be prepared to justify their findings and how they arrived at them. If the researcher can come to accept that they are not their scholarship, but that they are forever connected to what they create, then the *process* of making their scholarship better, not the scholarship itself, has the potential to help them grow as a person, as well as a researcher.

It comes as no surprise that each of these reviews consider my use of the concepts “identity” and “sustainability,” and the edges of their usefulness, in *Making Muskoka*. I spent a lot of time working through these concepts, how I would employ them, and why they were necessary at all. Some colleagues, peer reviewers, and mentors saw value in them, others suggested I dispense with one or both of them. For example, one mentor helped me make the book better, for which I will always be grateful. But that mentor also suggested that I “sever [my] attachments to identity and sustainability,” because they were problematic concepts that left my work open to criticism. At first, this advice discouraged me. I felt pressure to change my book into something else (a “radical redo” as my mentor put it). But my mentor also acknowledged that I might, and probably should, disagree with their advice. For historians, publishing our scholarship is not simply an exercise in getting our work out there and safely telling a new story with as little risk as possible. Rather, publishing research should aim to introduce some new ideas and provoke discussion and debate. I do not think everyone needs to be convinced by my use of “rural identity” and “sustainability” for them to have value. These are ideas that underpin my interpretations. I think the interpretations are sound, and I see value in the ideas.

Still, my use of the concept of “rural identity” is likely to frustrate some readers, because I draw conclusions less from discourse analysis (the established method of research on identity) and more from a materialist approach that emphasizes “a creative process that included the influence of the environment and interactions with that environment through work” (9). This approach has left lots of unanswered questions.

Maureen Reed wonders how rural identity in Muskoka was gendered. I examine some aspects of gendered identity in Muskoka, such as the consequences for wives and mothers when men left for months at a time to work in the backwoods environments and all-male social settings of seasonal logging camps. But there is much that is missing, including consideration of the highly gendered division of labour within the tourism industry. Separate spheres thinking meant men tended to take responsibility for work outside the home, while women were expected to work within it. During the years when settlers turned their homes into hotels and boarding houses, women did the majority of the work of operating the hotel. This gave them some significant control over tourism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, as hotels became more commercial and later declined after WWII, women’s control declined as well.

Camden Burd asks about the timing and process of rural identity formation and change. In the book, I argue that “Rural identity is a malleable concept,” which means that it was constantly forming and reforming over time (4). Many settlers came from other rural places, and so thought of themselves already as rural people, but not in universal ways. Those who lived in the backwoods formed a different sense of their rural identity than those who lived closer to the lakes where tourism developed. Some aspects of rural identity changed from one generation to the next. The challenge is finding the balance between explaining how and why some aspects changed while others stayed the same.

For Michael Dawson, the missing component of rural identity is political. I have the least to say about this, but I share his interest in knowing more about how tourism shaped the region’s political identity between 1870 and 1920. After the 1972 Municipal Elections Act, cottagers received the right to vote in local elections.⁶ This dramatically changed the region’s political economy. I argue in the book that permanent residents began to lose control over the local economy as consumer culture and fossil fuels gave seasonal residents access to goods and services from outside the region that they had previously been obliged to seek from within Muskoka. After 1972, permanent residents began to lose control over municipal politics as well.

Jocelyn Thorpe considers whether I could have used the term “survival” in place of identity. Survival was certainly an issue throughout this period. But the category of “survival” only has meaning if it is clear what people wanted to survive. So, survival of what? Certainly, existential survival of life and death were at stake for Indigenous people and many settlers. Beyond that basic and immediate measure of survival, however, people in Muskoka worked so that their *identity* could survive. In the book, I argue that what can help historians understand whether life became more or less sustainable over time is to assess the extent to which people could construct and maintain their identity. In this sense, the concept of survival is just as malleable as identity.

Thorpe also suggests that sustainability is rather malleable. Indeed, this is something that each review touches on in some way. In the interests of space, however, I will focus on the comments and questions raised by Burd and Thorpe.

Burd notes that my approach was influenced by Brian Donahue’s work. Quite right. In 2007, during my first term as a PhD student at York University, I was fortunate to take a course team-taught by my supervisor, Colin Coates, and Susan Gray at Arizona State University. In that course, we read Donahue’s book *Reclaiming the Commons*.⁷ Inspired by Donahue’s use of New England rural history to contextualize local efforts

⁶ Province of Ontario, “An Act Respecting Municipal Elections,” in *Statutes of the Province of Ontario* (Toronto: The Queen’s Printer and Publisher, 1971): 514.

⁷ Brian Donahue, *Reclaiming the Commons: Community Farms and Forests in a New England Town* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

to make his community more sustainable, I remarked in class that I wanted my dissertation to feature examples from the past of things getting better rather than just worse. When I began my research on Muskoka, I found it hard to imagine where I would be able to find much evidence that tourism had not simply made life in Muskoka less sustainable over time. But Donahue's work prompted me to focus on the permanent residents in Muskoka, because if there was any hope of finding lessons for a more sustainable future in Muskoka's history, it would be gleaned from their efforts to live on the Canadian Shield, with or without tourism.

"[F]or a brief moment," Burd writes in his review, "Watson finds some semblance of social and ecological balance between rural residents, indigenous hunters, wealthy tourists, and the landscape where they all derived meaning." Here Burd nicely captures the most important takeaway of the book, *and* the one that makes the concept of sustainability tricky. How can the relationships that I argue were the most sustainable have only lasted twenty years when the relationships that I argue are least sustainable appear to have endured for over a century since? First, it bears repeating that sustainability is not a condition, it is a historic process. It is also necessarily comparative, because "nothing is completely sustainable, only more or less sustainable" (12). What has unfolded since 1920 in Muskoka has been (increasingly) less sustainable, especially for the permanent residents, than what occurred in the forty years prior to that. Historically, people have made all sorts of decisions to move away from more sustainable relationships with one another and the non-human world. The length of time that a relationship lasts should not be used as a measure of sustainability, because the people who made decisions to change those relationships did not have the benefit of knowing the future. Second, for the rural people living in Muskoka, changes since about 1920 eroded their control over the local economy by opening components of Muskoka's socioecological system to outside flows of material and energy. That the forces of (global) capitalism have continued to dominate Muskoka does not mean that what came before was less sustainable simply because its duration lasted for a shorter period. Some local residents have managed to benefit from these changes, but most have not.

As Thorpe points out, *Making Muskoka* "offers examples of living more and less sustainably, and allows readers a chance to consider how we all might live now. It also gives environmental historians the opportunity to think about how we can provide accounts of the past that render all people equally human and show the significance of the rest of the world at the same time." But she also asks a question that reveals another aspect of how tricky sustainability can be as a historical tool: "if the sustainability of one community depended on the dispossession of another, how is it possible to measure its overall sustainability?" This question is an excellent example of why I argue that nothing is completely sustainable, only more or less sustainable. I am reminded of Hugh Brody's work in *The Other Side of Eden*, in which the author argues that agricultural societies are structured to expand and therefore

colonize and dispossess.⁸ Brian Donahue arrives at similar conclusions after a few generations of farming in colonial Concord, Massachusetts.⁹ The trickiest part of studying sustainability is limiting analysis to only what the researcher considers within the system boundaries. Each system is nested within larger systems, so conclusions about what happens within a defined system begs questions about what happens if the boundaries are expanded. One of the things I recognized early on in my research for this book was that a settler agricultural life in Muskoka was much less sustainable than the Anishinaabe way of life in the same place. By replacing a more sustainable way of life with one that was less sustainable, settler colonialism had the effect of making life in Muskoka less sustainable overall.

I set out to achieve three goals with *Making Muskoka*. First, explain the distinctive ways that tourism shaped rural (or Indigenous) identity in Muskoka during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Second, develop a comparative typology of sustainability useful for studying change over time. Third, demonstrate that tourism presented more sustainable arrangements than farming or commercial logging for many rural people in a place unsuited to sedentary life. I am so pleased that Dawson, Reed, Burd, and Thorpe have each engaged with these goals and offered ways of building on, challenging, and reconsidering the ideas that underpin the book. I am happy I stuck with identity and sustainability, and I have appreciated the opportunity to discuss it with some wonderful colleagues.

⁸ Hugh Brody, *The Other Side of Eden: Hunters, Farmers and the Shaping of the World* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2000).

⁹ Donahue, *The Great Meadow*.

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