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# Waters of Labor, Waters of Leisure: An Environmental History of Lake Memphremagog

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**WATERS OF LABOR, WATERS OF LEISURE:  
AN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF LAKE MEMPHREMAGOG**

By

**Katherine A.M. Tucker**

A Thesis Submitted to the Honors Council

For Honors in History

April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018

Approved by:



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Advisor: Professor Claire Campbell



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Department Chair: Professor B. Ann Tlusty

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## Abstract

This thesis seeks to examine the transition from traditional resource extractive industry to seasonal tourism industry around Lake Memphremagog, a mid-sized freshwater lake that is situated across the USA/ Canada border in northern Vermont and southern Quebec. Reading sources primarily from the decades 1860-1890, this research examines changing conceptualizations of nature that link to specific land use trends. Northern Vermont was left with a decimated landscape following the decline of the logging and agricultural industries by the mid-nineteenth century. Meanwhile, nature centered tourism began to emerge in the same area. The new tourism economy catered to the wealthy urban elite, and who were seemingly blind to the ecological turnover that had previously occurred, and accepted the landscape as ‘wilderness.’ This is largely due to the fact that in visiting Memphremagog, privileged Gilded Age tourists were searching for a prescribed, generic nature experience. This generality explains why a number of resort areas on the East Coast were developed during the same era, parallel to Memphremagog. The literature and art regarding Memphremagog that came out of these decades reflects both the components of a desired experience, and the generic attitude of those involved. However, the Lake Memphremagog region had a unique feature that set it apart from competitors: the international border. As I conclude this thesis, I highlight how the impact of the border has increased overtime. Initially, the border meant little to communities around Lake Memphremagog, but following the conclusion of the Civil War, a period of tensions, both local and national, caused the border to become more of a



political and lived reality. This would permanently change the relationships of communities around the lake.

## Introduction

For the past eighteen summers, my family has made an annual pilgrimage from our home in Woodstock, Vermont two hours north to a small rental cottage on a pond near the Canadian border. For a week, we live in solitude. Without cell-phone reception, we bond as a family: hiking and canoeing on Bald Hill Pond during the day, lighting campfires by night. In my teenage years, I often pondered the value in this immersive experience, but I've come to enjoy it again with age. This summer, sunburnt and three miles into a six mile hike, I stopped to ponder why my family, and the dozens of families camped around us, partake in this prescribed (and quite generic) 'country' experience. Families like my own have been coming to this same lake for over a hundred years. But when did it become popular for humans to vacation in 'the wilderness'? At what point in time did the value shift from what we could physically take from a natural landscape, to what we could spiritually receive from it?

I came to realize this specific query fit well with my interests in both the field of Environmental History, and Vermont, my home state. I didn't have to look far from my family's beloved vacation destination to find a suitable location to explore this question, albeit on a slightly larger scale. Less than thirty miles northeast of Bald Hill Pond lies Lake Memphremagog. Thirty miles long and shaped like a branch, Memphremagog is a freshwater glacial lake that is uniquely located on the border between Vermont and Quebec. The scenery around Memphremagog is beautiful: lush green mountains surround the lake, and cascade down to pebbled shores and crystal blue water. But there is more to Memphremagog than meets the eye. While there is no physical boundary across the lake,

border patrol boats lurk behind pine tree covered islands, guarding the invisible divide between the United States and Canada.

The communities that surround Memphremagog are a combination of former mill towns and vacation destinations. The name *Memphremagog* was derived from the local Algonquin Abenaki language, and is thought to mean "where there is a big expanse of water."<sup>1</sup> The name is fitting when you consider that water has long been the economic lifeblood of the towns surrounding Lake Memphremagog: first with subsistence practices like farming and fishing, later with industries that relied on hydropower, and eventually as the backdrop for the tourism industry.

Currently, however, there is minimal historical literature about Lake Memphremagog. While the Lake is mentioned in a few broad anthologies, including Christopher Klyza and Stephen Trombulak's *The Story of Vermont: A Natural and Cultural History* (1999) and Mark Bushnell's *Hidden History of Vermont* (2017), Memphremagog's significance is dwarfed in favor of its mighty western neighbor Lake Champlain. The few sources that do discuss the lake typically spotlight a specific community, or an environmental problem. Consequently, none of these texts significantly aided my research.

Despite this, I was grateful to have found a collection of secondary sources that discuss the transition of land use in a larger New England context, and offer background

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<sup>1</sup> "The Bridge at the Outlet. Lake Memphremagog, Currier & Ives." Caption. (Springfield Museums, Undated: Currier & Ives (American, 1834-1907).

on wilderness theory. Three texts have been especially helpful in providing this thesis with a scholarly framework. The first text, *Second Nature: An Environmental History of New England* (2014) by Richard W. Judd, offers a general environmental history of New England through the arc of regional landscape that is decimated by extractive industry, then reimagined to resemble primary nature. Judd argues the ostensibly natural spaces around us are actually ‘secondary’. I kept Judd’s arc in mind when researching how secondary nature was framed to look primary in the Memphremagog region. The next text that helped build a framework for my research was *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (1996), edited by William Cronon. *Uncommon Ground* explores flaws in common conceptions of nature, most notably the exclusion of humans from most environmental thought. Understanding the popular main modes through which nature is viewed in North America helped me to comprehend the values and motivations behind wilderness tourism. Finally, *After Preservation: Saving American Nature in the Age of Humans* (2015), edited by Ben A. Minteer and Stephen J. Pyne, discusses the issues associated with the land preservation movement. Minteer and Pyne cover general preservation theory, and also highlight modern implications of the classism and exclusivity that accompanied the preservation of many landscapes at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Luckily, many primary source documents concerning Memphremagog in the years 1860-1890 exist and are publically available. To complete my analysis I utilized a combination of primary newspaper articles, periodicals, journals, and longer texts. One interesting caveat I learned to be mindful of was that a great deal of tourism materials

about Memphremagog were funded by either hotels or railroad companies. Keeping these motivations in mind, I was careful to be discerning when analyzing what were often essentially advertisements.

Journals have bridged a critical gap between secondary sources that offer a New England framework and primary history more specific to Memphremagog. Some journals that have proved especially helpful are *Vermont History*, published by the Vermont State Historical Society; the *Northland Journal*, published out of Derby, Vermont; as well as the *Journal of Forest History*, *Journal of Eastern Township Studies*, and the *Journal of Historical Geography*. Two particular articles aided my framework immensely. The first was “Scenic tourism on the northeastern borderland: Lake Memphremagog's steamboat excursions and resort hotels, 1850–1900” (2009) by J.I. Little from the *Journal of Historical Geography*. This work helped me get into the minds of Memphremagog tourists, assisting me in understanding their motivations and the type of experience they were yearning for. The second piece was “The Gilded Age and the Making of Bar Harbor” (1993) by Stephen J. Hornsby, from *Geographical Review*. In his analysis of the place-making that transpired in Bar Harbor, Maine during the Gilded Age, Hornsby inspired me to consider how tourism shifted the Memphremagog communities beyond mere infrastructural changes.

This thesis is situated within the field of environmental history. At its core, environmental history deals with the study of interactions between people and environments (landscapes, features, places), over time. A common thread within the field

is the paradox of how environments have shaped societies, and conversely how societies have shaped environments throughout history. I have a particular fondness for the way Mark Fiege simplifies environmental history in his book, *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States* (2012). In the first chapter, Fiege writes:

Whatever form nature takes, people have arranged their societies, economies, and governments to turn it into food, clothing, warmth, shelter, weapons, art, architecture, and many other things. The complexity of means by which people have sought to realize these ends -and the biophysical and social consequences of their actions- constitutes an enormous part of environmental history.<sup>2</sup>

In this short segment, the profound amount of power that humans have wielded over their environments is equated with the goods and services we derive from them. The description may be simple, but it is quite strong. I also like this passage for its balanced suggestion that while humans have often manipulated their environments in destructive ways, they have also made some incredible innovations.

Given the parameters of my research question, and the prevalence of an international border in this subject, you may be wondering why I chose to complete this thesis in History, rather than in my other major, Geography. My reason for completing this thesis in History comes down to my instance in keeping the personal narratives of people who encountered Lake Memphremagog at the heart of my work. I felt that the

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Fiege, *The Republic of Nature: An Environmental History of the United States*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012). P. 10

very social themes of wilderness conceptualization, tourism, and nature reflected in the humanities were best understood through hearing from past voices. While elements of Geography are certainly included in my work, this is truly the story of human interaction with a specific landscape feature overtime.

In the course of its long history, Memphremagog has undergone a sequence of changes in how the region's inhabitants utilize the lake, as both a space and a resource. Conceptualized simply, the most visible shift has been from extraction and depletion to romanticization and festishization. This thesis will focus on this exact paradigm, using the decades 1860-1890 as a lens. This era is known as the Gilded Age. Cynics would say the name is derived from how the period seemed glittering, but was dirty and corrupt at its core. Regardless, the Gilded Age saw fundamental changes occur in American transportation, industry, and culture: changes which had impacts on the previously sleepy and isolated Memphremagog valley. Additionally, with the end of the Civil War in 1865, and Canada becoming a confederation in 1867, the "North" as a region was prosperous, making industrial advancements, and (the wealthy elite classes were) celebrating economic rejuvenation. Throughout this thesis I will use the terms Gilded Age and Post-Industrial, and I want to provide some clarification as to how they can be differentiated. Gilded Age refers broadly to a period of time, and the social, economic, and political events and actions that occurred within the bounds of the last few decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Post-Industrial refers to process; the gradual change in a society where industries like service, tourism, and leisure supersede extractive, production centered industries. In tracing Memphremagog through the Gilded Age, we can see the post-

industrial process at work, and also understand that it is not always linear, as there is temporal overlap between various types of industry.

Salient characteristics of the Lake Memphremagog area like privacy, seemingly untouched forests, and small rural towns became massive selling points when the region was reimagined for tourism. All throughout New England, small mill towns suddenly were described as ‘quaint’, or ‘charming’, and the abundance of forested land was seen as a novelty. In *Second Nature*, Judd describes the value in studying New England, as the region has undergone a sequence of environmental transition that saw resource extractive industries rise and fall, followed by a return to a version of regrowth nature that is ‘secondary’. Landscapes may be forested again, but the scars of industry remain. Studying second nature allows us to understand how ‘natural’ spaces have been first manipulated for resources and later redesigned to fit a societal ideal. Though in the Eastern United States we likely encounter second natures frequently, we tend to forget the destruction of the first.

Regional identity is an important part of the economic vitality and marketing of a place. It is also fundamental in building community, common threads of understanding, and improving quality of life. This research is important because it will begin a conversation about an overlooked place that is currently in a state of post-industrial transition, and prove that in many ways the region has dealt with similar environmental challenges before, when reckoning with disparate industries during the second half of the nineteenth century.



In order to examine the transition and overlay of industry and recreation, this thesis will address some foundational questions including: what extractive industry was occurring around Lake Memphremagog during the mid-nineteenth century, and when and why did the region begin to see a tourism industry develop? Additionally, how is the ‘nature’ of Lake Memphremagog described by visitors, who may not be aware of the region’s industrial past? And since the international border divides the lake between Canada and the United States, how did the ‘international’ quality of the region impact both traditional extractive industry and the tourism industry?

Residents of Northern New England looked upon lakes and rivers with an eye for opportunity, power, and dominion when they first developed industry in their small communities in the mid nineteenth century. But now, a century and a half later, modern New Englanders likely find different meaning in the same waters, instead considering energy, beauty, and recreation. This thesis aims to chart when these perceptions of value shifted. Broadly, this thesis will touch upon the themes of borderlands and border waters, human perceptions of wilderness, land upheaval/ reconstruction, and the social construction of tourism landscapes.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 will focus on the rise and expansion of extractive industry in the Memphremagog region. Using a combination of primary and secondary sources, the chapter will chart the development of extractive industries around Lake Memphremagog during the mid-nineteenth century. Specific resource extractive industries will be considered, along with the ways in which they

altered the land. The chapter will convene by presenting a portrait of the area's environment just before the introduction of nature tourism to the area.

Chapter 2 will explore the rise of leisure in the Memphremagog region. My intention is to chart the roots and motivations of tourism around the lake, and consider how tourism overlaid with traditional industry during this era, both temporally, socially, and spatially? What did tourism as an industry require of the lake environment, and how did it impact the landscape in turn? How did the leisure industry, which relied heavily on the production of an expected, predictable 'wilderness' experience deal with a landscape that had been (and was actively still being) altered by human driven processes? The overlaying of tourism and extractive industry was not merely a local phenomenon, but a national one as well. Thus this chapter will also generally discuss the history of American 'wilderness' tourism, and what confluence of circumstances drove the trend during the Gilded Age.

Chapter 3 will examine perceptions of Lake Memphremagog in the late 19th Century, focusing on the creative mediums of writing and art, with the intention to understand local and visitor perceptions of the lake, and detect if there is any early semblance of environmental concern present. During the nineteenth century, North America experienced a revolution in the humanities that began to romanticize nature and wilderness. While nothing physically changed about the beauty of Lake Memphremagog during these years, I will seek to answer the question of whether this creative movement had an effect on creative sentiment towards the lake.

Chapter 4 will consider Lake Memphremagog's identity as a border resource. Still focusing on the second half of the nineteenth century, the section will examine how the lake's location on the international border affected early extractive industry and later marketing as a vacation destination. The chapter will defer to my primary research theme of industrial transition, and explore how the border has over time posed unique environmental challenges to Memphremagog region communities.

Before venturing into my research, I would like to make a brief note about terminology. Scholars dealing with the study of place have mixed opinions about the term region. Every author seems to use the word uniquely, describing a variety of scales and encompassing different elements of locality, whether those be physical or cultural. Some scholars utilize the concept of a 'bioregion': an approach that "requires a definition of place based less on conventional and political boundaries and more on ecological similarities."<sup>3</sup> While this approach is fascinating, Memphremagog itself is not really a bioregion, and the cultural bounds of the surrounding communities are hard to ignore. In *Second Nature*, Judd utilizes the cartographic boundaries of New England states as his 'region'. While this grouping is large, Judd uses spatial diversity to his advantage, comparing different states and communities to craft his argument that, "All landscapes, including the wildest ones, are cultural constructs, and all built landscapes are in some respects natural."<sup>4</sup> New England serves Judd's study well, as there is economic and

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Gee, "Bays and barrens and culture in cans: reconceptualizing coastal landscapes in downeast Maine." In *A Landscape History of New England*. Ed. Blake A Harrison and Richard. W. Judd. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011). Chapter 13. P.230-247.

<sup>4</sup> Richard W. Judd, *Second Nature: An Environmental History of New England*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2014) P. X

cultural diversity in the area, despite shared histories and common characteristics among the states.

While useful in many circumstances, I will not employ broad New England regional analysis in this discourse. My thesis is the story of a manipulated and forgotten place; an environs that serves to address many themes of American environmental history when examined on a tapered scale. For the purpose of this study, region will thus be used to refer to Lake Memphremagog itself and the surrounding counties; Vermont's Orleans County to the south, and Quebec's Memphrémagog Regional County Municipality to the north. These bounds enclose an area that shares "a confluence of land use, collective memory, and natural process that is widely accepted as distinctive to the region. These landscapes become second nature in the regional way of life."<sup>5</sup>

Though Memphremagog may be small, conducting this study will contribute to scholarship that deals with secondary environmental transition, place-building, Gilded Age tourism, and the concept of nature as a retreat. This thesis is important because it tells the human story of constructing secondary natural landscapes and then subsequently utilizing them for leisure; process we participate in, but rarely pause to think about.

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<sup>5</sup> Judd, *Second Nature*, P. X.

## Chapter 1: The Reaping

“*The great question, whether man is of nature or above her*”

-George Perkins Marsh, *Man and Nature* (1864)

The varied but seasonally reliable landscape of New England provided a multitude of resources and opportunities for inhabitants to take advantage of. As was the case throughout the Northeast, the early industry that developed around Lake Memphremagog was generated as a response to the apparent potential of the immediate environment. The rich forests supplied abundant timber for logging, while fertile valleys were prime for grazing and farming. Lakes and waterways provided both energy and connection, as they powered mills and linked communities and goods. By examining a historic topographic map of Vermont, such as Daniel Friedrich Sotzmann’s 1797 iteration “Vermont” from the German *Ebeling-Sotzmann Atlas Von Nordamerika*, one could surmise the industries that flourished in each region during the 19th century, likely with satisfactory accuracy.<sup>6</sup>

The Indigenous Native American Abenaki and Wabanaki Nations had inhabited the Memphremagog region for centuries before European contact; and though early French fur traders had passed Lake Memphremagog during travel through the greater St. Lawrence River valley, no permanent, non-indigenous settlement was developed until over a century later. Anglo-American settlers first came to the Memphremagog region by way of the Bayley-Hazen Military Road. Initially intended to provide military access to

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel Friedrich Sotzmann, “*Vermont.*” In: *Atlas Von Nordamerika*. Ed. Ebeling Sotzmann. (Hamburg: Carl Ernst Bohn, 1797) P.5

the vulnerable Northern border, the road was the only route into the region as of the Revolutionary War.<sup>7</sup> Settlement of the present Orleans County region was instigated by the allocation of land grants from the acting independent republican government of Vermont to sixty four prospective homesteaders in 1780, including Ebenezer Crafts, for whom the town of Craftsbury was later named.<sup>8</sup> “Vermont” at this time was a conceptual region, and an independent Republic, claimed by both its neighboring states of New York and New Hampshire, but functioning autonomously as essentially its own nation. It was not until 1791 that Vermont would join the Union as the 14th State.<sup>9</sup>

As small communities began to take form, the attention of settlers turned to extracting the region’s most visible resource: the rich forests of the Green Mountains. Distinctively varied, containing a mixture of northern hardwoods and valuable pine and spruce species<sup>10</sup>, the Vermont woods held massive economic potential, especially during an era of national expansion. The disjunction of this extractive land use from the original prospect of land accumulation is important to note. While initially these settlers would gather land for the sake of agricultural expansion/ permanent settlement, logging marked a shift in value away from the actual ground to a resource that could be reaped and profited from in itself. I use the terms extract and reap rather than harvest in order to

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<sup>7</sup> Fredric Palmer Wells, “History of Newbury, Vermont: From The Coös Country to Present Time.” Caledonia Company, Newbury, VT. 1902.

<sup>8</sup> Bruce P. Shields, “Scots Among the Yankees: The Settlement of Craftsbury East Hill.” *Vermont History*. Vol. 64, no.3. (1996) P. 174-183

<sup>9</sup> Michael A. Bellesiles, "The Establishment of Legal Structures on the Frontier: The Case of Revolutionary Vermont." *The Journal of American History* 73, no. 4 (1987): 895-915. doi:10.2307/1904054.

<sup>10</sup> Eric S. Wharton, and Richard H. Widmann, Charles J. Barnett, Thomas S. Frieswyk, Bob DeGeus, and Andrew J. Lister. “The Forests of the Green Mountain State.” Resource Bulletin NE-158. USDA and US Forest Service, Northeast Research Station. Newtown Square, PA. November 2003

convey the near total ecological decimation the logging industry would carry out by the beginning of nineteenth century, as over seventy percent of Vermont's forests were clear cut.<sup>11</sup>

The logging industry was particularly successful in the Memphremagog region because of a collection of unique regional characteristics. The first advantage was the abundant presence of lakes and waterways in Orleans and Memprémagog counties. In addition to the lake and the Magog River, the area has four other river systems, three of which flow northward.<sup>12</sup> Waterways were critical components of the historic logging industry, which thrived in the Northern border zone. Because there was limited transportation infrastructure, rivers acted as superhighways, moving raw materials from the hinterland to the metropolis. In a process known as log driving lumbermen would ferry timber downstream on rivers to sell in urban transportation centers.<sup>13</sup> For logging ventures near Memphremagog, this meant moving timber southeast to the Connecticut River and major New England ports, or northward towards Québec City. Peak log driving season was the very beginning of spring, once the thick ice jams had cleared and the rivers were flowing swiftly. The process of log driving was understandably dangerous, not only for the brave souls who traveled atop the treacherous streams of liquid and lumber, but also for the communities the log drives passed through. Logs commonly

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<sup>11</sup> Wharton, Widmann, Barnett, Frieswyk, DeGeus, and Lister, "The Forests of the Green Mountain State."

<sup>12</sup> "Basin 17 - Lake Memphremagog, Coaticook and Tomifobia Rivers Basin Planning." Vermont State Department of Environmental Conservation. n.d. Accessed February 5, 2018. <http://dec.vermont.gov/watershed/map/basin-planning/basin17>.

<sup>13</sup> Scott Wheeler, "The History of Logging in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom." *Northland Journal* 6, September 2002.

became tangled around river bends, resulting in enormous jams that could flood the valleys or destroy the riverbank if the log drivers did not quickly break up the blockage.

Further boosting the Orleans County timber trade was the region's proximity to Canada; the northern border provided close access to a profitable international market. The region's loggers took advantage of this opportunity until President Thomas Jefferson issued a trade embargo in 1807.<sup>14</sup> Despite the embargo, a lucrative international black market for timber (among other goods) persisted. The first decades of the nineteenth century were the golden age of the shipbuilding industry, and new markets were opening worldwide, increasing the demand for larger national fleets. British North America (Canada) was the epicenter of the Empire's shipbuilding industry, and thus there was constant demand for timber. While Atlantic Canada certainly had abundant lumber reserves to tap into, the colonies lacked the manpower of their southern neighbor, hence the popularity of northward lumber trade.<sup>15</sup> This specific moment in trade history is crucial, because it challenges current notions of bordered industry. With lumber, and other industries over time, a distinctive North American industrial geography had existed that worked against diplomatic boundaries.

Following the Civil War, logging grew to be the largest and most economically valuable industry in Vermont. This was primarily due to demand from the construction of

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<sup>14</sup> Arthur Scherr, "Thomas Jefferson's Nationalist Vision of New England and the War of 1812." *The Historian* 69, no. 1 (2007): 1-35. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.bucknell.edu/stable/24453909>.

<sup>15</sup> Graeme Wynn, *Timber Colony: a Historical Geography of Early Nineteenth Century New Brunswick*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979)



regional railroads, and the emergence of the paper trade.<sup>16</sup> This period was distinguished by new geographic separation of rural supply and urban demand; as cities on the East Coast developed, trade between hinterland and metropolis became increasingly bilateral. This era in Vermont industry diverges from pre-war practices by introducing a new layer of infrastructure. Logging in the region had been solely extractive; timber was cut then shipped elsewhere for processing. But the geography of industry began compressing. Mills and small factories emerged to cut out the transitive middle step. The landscape shifted function from merely providing resources to functioning as a space and center of production. The rapid expansion of the logging industry in Vermont is evidenced by the fact that while in 1856 twenty million square feet of board were produced in Vermont, by 1889 that annual figure had grown to three hundred seventy five million.<sup>17</sup> Seeing the impacts of deforestation on his beloved Vermont landscape, Woodstock resident George Perkins Marsh reflected in his 1864 book, *Man and Nature*, “Man is everywhere a disturbing agent. Wherever he plants his foot, the harmonies of nature are turned to discords.”<sup>18</sup> Marsh’s book would become the cornerstone text for environmental awareness in nineteenth century America. It is significant to note that it was the lowly Vermont highlands that inspired a movement which would have immense national repercussions, and a text that would be remembered to this day.

While the dairy industry dominates modern Vermont agriculture, sheep used to be

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<sup>16</sup> David C. Smith, "The Logging Frontier." *Journal of Forest History* 18, no. 4 (1974). P. 96-106. doi:10.2307/3983320.

<sup>17</sup> Smith, "The Logging Frontier."

<sup>18</sup> George Perkins Marsh, "Man and Nature: Or, Physical Geography as Modified by Human Action." (New York: C. Scribner, 1864.) P.36

king in the Green Mountain state. An alignment of ecological opportunity and political disturbance created the woolen enterprise. By the 1810's the once bountifully wooded hillsides of the Green Mountains were barren and over logged. Settlers looked to sheep, specifically fine Spanish Merinos, to turn a profit off of the fruitless land.<sup>19</sup>

Coincidentally, the War of 1812 bolstered the woolens industry by creating a high demand for American uniforms. By 1820, the industry had grown to be the largest in Vermont, and woolen mills sprang up in every county. In 1837, Orleans County was home to an astonishing 30,657 sheep<sup>20</sup>. That same year the number of mills in the state increased from thirty three to a staggering three hundred and thirty four.<sup>21</sup> The sudden emergence of a processing infrastructure for wool mirrors the rapid development of secondary infrastructure for logging; both industries spawned layers of supporting systems once their economic potential was realized. The Vermont sheep flock would reach its peak population at midcentury, trailing off in later years due to increasing competition from Western states and a saturated wool market. The ecological impact of having over one and a half million sheep at time graze on Vermont hillsides would leave scars of depletion on the landscape for decades to come. Just as the logging industry had exhausted local supply by overharvesting, the frenzied woolen industry would degrade grazable pastures. The two industries shared stunted timelines; both outgrew Vermont

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<sup>19</sup> Robert F. Balivet, "The Vermont Sheep Industry: 1811-1880." *Vermont History*, Edmunds Essays, 33 (1): 1965. P. 243-249. <https://vermonthistory.org/journal/misc/VermontSheepIndustry.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> Balivet, "The Vermont Sheep Industry: 1811-1880."

<sup>21</sup> Balivet, "The Vermont Sheep Industry: 1811-1880."

when the environment could not keep up with demand, and both left a decimated landscape in their wake when they dissolved.

Vermonters and visitors took note of the impact these extractive industries had on their surrounding landscape. In *Travels; in New England and New York*, Dr. Timothy Dwight, a religious leader and Yale University President, observed the non-native secondary forest growth he encountered during a visit to Panton, Vermont, a central Vermont community of the Eastern shore of Lake Champlain. Dwight records,

The lands [in Panton, Vermont], which have here once been cultivated and again permitted to lie waste for several years, yield a rich and fine hickory. Of this wood there is not, I believe, a single tree in any original forest within fifty miles from this spot. The growth is here white pine; of which I did not see a single stem amid a whole grove of hickory.<sup>22</sup>

Even political leaders noticed the change in both the quantity and quality of Vermont forests. During his term as Governor of Vermont, Samuel E. Pingree issued a proclamation declaring Arbor Day as a State holiday, to be celebrated every May 1<sup>st</sup>. Though the language of the proclamation is at times florid, Pingree (who had a connection to Memphremagog through his wife's hometown of Stanstead, Quebec),

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<sup>22</sup> Timothy Dwight, "Travels; in New England and New York." Volume II. New Haven: S. Converse Printing. 1821. Print. 439-441.

stresses the connection between Vermont communities and forests, in a passage that still rings true to Vermonters to this day. Introducing his designation, Pingree recites,

The love of Vermonters for trees and groves should show itself along every thoroughfare and wayside; upon the village green and city park; around the school house and by the academy; the grounds of the home should be tastefully adorned with the maple, the oak, and the elm, and thereby made scenes of lovelier memories; the church, too, should be reached through their pleasant and inspiring shades; and the “God's Acre” where we shall all soon sleep with our beloved ones, should not remain neglected of these adornments of nature that form the finest drapery that hallows the earth.<sup>23</sup>

In this passage, and with the declaration of Arbor Day itself, Pingree is selling a conceptualization of Vermont that values forests, mainly for the services they can provide to individuals and communities. It’s an anthropocentric imagining, especially when you consider Pingree’s desire for trees as accessories that decorate a human designed landscape.

Railroads don’t initially seem to fit into Pingree’s forested vision of Vermont. But their presence was vital in shaping the extractive economy of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, and

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<sup>23</sup> Samuel E. Pingree, “A Proclamation.” *Journal of the Senate of the State of Vermont*, 373. Vermont General Assembly, 1886. Print.

the later tourist industry of the Gilded Age. Compared to other New England states, railroads came late to Vermont. There isn't a clear reason as to why this was the case, but a small population and meager industry relative to neighboring states was likely an influential factor. Maine, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire were linked by the Boston and Maine railroad as early as 1842<sup>24</sup>, and New York state had tracks laid as far north as Albany an entire decade earlier, in 1831.<sup>25</sup> While a few routes through the Green Mountains were planned as early as 1831, it wasn't until 1849 that the first railroad, The Rutland & Burlington Railroad, operated in Vermont. It would be an additional three decades before railways reached all corners of the state. In Orleans County

the opening of the Connecticut and Passumpsic Rivers Railways to Boston, Oct. 21, 1857; to Newport, October 1862, and to North Derby, May 1, 1867, not only stimulated all the other business of the county, but occasioned a large increase of manufacturing, principally of lumber. The stimulating influence of the road was felt mainly by the villages of Barton and Newport [which borders Lake Memphremagog].<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Warren Jacobs, "Dates of Some of the Principal Events in the History of 100 Years of the Railroad in New England. 1826-1926." *The Railway and Locomotive Historical Society Bulletin*, no. 17 (1928). P. 15-28. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.bucknell.edu/stable/43504499>.

<sup>25</sup> "History of Railroads in New York State." New York State Department of Transportation, Accessed February 1, 2018. <https://www.dot.ny.gov/divisions/operating/opdm/passenger-rail/passenger-rail-service/history-railroads>

<sup>26</sup> Pliny H. White, "Orleans County." *Vermont Historical Gazetteer*. Ed. Abby Maria Hemenway. Claremont Manufacturing Co. 1877. P.31-33. <http://oldstonehousemuseum.org/orleans-county-history/>

Railroads grew not only industry, but also the county's population. Rails brought immigrants who had arrived at East Coast ports into northern Vermont to pursue work in the lumber, wool, and mining industries.

The railroads also had the effect of altering patterns of settlement, by fortifying the communities around the tracks. Towns with railroad access experienced growth in industrial infrastructure, banks, schools, hotels, and taverns. Before there had been economic and cultural parity among the rural settlements of the Memphremagog region. But that equality quickly dissipated, as the rail towns of Derby and Newport, Vermont and Stanstead, Quebec, grew into dynamic cities, around which area life would come to revolve. Between 1880 and 1890, the population of Newport nearly doubled, jumping from a meager 930 to 1,730 residents.<sup>27</sup> In the same span of time, the nearby town of Chelsea, Vermont took a population hit, losing a total of 232 residents to reduce the population to 1230.<sup>28</sup> During this era, leaders in rural Vermont communities began to vocalize their about a phenomenon known as 'rural flight'. The turnover of rural industry caused economic hardships. Small town youth were drawn to not only the economic opportunity cities provided, but also the exciting cultural life that could be found there. In 1876, Captain John B. Mead delivered a speech to the Vermont State Board of

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<sup>27</sup> "Decennial Census." United States Census Bureau. 1880-1890. Accessed February 1, 2018. <https://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html>

<sup>28</sup> Hal Seth Baron, "The Impact of Rural Depopulation on the Local Economy: Chelsea, Vermont, 1840-1900." *Agricultural History* 54, no. 2 (1980). P. 318-35. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.bucknell.edu/stable/3743048>.

Agriculture, a transcript of which was later distributed in the group's annual report. Captain Mead bemoaned the issue of fleeing rural youth declaring, "We hear, upon every hand, the complaint that young men quit the paternal acres upon arriving at their majority, their heads filled with visionary schemes for rapidly getting wealth, -- which, to a vast number, through an erroneous education, is the 'chief end of man'."<sup>29</sup> It is clear from his speech that Captain Mead, like many community leaders of his time, equated hard work and capital gain to the masculine ideal of working the land.

Despite this industrial history, New England, and Vermont especially, have developed a public image that centers on 'untamed' landscapes and verdant forests. Nature, in a seemingly untouched form, is the basis for modern culture, craft, economy, tourism, and even historical understanding. With this reduction to idyllic imagery, the layers of Vermont's complex industrial past are ignored. The early economy, with a heavy focus on extraction and singular commodities, is obsolete. Has the state manufactured a second iteration of nature that ignores the historical destruction of the first? It is true that the landscape of the Memphremagog region is *second nature*, but it does not seem that way visually. What industry that does remain in the public imaginary is low-impact and bucolic; old mills add a seemingly pleasant slant to local histories. Judd comments on this manufacturing of the past by suggesting "All landscapes,

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<sup>29</sup> John B. Mead, "Opportunities for Young Farmers." Vermont State Board of Agriculture. Third Report. Rutland. 1876. P. 516-532

including the wildest ones, are cultural constructs, and all built landscapes are in some respects natural.”<sup>30</sup>

I believe that amnesia regarding society's role in the degradation of nature is in part due to the separatism of humankind from popular ecological narrative. Particularly in New England, nature tends to be viewed in one of two modes. The first perspective is that nature is a constant which we as humans are observers of, but not actively participants in. Nature is something for us to enjoy, venture in to, admire, et cetera. But the line between human society and the natural world is firm. Nature is ‘other’.

Then there is a perspective towards nature that expands upon this disconnection, classifying the landscape, with all its flora and fauna, as a conquerable resource that is intended for human control. Particularly during the American Enlightenment of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was value seen in taxonomy, categorization, and zoning, which enabled people to separate, control, and alienate nature, or even other groups of people. This mode of perspective draws parallels to the theological notion of dominion. The book of Genesis, from the Old Testament, articulates the theory, stating “Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all[a] the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”<sup>31</sup> The language situates humans as elevated possessors of the Earth, separated from the rest of the natural world. In a subsequent line, the linguistics shift to specifically define the governance and

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<sup>30</sup> Judd, *Second Nature*, P.X.

<sup>31</sup> The Holy Bible, New International Version. Gen. 1:26. Grand Rapids: Zondervan House, 1984. Print.



authority role of humans, declaring “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”<sup>32</sup> In just a few short lines, these simple verses define a theory of human ecological sovereignty that has dominated the Western world for centuries, and situate societal values in production, extraction, and domestication.

When putting these words to paper, the scribes of the Old Testament likely imagined an agricultural utopia rather than industrialized modern New England. Examining the makeup of a Memphremagog mill town, it is clear that humans have broadened the terms of the Bible and bled the landscape of all that it could provide. In *Second Nature*, Richard Judd ventured “New England’s farms, cities, mills, and factories are products of nature as well as constructions of culture.”<sup>33</sup> While human ingenuity has worked to actualize environmental control inspired by theories of dominion, it is worth weighing the impact of culture and environment: which has had more of a role in shaping the industrial systems we have today?

The theory of environmental determinism would suggest the physical and climatic features of place command more power in the creation of regional industry, identity, and cultural life. Conversely, some scholars argue human ingenuity and ambition operates independent of the environment, and that culture is the true determining influence. Hugh M. Raup, a famed American ecologist and former director of the Harvard Forest Program, would fall in the latter camp. Raup said of the relation

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<sup>32</sup> The Holy Bible, New International Version. Gen. 1:28. Grand Rapids: Zondervan House, 1984. Print.

<sup>33</sup> Judd, *Second Nature*, P. XI.

between culture and field, “I suggest that the principal role of the land and the forests has been that of stage and scenery....The significant figures have always been the people, and the ideas they have had about what they might do at specific points in time with the stage properties at hand.”<sup>34</sup>

If there is a lesson to be learned from the rapid expansion and subsequent erasure of extractive industry, might I suggest the following; while landscapes might appear to recover to a state of primary nature following destruction, forests and watersheds are complicated systems that can remain unbalanced even if there is no issue visible to the human eye.<sup>35</sup> As we now know, the historical extraction of finite resources has had severe environmental consequences. Global climate change, fed by the greenhouse gases that have seeped out of factories for centuries, is a measurable and serious threat to humanity. Natural habitats have been altered beyond recognition, and legions of plants and animals have gone permanently extinct. While forests can be replanted, and streams slowly filtered of contaminants, nature in its pre-industrial form can never truly be recreated. Modern iterations of nature are wilderness, erased.

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<sup>34</sup> Hugh M. Raup, “The View from John Sanderson’s Farm: A Perspective for the Use of the Land,” *Forest History* 10:1. April, 1966. P.7

<sup>35</sup> Judd, *Second Nature*, P. XI

## Chapter 2: The Reinvention

*“First that which is physical, afterward that which is spiritual. Accordingly, we sing a hymn after breakfast, read a psalm, and recite together the Lord's Prayer. It helps us to resist the common tendency of camp life to revert to primitive barbarism.”*

-Isabel C. and Samuel J. Barrows, *The Shaybacks in Camp* (1887)

The Gilded Age elite pioneered the concept of summer vacation in the United States. Retreating away to the lakes, mountains, and shores of backcountry New England, aristocratic Americans built enclaves of luxury in the woods. Ostensibly rustic, but equipped with the comfort and extravagance they were used to, these ‘camps’ provided the upper class with a manufactured wilderness experience.<sup>36</sup> In reality, the landscapes these camps occupied had been manipulated and reaped over by humans for a century. In the article “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” William Cronon goes so far as to call wilderness a product of human creation. He affirms that wilderness

Is quite profoundly a human creation—indeed, the creation of very particular human cultures at very particular moments in human history. It is not a pristine sanctuary where the last remnant of an untouched, endangered, but still transcendent nature can for at least a little while longer be encountered without the contaminating taint of civilization. Instead, it’s a product of that civilization, and could hardly be contaminated by the very stuff of which it is made.

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<sup>36</sup> Isabella C. and Samuel J. Barrows, *The Shaybacks in Camp: Ten Summers Under Canvas*. (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1887)

Wilderness hides its unnaturalness behind a mask that is all the more beguiling because it seems so natural.<sup>37</sup>

Despite the human construction of nature as Cronon discusses, elites became enamored with these designated spaces because they seemed to be the antithesis of what North American cities had become. Whereas cities were increasingly crowded and loud, the Appalachian hinterland seemed bucolic and quiet. The air and water were of comparatively better quality, and in ample supply. Perhaps most appealing, wilderness offered a private playground; a space in which affluent Americans could enjoy the serenity of the countryside in a filtered and exclusive venue. Consider the words *retreat* and *vacation*. Both terms allude to an escape. These words imply the benefit in the experience is because of the removal from normal circumstances and surroundings. In order to peek into the opulent rural playgrounds of the Gilded Age elite, let's first consider what exactly they were fleeing.

By 1870, North American cities had evolved from portside trading hubs to mechanized, crowded centers of industry and culture. For many choosing Memphremagog as their ideal retreat, they were fleeing the crowds of Montreal and

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<sup>37</sup> William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature" In William Cronon, ed., *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 1995) P. 69-90.

Boston.<sup>38</sup> Lake Memphremagog appealed to residents of these cities for two distinct reasons: the region provided the opportunity to escape urban surroundings, and the opportunity to enrich oneself through nature.

It's important to keep in mind that the earliest group of summer vacationers were from the extremely wealthy upper class. Just leaving the city was a high cost in itself. Before the introduction of the automobile, trains were the best option for long range travel. But rail travel was a luxury only the wealthy could afford: in 1880, an eight day excursion from Boston to Lake Memphremagog and Quebec cost a steep forty two dollars and fifty cents.<sup>39</sup> The transformation of traditional labor into a wage based system made extended breaks unrealistic for anyone but the wealthiest Americans.

Many authorities from the Gilded Age touted the health benefits of retreating to nature. Medical knowledge after the Civil War was gradually improving, but still primitive. Doctors and ordinary citizens alike maintained inaccurate beliefs in the miasmatic theory of disease, meaning they thought illness spread through noxious, smelly air.<sup>40</sup> Though some cities had municipal water systems, they broke frequently, and often didn't reach the crowded tenement neighborhoods that needed them the most. Public works projects and street cleaning initiatives were ineffective or obsolete.

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<sup>38</sup> Jody Robinson, "The Architecture of Villégiature on Lake Memphremagog, 1860–1890." *The Journal of Eastern Township Studies*. Vol. 41, Fall 2013. Accessed January 18, 2018 [http://www.etc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/JETS\\_41-6-Robinson.pdf](http://www.etc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/JETS_41-6-Robinson.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> Raymond W. Whitcomb, "Grand excursion to Lake Memphremagog, Montreal, Quebec and the far-famed Saguenay River, etc." (Boston: J.S. Adams, 1880) Accessed via Archive March 1, 2018 <https://archive.org/details/grandexcursionto00raym>

<sup>40</sup> Peter C. Baldwin and Howard P. Chudacoff, *Major Problems in American Urban and Suburban History: Documents and Essays*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005)

Understandably, cities like Montreal and Boston would have been uncomfortable in the dead of summer, and if families had the means to temporarily leave, they likely would. In *The Sanitary City: Urban Infrastructure in America from Colonial Times to the Present* (2000), Martin Melosi explains how urban environments face the challenge of controlling waste because the landscape's natural filtration mechanisms are removed in the building of city infrastructure. He states that

Urbanization removes much of the filtering capacity of soil and rapidly channels precipitation into available watercourses. . . . City building affects the atmosphere by increasing airborne pollutants and also creating 'heat islands' where temperatures are greater than the surrounding area. Various urban activities produce huge volumes of waste products that require complex disposal mechanisms.<sup>41</sup>

Montreal and Boston in particular struggled to provide their residents with adequate disposal 'mechanisms'. Both cities dealt with outbreaks of disease throughout the Gilded Age era. In 1885, Montreal lost 3,164 residents to death by smallpox. Adjusted for total population, the casualties were the equivalent of almost 20 deaths per 1,000 people.<sup>42</sup> Montreal was unique among cities in Eastern North America because of

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<sup>41</sup> Martin V. Melosi, *The Sanitary City: Urban Infrastructure in America from Colonial Times to the Present* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) P. 4.

<sup>42</sup> Eugene Gagnon, "Notes on the Early History and Evolution of the Department of Health of Montreal." *Canadian Public Health Journal* 29, no. 5 (1938): 216-23.  
<http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.bucknell.edu/stable/41977763>.

its inland but convenient location along the St. Lawrence River halfway between the Great Lakes and the Atlantic Ocean. Unlike most Atlantic port cities, Montreal was a French fur trading center before it was an outlet for settlement or general trade.<sup>43</sup> The city was thus always geared toward transportation, and the receiving and re exporting of goods. Boston's biggest setback was a non-centralized water system. Water was not a public right or resource until the turn of the century, and since it was privatized there were varying standards of quality and startling inequity of access. Due to the challenge, Boston's population faced high rates of cholera and general waterborne illnesses.<sup>44</sup>

Further appealing to the wealthy was the manner in which Lake Memphremagog was touted as a sportsman's paradise. The region was presented as the perfect landscape for the rich to sail, fish, hunt, and hike. Regardless of how frequently visitors partook in these activities, being in nature was said to restore male visitors of a feeling of domicile conquest and command.<sup>45</sup> It was during this time period that reformers began to lament the plight of the wealthy urban male, as the loss of connection to land based professions was seen as emasculating. As a response, the origins of Boy Scouts can be traced to this era, as can the founding of several Boys Camps along the shores of Lake Memphremagog.<sup>46</sup> With names like Birch Bay and Camp Arrowhead, these camps stole

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<sup>43</sup> Stephane Castonguay and Michele Dagenais, *Metropolitan Natures: Environmental Histories of Montreal*. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011)

<sup>44</sup> Gretchen A. Condran and Eileen Crimmins-Gardner. "Public Health Measures and Mortality in U.S. Cities in the Late Nineteenth Century." *Human Ecology* 6, no. 1 (1978): P. 27-54. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.bucknell.edu/stable/4602436>.

<sup>45</sup> J. I. Little, "Life without Conventionality: American Social Reformers as Summer Campers on Lake Memphremagog, Quebec, 1878–1905." *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 9 (3), 2010. Cambridge University Press: P. 281–311. doi:10.1017/S1537781400004072.

<sup>46</sup> Little, "Life without Conventionality."

Native American symbols and combined them with strict military structure to reinforce the ‘wilderness hero’ brand of masculinity to younger generations.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, elite vacationers were drawn to the wilderness because of their belief that nature could be mentally stimulating and spiritually enlightening. A popular theologian, and frequent Memphremagog visitor, Henry Ward Beecher “taught that leisure and relaxation could in themselves be a route to God.”<sup>48</sup> Temporarily retreating from the luxury and culture of the city was thought to have a grounding effect, reminding the visitors of their connection to religion via a natural, paradise-like landscape. There were varying degrees to which visitors could enhance this connection, with the most devout sometimes choosing to eschew traditional luxury dwellings, and instead camp in tents under the stars. Noted Unitarian Minister and House Representative Samuel J. Barrows and his family chose to camp in tents to strengthen their ties to the land, and heighten the authenticity of the experience. Barrows and his wife Isabel wrote a book reflecting on their cherished Memphremagog memories, titled *The Shaybacks in the Camp: Ten Summers Under Canvas* (1887). Their book “reassured others that living in tents and going barefoot signified competence and virtue, not poverty and indolence.”<sup>49</sup>

When considering the factors that motivated the American elite to retreat to nature, it is pertinent to recognize the subtle racist and classist undertones of the phenomenon. They were fleeing cities where poverty was rampant and visible; children

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<sup>47</sup> Sharon Wall, *The Nurture of Nature: Childhood, Antimodernism, and Ontario Summer Camps, 1920-55*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009)

<sup>48</sup> Little, “Life without Conventionality.”

<sup>49</sup> Little, “Life without Conventionality.”



begged at street corners, and poor families lived in unsanitary conditions.<sup>50</sup> Constant waves of immigrants poured into the harbors of Boston, New York, and Halifax, straining city resources. The poor were thought to spread disease and corrupt morality. In creating utopias in nature, these early vacationers had a vision that was white, heavily gendered, affluent, and Protestant. Their vision neglected not only the Native Americans that had traditionally inhabited the region, but also rural Vermont settlers, who built the infrastructure by which these vacation paradises were made possible. While these erasures are subtle, later there were examples of obvious class and racial discrimination to emerge from the Memphremagog tourism industry. In 1912, The Hermitage Club, an exclusively Anglophile institution, opened in Magog, Quebec. It still exists today, although French speaking Canadians are no longer barred.<sup>51</sup>

In the early years of the Gilded Age, there were dozens of East Coast lakes and harbors being developed into summer resorts. What then was it about Lake Memphremagog that made the area appeal to early vacationers? Location was key in conceiving the lake as a holiday destination. The Memphremagog area had a confluence of geographic advantages working in its favor. First, the railroad from Boston headed northeast to Montreal, passing through the interior of Vermont, and conveniently crossing the border into Canada on the banks of Lake Memphremagog. With stations in the Vermont towns of Newport and Derby and the Quebec towns of Sherbrooke and

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<sup>50</sup> Baldwin and Chudacoff, *Major Problems in American Urban and Suburban History*.

<sup>51</sup> Dany Jacques, "90 ans du Club Hermitage Du Magog," from *Le Reflet du Lac*. Excerpt via Townships Heritage Web Magazine, 2017. Accessed March 1, 2018. <http://townshipsheritage.com/node/2157>

Stanstead, the Boston & Maine Rail Company had an opportunity.<sup>52</sup> Memphremagog was not the only lake the company developed and advertised (others included Lake George, Sebago Lake, and Lake Winnepesaukee), but it was unique in its ability to tap into two major markets: Boston and Montreal.<sup>53</sup>

There further was appeal in Lake Memphremagog as an international tourist destination. Though the border between Vermont and Quebec had been set in 1818, there was still a great deal of connectivity between Memphremagog border towns, and freedom to travel at will on the Lake itself.<sup>54</sup> Being able to travel internationally in a single day had immense cultural appeal to this particular stratum of society. The railroads even used the unique border setting of Lake Memphremagog as an advertising scheme. In 1885, the Connecticut and Passumpsic Valley Railroad published a short novel titled *My Canadian Sweetheart: Or, Aunt Tabby's Summer Boarders: a story of Lake Memphremagog* (1885).<sup>55</sup> The novel tells the story of a young New York gentleman, Gerald, who travels north to stay with his Aunt for a summer at Memphremagog, and a romance with a charming Canadian girl ensues. In the story the railroad company exploits the exoticism of the border and the innocence and appeal of adolescent romance to market the region specifically to young travelers.

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<sup>52</sup> Ronald D. Karr, *Lost Railroads of New England*. (Pepperell, Mass: Branch Line Press, 2010)

<sup>53</sup> Karr, *Lost Railroads of New England*.

<sup>54</sup> Victoria M. Phaneuf, "The Vermont-Québec Border Region: Negotiations of Identity and Logic in the Northeast Kingdom." *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 28:1. P. 109-125, DOI: 10.1080/08865655.2013.796197

<sup>55</sup> "My Canadian Sweetheart, or, Aunt Tabby's Summer Boarders: a story of Lake Memphremagog" Connecticut Valley & Passumpsic Railroads. (New York: Liberty Printing Co., 1885)

While the unique location of Memphremagog set the region apart, the experience that wealthy vacationers would have at Lake Memphremagog was somewhat generic; it was quite literally one example of a summer resort with a larger ‘retreat’ genre. In reality, they could have found the same kind of natural respite and small town appeal on the shores of many East Coast lakes. It makes sense that during the same era Memphremagog was developed into a summer resort, parallel development was happening across the greater Appalachian region. Some of the areas with mirrored growth include the lakes of the Adirondack Mountains in upstate New York, where the wealthiest Americans, including the Vanderbilts and Rockefellers, built enormous, chalet style ‘great camps’, and New Hampshire’s popular Lake Winnepesaukee, which was advertised by railroad companies, similarly to Memphremagog.

When I first realized that Memphremagog had generic appeal to the visitors of this era, I was a bit taken aback. The intrinsic value and specialness of place has always been what I have understood to give meaning to a landscape. Realizing that these first vacationers valued Lake Memphremagog not for the feature itself, but for the experience of being in a certain *type* of space, was very surprising. The primary materials that advertised travel to Lake Memphremagog highlight the general stance of these first tourists: ‘summering’ was not about nature, but rather about what being in nature could do for an individual - and only an individual of a particular group, at that. The experience was thus selfish, and meant to serve for the benefit of a distinct social group.

The advertisements that Railroad companies produced during this era illustrate the predictable construction of place and experience that was found in any ‘wilderness

vacation'. Using poetic language, advertisements would attempt to paint appealing mental pictures in an era when photography was not yet widespread. One striking passage from a guide to Northern Vermont reads:

“Broad in the sunshine stretched away,  
With its capes and islands, the turquoise bay,  
And over water and dusk of pines  
Blue hills lifted their faint outlines.”<sup>56</sup>

Though the language of the excerpt is nonspecific, other sources applaud the specific regional climate, and highlight the health benefits of the region in comparison to the city (and other potential travel destinations as well). Writer M.F. Sweetser wrote, “Among the other attractions of Memphremagog, its picturesque scenery, glorious sunsets, serenity of sunny days and majesty of scourging gales, its negative virtues should be set forth, in the absence of mosquitoes and black flies, and of brooding fogs.”<sup>57</sup> In the forward to his guide book, Henry M. Burt expressed his wishes for his readers, professing “it is hoped you will find in it a help to your enjoyment of a tour through the Connecticut Valley where it is confidently believed you can find increased health and a pleasant lifelong remembrance.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Moses F. Sweetser, *Northern Vermont*. (Boston: Passenger Department, Boston & Maine Railroad, 1892) P.20

<sup>57</sup> Sweetser, *Northern Vermont*, P.20.

<sup>58</sup> Henry M. Burt, *Burt's Illustrated Guide of the Connecticut Valley*. (Northampton: New England Publishing Company, 1867) P. “The Editor's Apology”

Further advertising relied on comparison to notable bodies of water, both in North America and Europe. Some literature referenced the Adirondack region, asserting Lake Memphremagog “in general appearance... more nearly resembles the far-famed Lake George than any other body of water that has come under our observation, and is so regarded by old travelers who are familiar with both.”<sup>59</sup> Other sources referenced famous Highland lakes, principally Loch Lomond. Said one travel writer of Lake Memphremagog, “people find here resemblance to Loch Lomond; and those who have been farther afield call it the Lake Geneva of Canada.”<sup>60</sup> Invoking these more famous, more exotic bodies of water is significant because it informs us as to what the market’s frame of reference was, and attempts to elevate a New World site to the same level of prestige as an Old World landmark.

Advertisers also touted the abundance of fishing opportunity at Lake Memphremagog, describing the region as “a place where the fish do nothing but bite,” and a general sportsman's paradise.<sup>61</sup> Promotional materials liked to reference the prevalence of Muscalong fish, playing up their size by saying thirty to forty pound catches were common. The lake was also stocked with black bass, which poses a question about artifice and the manipulation of the environment to fit an ideal.<sup>62</sup> The guests were expecting a well-stocked lake, and being able to have the experience of catching a fish (a ‘country’ activity) was a valued part of the experience. When the environment could not

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<sup>59</sup> Burt, *Burt's Illustrated Guide of the Connecticut Valley*.

<sup>60</sup> Burt, *Burt's Illustrated Guide of the Connecticut Valley*.

<sup>61</sup> Frederic G. Mather, “A Summer at Magog Lake.” *The Continent, An Illustrated Weekly Magazine*. Vol. 3, January to June 1883. (Philadelphia: Our Continent Publishing Company)

<sup>62</sup> “Brochure of Owl's Head Mountain House, Lake Memphremagog.” (New York: A.H. Kellogg, 1889) Accessed March 3, 2018 via Archive <https://archive.org/details/brochureofowlshe00owls>

naturally supply that opportunity, humans intervened to alter the surroundings and make the moment more plausible.

One of the more problematic trends in advertising was reference to Native American culture. Alluding to indigenous groups added mystique, and made the region seem exotic. Plus, there was appeal at the time in the idea of the ‘going native’; the possibility that in nature an individual could be so removed from society. The Connecticut Valley & Passumpsic Railroads exploited this trend when they published their promotional novel *The hermit of the lake; or, The island princess. A story of Lake Memphremagog and the Southwest* (1886).<sup>63</sup> In the novel, a young traveler from Texas goes with his Uncle to Memphremagog, and encounters for the first time a band of Abenaki warriors, along with a native princess. Rife with inaccuracy, including the miscalculation that most natives had been driven away from the Memphremagog communities, the book was fantasy designed to entice readers. One troublesome passage that truly appropriates indigenous culture comes from a brochure for the Owl’s Head Mountain House. It reads:

The shore of Lake Memphremagog, the Geneva of Canada, and the gateway through which passed the fierce Abenakis, a powerful tribe of the roaming warrior Algonquins, who were the deadly foes of the more civilized Iroquois: savages who for a century carried periodical war and desolation to the settlements as far

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<sup>63</sup> *The Hermit of the Lake, Or The Island Princess*. Connecticut Valley & Passumpsic Railroad. (New York: Liberty Printing Co., 1886)

South as Massachusetts; until, in 1759, Roger's Rangers swept like a tornado to the North, determined to exterminate the whole brood of tigers; and thoroughly they did their work, for few Abenakis outlived the storm of death.<sup>64</sup>

The authors of this passage literally used the genocide of the Abenaki as fodder to allude to action and adventure. The use of vivid allegory about indigenous North Americans in advertising was not unique to Lake Memphremagog. The technique was utilized frequently to make northern interior lakes seem exotic.<sup>65</sup>

The variety of language employed in advertising Lake Memphremagog informs us that there was no singular experience prescribed in a retreat to nature. The vacationer could cater to what they, whether it be relaxation, recreation, or adventure, through their activities and interactions with the landscape.

To conceptualize the development of tourism infrastructure on Lake Memphremagog, it helps to think about a temporal sequence of layers, starting with infrastructure for only the wealthiest classes, and increasing in accessibility over time. Beginning with grand estates in the antebellum years, and eventually giving way to luxury hotels and smaller cottages, retreats on Lake Memphremagog slowly declined in scale, grandeur, and exclusivity as the years passed by.

The first generation of seasonal visitors to Lake Memphremagog were from the upper tiers of North Atlantic society. Many of their family names are recognizable even

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<sup>64</sup> “Brochure of Owl's Head Mountain House, Lake Memphremagog.”

<sup>65</sup> Wall, *The Nurture of Nature*.

today. Sir Hugh Allan, the titled Montreal shipping and banking magnate, purchased his home, Belmere, from another wealthy businessman in 1866. Sprawling and Euro-inspired in both architecture and landscaping of the grounds, “Belmere, as Allan’s summer estate, consisted of the main house (also known as the ‘big house’), boathouse, bathing house, two wharfs, gardener’s cottage, bowling alley, hermitage, farmhouse and other farm buildings.”<sup>66</sup> Local historian Jody Robinson described the fashion of such multifaceted estates as *villégiature*. She describes that, “The presence of wealthy summer tourists on Lake Memphremagog was part of a broader North American trend, most often termed *villégiature* in Quebec history. The word ‘*villégiature*,’ coming from the Italian *villeggiatura* and which lacks a suitable English equivalent, means to take a vacation in the country, at the ocean or in some other pleasurable location, for the purpose of relaxation.”<sup>67</sup> Another prominent Montrealer who established a camp on Memphremagog’s shores was Alexander Molson, of the famed Canadian beer empire, who bought a 165 farm in 1862. The fact that it was a farm, and not a forested parcel of land, is intriguing because it is evidence of the turnover of agricultural land for tourism during the era, when the previous industry became unsustainable. Molson’s estate, Fern Hill, was more agrarian in design than Belmere, and “consisted of the large country house, a boathouse, stables, farmhouse and barn. Specific to Fern Hill, an impressive orchard also made up part of the estate.”<sup>68</sup> Other notable estates established just before the dawn of the Gilded Age included Judge Charles Day’s Glenbrook in 1865, which was

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<sup>66</sup> Robinson, “The Architecture of *Villégiature* on Lake Memphremagog, 1860–1890.”

<sup>67</sup> Robinson, “The Architecture of *Villégiature* on Lake Memphremagog, 1860–1890.” P. 56

<sup>68</sup> Robinson, “The Architecture of *Villégiature* on Lake Memphremagog, 1860–1890.”



also a former farm parcel, and John Murray's Victorian-style Dunkeld. The names of these two latter estates both allude to Scottish municipalities, echoing the narrative used in advertising that Memphremagog was the 'Loch Lomond of America'.<sup>69</sup>

These named, landed estates were largely in place by the 1860s. In the decades that followed, grand hotels added another - different, but complementary - layer of tourist infrastructure on the landscape. Specifically in Newport and Magog, when luxury hotels arrived they brought in a new class of visitors: wealthy Americans who were upper middle class and could afford vacations, but not necessarily their own private estates. Despite their accessibility these resorts were still elegant, and they went above and beyond to provide their guests with an expected, manufactured 'wilderness' experience, by sponsoring activities and tours around the lake.<sup>70</sup>

The first hotel in the region had arrived in Georgeville as early as 1810, and came to be called the Camperdown.<sup>71</sup> Since the hotel predated the arrival of the railroad, it catered mostly to the stagecoach lines that stopped in Georgeville before taking the ferry across the Lake. But after the Boston & Maine and Connecticut & Passumpsic railroads came to the area, hotels that developed in the region began to cater more explicitly to a leisure market.

No hotel was more oriented towards nature (of a sort) than the Owl's Head Mountain House. Constructed in 1852 and set away from the villages at the base of Owl's

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<sup>69</sup> Burt, *Burt's Illustrated Guide of the Connecticut Valley*.

<sup>70</sup> "Brochure of Owl's Head Mountain House, Lake Memphremagog."

<sup>71</sup> Barbara K. Malloy, and Bea A. Nelson, *Around Lake Memphremagog*. (Portsmouth, NH: Arcadia Publishing, 2003)

Head Mountain, the Mountain House was described “looming up amid the trees and wild, dissevered rocks,’ the new hotel ‘looks like an eastern temple empowered in its sacred grove.’”<sup>72</sup> As it was set away from the village, the guest experience was intentionally focused on reaping the benefits of immersive nature. The property contained features and outbuildings that enabled guests to be constantly in or near to the outdoors, including “‘a reading room,’ ‘ample dining-room,’ ‘airy bedchambers, ... plus ‘a charming Chinese summer-house, looking from a rock, covered with fern and foliage, close by the landing’ .”<sup>73</sup> Not only did every room and outbuilding serve a specific purpose, but they all provided a unique set viewpoint from which visitors could observe the surrounding landscape. Each staged view was a tool for framing the guest experience. The description of the Mountain house as an “eastern temple,” and the existence of a “Chinese summer-house” are evidence of the hotel design employing ‘oriental’ allusion in order to craft mystique. The use of Asian style elements in architecture was quite common during this era particularly within *villégiature* style compounds and estates. Many of the Adirondack great camps had Japanese style tea houses, including President Calvin Coolidge's White Pine on Saranac Lake in New York.<sup>74</sup> Tea time itself was an indulgence wealthy vacationers brought with them from the city to the countryside. Tea was a light meal served in the late afternoon that was an important, and highly gendered,

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<sup>72</sup> Stanstead Journal, 12 July 1855. As cited in J.I. Little, “Scenic Tourism On the Northeastern Borderland: Lake Memphremagog’s Steamboat Excursions and Resort Hotels, 1850–1900.” *Journal of Historical Geography*. Vol 35, Is. 4, October 2009. P. 716-742 Accessed January 10, 2018 via. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305748808001217>

<sup>73</sup> Stanstead Journal, 12 July 1855. As cited in Little, “Scenic Tourism on the Northeastern Borderland.”

<sup>74</sup> Todd Moe, “President Coolidge slept here: stories from White Pine Camp's past.” North Country Public Radio. *Weekday Morning*, Aug 28, 2015. Accessed January 24, 2018.

social gathering.<sup>75</sup> Regardless of what was going on during a given day, tea was always on the schedule for Gilded Age American elites. The rest of a day could be filled with any number of interchangeable activities. Popular pastimes for Mountain House guests included hiking, caving, arts and crafts, and boating, which would be revolutionized by the introduction of steamers on Memphremagog<sup>76</sup>.

Tourists on Lake Memphremagog made the most of their time on the water by utilizing steamboats to travel and tour. The steamboats were both practical and pleasurable, as they connected southern lake communities like Newport to the northern Canadian townships of Magog and Sherbrooke, with stops at various hotels along the way. The first steamboat, the *Maid of the Mist*, launched from Georgeville in 1850.<sup>77</sup> In the following decades, the boat was joined by the *Mountain Maid* in 1850, the *Lady of the Lake* in 1867, the *Mountain Maid II* in 1878, and finally in 1909 the *Anthemis*. Additionally, individual estates would have their own fleet of smaller yachts for visitor use. The geography of Lake Memphremagog made it well suited for steamboats to thrive. Long and skinny, with the eastern and western shores only a mere half mile apart, boats opened up access to all parts of the lake. Through their introduction, steamboats shifted the center of lake life from the shores, to the center of the waters; vacation became about being on the lake in a passive capacity, not merely circumventing it.

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<sup>75</sup> Helen Z. Veit, "What Shall We Eat?: A Manual for Housekeepers, Comprising a Bill of Fare for Breakfast, Dinner, and Tea, for Every Day in the Year." In *Food in the Civil War Era: The North*. (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014) P.153-186.

<sup>76</sup> "Brochure of Owl's Head Mountain House, Lake Memphremagog."

<sup>77</sup> "Days of Steamboats." Derby Historical Society. Derby, Vermont. Digital Exhibit Accessed January 13, 2018 via <http://derbyhistoricalsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Days-of-the-steamboat.pdf>

In all the material that touted the glory of Memphremagog as a tourist destination, there was one critical disconnect. The wilderness in the region was not wild, nor untouched. Euro-descended settlers, and the Abenaki and Wabanaki before them, had been transforming nature for centuries before elite vacationers came in and labeled the landscape as wilderness. Now these prior groups' impacts on the land, for better or for worse, was being written out of the Memphremagog narrative. This systematic erasure of local voice makes interactions between Memphremagog area locals and the tourism industry difficult to track. Though the leisure industry helped lake communities by providing employment opportunities, it brought a non-local population in to the area that enforced its own ordering and values on the landscape. The arrival of the tourism sector buried the existence of land use practices that did not fit into the idealized 'wilderness' narrative. A fractured, resource depleted landscape was unacceptable, so the history was conveniently rewritten.

### Chapter 3: The Reflection

*"Nature, in the common sense, refers to essences unchanged by man; space, the air, the river, the leaf"*

-Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (1835)

Retreating to New England summer resorts inspired many vacationers to create. Utilizing prose and paint, visitors produced souvenirs of the 'pleasure periphery'.<sup>78</sup> Through the lens of these primary sources, we can interpret how summer visitors framed the landscape. The layers of industry and elements of settlement they chose to include, or not include, inform us about where individuals placed value. While these collective works were reflections of an experience, they were also testaments to the prevailing romantic notion of Transcendentalism. Gilded Age writers and artists were intimately tied to the transcendental movement, and thus reflected ideals of the philosophy in their work. As it became popular, Lake Memphremagog served as a muse for many such creators. By using their productions as artifacts, we can attempt to answer a timely question: beyond the cultural suitability, was there any recognition of the inherent "ecological" value of the region? Was the value in these places recognized as the supposed lack of human influence on them, or did human interference not matter?

Though they wrote the majority of their works in the half century before the start of the Gilded Age, Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau had a tangible impact on the subsequent wilderness tourism movement because they pioneered the

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<sup>78</sup> Stephen J. Hornsby, "The Gilded Age and the Making of Bar Harbor." *Geographical Review* 83, no. 4 (1993): 455-68. doi:10.2307/215826.

concept of human betterment through retreat to nature. Both men were Massachusetts-born, and they used the social context of a rapidly industrializing New England as fodder for writing. Both men were leaders of the Transcendentalism movement, which was a radical religious movement that shunned the rigidity of New England churches, and instead focused on the dual domains of nature and the soul. Transcendentalist scholars thought true moral order was modelled in the natural world, and reflected this in their writings.<sup>79</sup>

Cities represented everything Transcendentalist writers believed was corrupting society. The growth of industry, and the subsequent amassing of wealth (and greed) by urban elites was exactly what transcendentalist nature writers were pushing back against. As Albert J. von Frank, a biographer of Emerson described it, “Wealth, power, and prestige seemed everywhere the seductive fruit of human exploitation, while artists and the moral heroes of the reform movements were voices crying in the wilderness.”<sup>80</sup> For Emerson and Thoreau, their voices cried over the perceived loss of moral consciousness that came with the industrial revolution and urbanization (events that separated humans farther from the land). Transcendentalists thought that observing nature could correct fogged consciousness, because in wilderness, and in all its life forms and features, there was ‘a map of the mind’, which provided “insight into the miraculous fullness and unity of life.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Albert J. Von Frank, “Ralph Waldo Emerson.” *The American Renaissance in New England*. Dictionary of Literary Biography, Vol. 223, Series 2. Ed. Wesley T. Mott. (Detroit: The Gale Group, 2000) P. 110

<sup>80</sup> Von Frank, “Ralph Waldo Emerson.” P. 116.

<sup>81</sup> Von Frank, “Ralph Waldo Emerson.” P.110.

Though the Transcendentalist movement predates the Gilded Age, I felt it was important to mention as it provides context as to what drove upper class tourists out of the cities and periodically into nature. Henry David Thoreau provided a model for retreat in *Walden* (1854), in which he reflects on time spent in solitude at his lakeside cabin in Massachusetts. The book includes the famous line “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.”<sup>82</sup> This delibracy, authenticity, and sensation of freedom away from the constraints of society (as Emerson describes it, “want and woe which torture us”), succinctly describes the feeling that later Gilded Age vacationers were chasing when they visited Lake Memphremagog.

After exploring the early origins of this distinct style of nature writing, I was interested in seeing what works about Lake Memphremagog specifically were published during the Gilded Age. What I discovered was a body of work that was highly romantic and almost mystical. Like the writings of the earlier Transcendental New England masters, Gilded Age authors employing the setting of Lake Memphremagog also focused on the experience of man (always a man) in nature, and how it enriched him as an individual.

Robert Stanley Weir, a Montreal-based judge and poet whose most notable work was the English language lyrics to the Canadian National Anthem, owned an estate on Lake Memphremagog called Cedarhurst.<sup>83</sup> While here Weir composed not only the

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<sup>82</sup> Henry David Thoreau, *Walden, or, Life in the woods*. (London: J.M. Dent, 1854).

<sup>83</sup> Matthew Farfan, “‘Oh Canada’: Our Native Townships Song.” *Townships Heritage Web Magazine*. 2017. Accessed March 1, 2018. <http://townshipsheritage.com/article/o-canada-our-native-townships-song>

English lyrics to “O Canada,” but also dozens of poems that conveyed the mysticism and spirit of being in camp at the lake. One such work is the aptly titled “Lake Memphremagog”:

O Memphremagog sea diminutive!  
The beauty of the Trossachs hides with thee,  
Although not thine the highland wizardry.  
Nor doth the dweller by thy shores receive  
The solemn thrill Gennesaret doth give;  
Nor yet the subtle charm that ever breaks  
From the old glory of Italian lakes  
And Windermere, where Wordsworth still doth live.

But thou hast spell for peace that is thine own.  
Long long ago the untamed Iroquois  
Mounting Owl's Head or Elephantis, saw  
Thy shining beauty in the distance lone.  
His heart stirred strangely as entranced, he stood:  
Grew soft awhile, -- forgot its thirst for blood.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Robert Stanley Weir, “Lake Memphremagog.” *Poems, Early and Late*. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1922)



This glowing tribute to the lake is notable for a few key elements. The first is the opening stanzas reference to the Scottish Trossachs and the biblical seaside city of Gennesaret, and invoking of the poetry of famed nature commentator William Wordsworth. Though these allusions crisscross the globe, united they form Weirs attempt to elevate Memphremagog into an exclusive club of globally renowned lakes. The passage also offers an allusion to the upper class ideal of the ‘Grand Tour’, which was the eighteenth and nineteenth century practice of young men from aristocratic families venturing abroad to see the world and receive a classical education in the process.<sup>85</sup> Weir’s comparison of Memphremagog to *multiple* international landmarks asserts that the intended audience is undoubtedly upper class. Second, the “spell for peace” as described in the latter stanza is Weirs answer to Transcendentalism. The effect that nature has, even upon the “savage” Iroquois, simply because of the striking beauty of the scene, reiterates the idea that the right landscape can heal an individual, and reverse their moral corruption.

Another scholar who commented specifically on Memphremagog was the American naturalist John Burroughs. A friend of Emerson and Walt Whitman, Burroughs became famous for publishing dozens of essays and guidebooks about nature, written in a distinct literary style.<sup>86</sup> In 1879, Burroughs published *Locusts and Wild Honey*, an anthology reflecting upon various travels through the wilderness of the Eastern Seaboard.

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<sup>85</sup> Jean Sorabella, “The Grand Tour.” *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Last Modified October 2003. Accessed March 1, 2018. [https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/grtr/hd\\_grtr.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/grtr/hd_grtr.htm)

<sup>86</sup> Edward Renehan, *John Burroughs: An American Naturalist*. (Delmar, New York: Black Dome Press, 1998)

Speaking to the name *Locusts and Wild Honey*, in the beginning of the book Burroughs writes, “If the name carries with it a suggestion of the wild and delectable in nature, of the free and ungarnered harvests which the wilderness everywhere affords to the observing eye and ear, it will prove sufficiently explicit for my purpose.”<sup>87</sup> The analogy of a *harvest* provided to an individual by the wilderness is poetically fitting when talking about recreational tourism.

In *Locusts and Wild Honey*, Burroughs also writes about his reaction to seeing Lake Memphremagog for the first time. He recalls,

The traveler opens his eyes a little wider when he reaches Lake Memphremagog, especially if he have the luck to see it under such a sunset as we did, its burnished surface glowing like molten gold. This lake is an immense trough that accommodates both sides of the fence, though by far the larger and longer part of it is in Canada. Its western shore is bold and picturesque, being skirted by a detachment of the Green Mountains, the main range of which is seen careering along the horizon far to the southwest; to the east and north, whither the railroad takes you, the country is flat and monotonous.<sup>88</sup>

Though speaking in more practical terms than other writers, Burroughs’s passage nonetheless exalts the landscape of the region, and interestingly includes reference to the

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<sup>87</sup> John Burroughs, *Locusts and Wild Honey*. (Edinburgh: David Douglas, Castle Street, 1884) P.4

<sup>88</sup> Burroughs, *Locusts and Wild Honey*.

railroad. Burroughs describes both the landscape and a specific *moment* of experience in this excerpt. This bilateral lauding is notable because though Burroughs is traveling a common train route, like many before and him and surely after, a factor in his joy is the *serendipity*, the “luck” as he describes it, in the alignment of time and place. This combination of a prescribed, well-traveled route and a spontaneous moment offers a pure example of the framing of wilderness, and the appeal that a seemingly staged experience could have. Even walking a trail that has been traversed by thousands can still provide joy to an individual when they summit and discover the view for themselves.

While tourists to New England summer resorts might have believed that they wanted wilderness preservation measures, in truth it was a certain type of accessible, groomed nature that they desired to preserve. Their ideal version of wilderness had carriage roads and scenic overlooks, and was located at a convenient distance from a railroad station. This was a type of nature where humans had a role not of the dominating industrial destroyer, but of the romantic, pensive stroller. The role of humans in this ideal nature was thus still selfish and inherently anthropocentric. Had true conservation been the ultimate goal, wild landscapes would be messy and inaccessible; perhaps there would be no role for humans in them at all.

On that note, it's important to consider the difference between the ideals of conservation and preservation. Conservation is the idea that humans have a responsibility/opportunity to be stewards of the land, to manage and take from it the tools

and resources to build a civilization<sup>89</sup>. Preservation, more aligned with the philosophies of John Muir, argues that wild spaces have value in themselves, not for the services or material they can provide to humans; thus preservation is a more hands off approach.<sup>90</sup> The value Gilded Age tourists saw in Memphremagog was very firmly *not* in the environment itself, but rather in the interactions and experiences that being in the settings made possible. These individuals could have cared less what was happening ecologically to the forest or lake, so long did it not begin to detract from their idyllic retreat.

One of the only voices from the time period that spoke honestly about the impacts of environmental destruction was that of Vermonter George Perkins Marsh. Though Marsh was originally from Woodstock, one hundred and fifteen miles south of Lake Memphremagog, he had traveled throughout the state extensively as both a scholar and a member of the Vermont Congressional Delegation.<sup>91</sup> A diplomat, academic, and lifelong forester, Marsh published his pivotal text *Man and Nature* in 1864. The anthology is divided into five parts, each chronicling a component of the environment that has been changed by human interference. ‘Woods’ and ‘Waters’ are two of the elements Marsh covers. The text concludes with a chapter titled “Projected or Possible Geographical Changes by Man,” a groundbreaking discussion of the possible fate of the American landscape if industry moves forward at its then rate.<sup>92</sup> Citing cases of recorded

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<sup>89</sup> Ben A. Minteer, and Stephen J. Pyne, *After Preservation: Saving American Nature in the Age of Humans*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015)

<sup>90</sup> Minteer and Pyne, *After Preservation: Saving American Nature in the Age of Humans*.

<sup>91</sup> Gregory T. Garvey, "The Civic Intent of George Perkins Marsh's Anthrocentric Environmentalism." *The New England Quarterly* 82, no. 1 (2009): 80-111. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20474708>.

<sup>92</sup> Marsh, *Man and Nature*.

environmental destruction by man throughout history, Marsh issued a sincere and well-founded warning to mankind:

Apart from the hostile influence of man, the organic and the inorganic world are ... bound together by such mutual relations and adaptations secure, if not the absolute permanence and equilibrium of both ... at least a very slow and gradual succession of changes in those conditions. But man is everywhere a disturbing agent. Wherever he plants his foot, the harmonies of nature are turned to discords.<sup>93</sup>

In this passage, Marsh counters the theological idea of human dominion over nature (that extractive industry had been mirroring) by inserting man in the environmental narrative, as a ‘disturbing agent’, no less. He theorizes that man has gone the opposite direction from a ‘keeper of the earth’ and its living things, to a *destroyer* of it. Though Marsh’s words are commonly praised today, his then radical warning fit well with the revolutionary transcendental texts that attempt to ground man on the earth, rather than ruling above it.

Writing was not the only medium that pivoted to focus on nature during the mid-nineteenth century. American art also depicted landscapes through a new lens, invoking the same wild romanticism that literature utilized. The leaders of this movement were the artists of the Hudson River School. The style they developed, which uses landscape and

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<sup>93</sup> Marsh, *Man and Nature*.

light to convey the glory and presence of the divine in nature, complimented Transcendentalism and became the national standard for landscape art.<sup>94</sup> The Hudson River School style is a combination of romantic and nation-building ideas. Coinciding with the centennial of America, the works celebrated American power through highlighting the nation's unique lands. Like the Transcendentalist writers, the artists of the school intimately tied nature to divinity. Professor of History at Virginia Technical University Mark Barrow, writing in his presentation titled *The Hudson River School: Nationalism, Romanticism, and the Celebration of the American Landscape*, speaks to the way Hudson River School artists romantically portrayed the biblical theory of dominionism in their landscapes. Barrow contends that in the era of American nation building and expansion

Wilderness was something to be quickly civilized, brought under human control in the name of progress. In associating nature with divinity, valuing the sublime, and exalting a life close to nature, the Romantics provided an alternative framework through which to see and appreciate the natural world.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Tricia Cusack, "The Chosen People: The Hudson River School and the construction of American Identity," *Riverscapes and National Identities*, Chapter 2. (Syracuse University Press, 2010) P. 19-56

<sup>95</sup> Mark V. Barrows Jr., "The Hudson River School: Nationalism, Romanticism, and the Celebration of the American Landscape." Presentation for *History 3144: American Environmental History*. Virginia Technical University, Department of History. Last updated January 18, 2010. Accessed February 27, 2018. <http://www.history.vt.edu/Barrow/Hist3144/readings/hudsonriver/>

Ironically, despite their theological connotations, paintings like those the Hudson River School produced began serving as advertisements during the Gilded Age, educating the predominantly urban public in the Northeast about what American landscape treasures existed farther afield. Acting as promotional material among the upper tiers of society, paintings, etchings, and later photographs circulated in home magazines and journals, inspiring individual's desires to see American landscape treasures for themselves. The distribution of these awe inspiring images was key in sparking the early public land preservation movement, which would culminate in the formation of the first National Parks.<sup>96</sup>

Artists that visited Lake Memphremagog during the early Gilded Age used the same elements of romanticism and allusion to the divine in their works, which notably rarely included humans. When humans were present, they were dwarfed by the landscape, suggesting belief in the superior power of nature over society. Some notable artists that painted Memphremagog over the years included W.H. Bartlett, Currier and Ives, John A. Fraser, and Cornelius Krieghoff. From this collection I have chosen three different pieces to analyze. Each represents a differing ideal of nature.

The first work (Figure 1) is "Owl's Head and Skinner's Cove, Lake Memphremagog" (1859), by Cornelius Krieghoff.<sup>97</sup> Of the pieces I have chosen for this analysis, Krieghoff's work most closely resembles the style of the Hudson River School.

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<sup>96</sup> Richard W. Sellars, *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009)

<sup>97</sup> Cornelius Krieghoff, *Owl's Head and Skinner's Cove, Lake Memphremagog*, 1859. Oil on Canvas, 43.3 x 63.8 cm. Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada. Accessed January 24, 2018. <https://www.gallery.ca/collection/artwork/owls-head-and-skinners-cove-lake-memphremagog>

With his dramatic use of light and shading, Krieghoff casts a powerful and ominous feel over his painting. The two men in the rowboat seem helpless riding the massive (and unrealistic for Memphremagog) waves. With the boat seemingly heading towards the darkness, there is a sense of danger about the scene. Nature is the all-powerful and ruling force in Krieghoff's work, with humans diminished and at the mercy of the environment.

Figure 2, "View From Sugar Loaf Looking North toward Lake Memphremagog" (1869) by W. S. Hunter<sup>98</sup>, puts a cartoonish spin on the concept of ordering nature. Hunter's engraving offers visual breadcrumbs that support the notion of framing the wilderness as discussed in the previous chapter. The etching itself features a frame, with illustrations of well-dressed hikers looking down from a mountaintop onto a peaceful lake scene. The interior image of the lake has rounded corners, as if it truly were a looking glass. The initial mountain top scenery seems wild, but as the background slopes towards the lake, the scene becomes more domestic. Steamers are pictured navigating the lake, and on the distant shore a quaint village can be seen. The scene shows how within a destination nature can function as a gradient, with some areas appearing more or less 'wild'.

The final work (Figure 3) is "Mount Elephantis and Owl's Head from across Lake Memphremagog" (1869) by John A. Fraser.<sup>99</sup> The overall feel of the painting is pastoral

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<sup>98</sup> W.S. Hunter Jr., DeVolpi and Scowen, *Eastern Townships, A Pictorial Record*, plate 44. Cited in Little, "Scenic Tourism on the Northeastern Borderland: Lake Memphremagog's Steamboat Excursions and Resort Hotels, 1850–1900."

<sup>99</sup> John A. Fraser, *Mount Elephantis and Owl's Head from across Lake Memphremagog*, 1869. Watercolor and gouache on wove paper, 25.8 x 49.6 cm. Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada. Accessed January 24, 2018. <https://www.gallery.ca/collection/artwork/mount-elephantis-and-owls-head-from-across-lake-memphremagog>



idyllicism. The colors and lighting suggest a pleasant late summer or early fall day.

Though the lake is visible on the horizon, there is virtually no trace of human life. That is of course, unless you consider the subtle traces of human intervention, such as a cleared hillside, a path, or a fallen log that seems it could be a bench. The landscape is the star of the work, but the framing is important to consider. Fraser paints from a hillside, gazing down towards Lake Memphremagog, placing the water at the heart of the composition, and making a statement about its superior value. The Memphremagog landscape depicted in Fraser's piece is comfortable and bright.

These pieces are united by their dramatic depiction of landscape, and the reduced role of humans as actors in the scenes. These artistic choices draw parallels to the literary ones of authors during the same period, and reinforce the many distanced lens that nature was viewed through, the concept of framing a prescribed tourist experience, and a changing arc of what society valued in nature over time. These works depict iterations of nature free from the smog and noise of the railroad that would have brought these artists to Lake Memphremagog. The pieces reflect appreciation for spaces that *seem* minimally influenced by humans, whether or not that it truly the case.

The landscapes that these creators were inspired by were in fact curated by decades of settlement, extraction, and redesign. While they saw in nature a foil to the artifice of urban industry and wealth, their visions of nature were often lacking the reality of human presence. Perhaps this was a result of simply where they chose to frame their works, or perhaps it was deliberate erasure. Whether it be depicting pastoral imagery, or lamenting of the pure morality of nature, artists and writers in Gilded Age New England

failed to acknowledge that it was technology and industrial development that had brought them to the “pleasure periphery.”<sup>100</sup> The pure experience these scholars believed they were having was not entirely artificial, but rather curated. That being said, the manner in which these artists exalted the landscape, and chose to erase the negative aspects of human overlay, suggests a desire to maintain nature in this staged form. Conservation sentiment was alluded to, but not for ecology's sake, or even to return to primary stage forest. There was still order and comfort in vacationland, and these works reflected that truth.

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<sup>100</sup> Hornsby, "The Gilded Age and the Making of Bar Harbor."

## Chapter 4: The Reordering

*"You may travel "in English" from Boston on the train we have named, but when you awake in the morning you are on the borders of the Queen's Dominions, and a foreign tongue disputes precedence with your own. You are but little farther from home than if you had gone to Saratoga or Lake George; but how different are the shores of Lake Memphremagog!"*

-F.G. Mather, *A Summer at "Magog" Lake* (1883)

Examining modern maps of Lake Memphremagog, the bolded international border is front and center. For example, on the U.S. Geological Survey's *National Map* the northern border is not only bolded, but everything above it is blank, save for a few faint topographical lines.<sup>101</sup> While physical border infrastructure does not cross over the lake's surface, maps enforce the line clearly, superimposing a presence that does not match the in-person reality. In the past two decades, the scale and rigor of the American border has increased, due to the threat of international terrorism.<sup>102</sup> But the American/Canadian border has not always been as tangible and looming. My intention for this chapter is to consider how Lake Memphremagog communities were impacted by the presence of the international border during the transformational Gilded Age. I will be specifically examining how the American communities on the southern end of the lake treated the presence of Canada to the North. My goal is to determine whether the border was an asset, marketed and ventured across for enjoyment, or a liability that complicated

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<sup>101</sup> U.S. Geological Survey. "The National Map." 2017. 3DEP products and services: The National Map, 3D Elevation Program Web page, accessed March 12th, 2018.  
[https://nationalmap.gov/3DEP/3dep\\_prodserv.html](https://nationalmap.gov/3DEP/3dep_prodserv.html).

<sup>102</sup> Derek Lundy, "Stanstead: A Town on the Border." Text. *Canadian Geographic*. June 16, 2016.  
<https://www.canadiangeographic.ca/article/stanstead-town-border>.

community affairs and daily life. I will also be looking at how the American lakeside communities conceptualized the environment. Was nature valued by these communities and if so, was the value economic, aesthetic, or something else? Was Lake Memphremagog in its lengthened totality ‘their’ landscape, or just the southern portion: where did the communities recognize the cultural and natural bounds of their surrounding environment?

The story of the northern American border begins not in New England, but an entire ocean away: in Paris, during the post-revolutionary peace conference of 1783.<sup>103</sup> Following a melee of rejected proposals put forth by representatives from both the United States and Great Britain, delegates finally compromised on a plan that “combined historic borders and what were hoped were workable natural frontiers.”<sup>104</sup> The plan roughly maintained existing northern New England borders, and established the Mississippi River as the far western cutoff of the new American nation. After the War of 1812, the border was reconfirmed to abide by these guidelines under the terms of the Treaty of Ghent. However, bounding of the physical border was complicated by inaccuracies in primitive maps and patterns of settlement with discordant loyalties. The section of border my research is concerned with, between the State of Vermont and the Province of Quebec, was agreed under these terms to be the 45th Parallel.

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<sup>103</sup> Francis M. Carroll, *A Good and Wise Measure: The Search for the Canadian-American Boundary, 1783-1842*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016)

<sup>104</sup> Carroll, *A Good and Wise Measure*, P. 8.

Marking a perpendicular, straight border on a landscape that was anything but proved immensely difficult for the surveyors who set out to do so.<sup>105</sup> In a competitive and humorous fashion, the United States and Great Britain (as Canada was still then merely a collection of British colonies) sent delegations that would combine forces and together complete the task. Assembling matching teams of astronomers, mathematicians, and military men, the party set out in July, 1817 from the St. Croix River moving eastward to mark the border. Technological mistakes, lost equipment, and sloppy workmanship from an inebriated surveying crew, caused the marks to be at times 4,000 feet from the true 45th parallel.<sup>106</sup> While the surveyors later realized their mistakes, the respective governments choose to accept the surveyed line as the border.

The result of the confusing laying of the border was that as European-descended settlers moved into the region, from all geographic directions, it was not always clear in which country an individual was staking a claim in. There are accounts of British loyalists angrily finding out their land was on the American side of the border, as well as tales of mill owners happily finding out their supposedly American property was under British jurisdiction.<sup>107</sup> But because the Memphremagog region remained profoundly rural for the first half of the nineteenth century, with few settlers and only a smattering of villages, border disputes initially remained at a minimum. Finally, in 1842, the Webster-Ashburton Treaty set the true border as the falsely surveyed, crooked semblance of the

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<sup>105</sup> Carroll, *A Good and Wise Measure*, P. 70.

<sup>106</sup> Carroll, *A Good and Wise Measure*, P. 74.

<sup>107</sup> Lundy, "Stanstead: A Town on the Border."

45th parallel.<sup>108</sup> In 2014, as part of their exhibit titled “The United Divide: A Linear Portrait of the USA/ Canada Border,” researchers from the nonprofit Center for Land Use Interpretation followed the northern border across Vermont. What they found was a weaving line with levels of security that varied by the mile. At times the border was highly militarized, complete with crossing stations and armed border patrol, but in other sections there was no trace of a border, and forests and small lakes sat on a virtually transparent boundary that had seemingly no bearing on them. Examining the progression of border security through the last century and a half allows us to understand why conditions along the boundary fluctuate depending on location, though the line appears firmly drawn on maps.<sup>109</sup>

Despite the development of railroads through the Memphremagog region, and the birth of the resort tourism economy that subsequently followed, interactions between American communities on the southern end of Lake Memphremagog and their northern Canadian neighbors were at times politically strained, but minimal and professional.<sup>110</sup> Canada, a territory of Great Britain until 1867, was at times threatened by a rapidly growing Vermont population with deeply rooted republican beliefs. Conversely, Vermont at times was debated as a possible conquest for annexation by Canada.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Matthew Farfan, *The Vermont-Quebec Border: Life on the Line*. (Mount Pleasant, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2009) P. 3

<sup>109</sup> The Center for Land Use and Interpretation. “The 45th Parallel.” *United Divide: A Linear Portrait of the USA/ Canada Border* (Los Angeles: CLUI, 2014) Accessed January 19, 2018. <http://www.clui.org/section/united-divide-a-linear-portrait-usacanada-border-2>

<sup>110</sup> Edward Brynn, “Vermont and the British Emporium, 1765-1865.” *Vermont History* 45, no.1, 1977. P. 5-30

<sup>111</sup> Brynn, “Vermont and the British Emporium, 1765-1865” P. 16.

The terse nature of the relationship is present in Vermont newspaper clippings from the second half of the nineteenth century. According to local accounts, the border disrupted daily life by facilitating crime. While fantastical tales of bootlegging and smuggling are blown exorbitantly out of proportion, theft and financial crimes were aided by the international division of police. One curious account from the St. Albans register tells of a man who stole a team of horses and alluded police by attempting to sell them in Newport, across the American border<sup>112</sup>; more serious crimes included money laundering and the creation of fraudulent stocks. Aside from crime, accusations of disease spread south from Canada frequently appeared in the paper, though the validity of these accounts can be questioned.<sup>113</sup>

While the impacts of these petty crimes were menial, the Vermont/ Canadian border was also the setting of more serious skirmishes, which were the results of the boiling over of larger movements that threatened the security of both countries. In 1864 during the height of the Civil War, a band of Confederate soldiers crossed the border and raided the town of St. Albans, Vermont, robbing multiple banks and killing a bystander in the process.<sup>114</sup> The party had been sheltered north of the border by sympathetic Canadians, and following an investigation, the Union restricted border access and began monitoring crossings. The most detrimental repercussion to follow the St. Albans Raid

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<sup>112</sup> "Looking For A Thief. Man Stole a Team In Canada and Eluded Customs Officials." *St. Albans Daily Messenger*. St.Albans, Vermont. July 12, 1900: 1. Readex.

<sup>113</sup> "Vermont News." *St. Albans Daily Messenger*. St.Albans, Vermont. February 10, 1880: 3. Readex.

<sup>114</sup> Carman Cumming, "Fire in the Rear." *Devil's Game: The Civil War Intrigues of Charles A. Dunham*, Chapter 6. (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004) P. 95-122.

was the Union's withdrawal of the Reciprocity Agreement, which ensured free trade across the border.<sup>115</sup>

Following the Civil War, a group called the Fenian Brotherhood had been recruiting former Union soldiers to join their ranks. The Fenians were Irish descendants whose ultimate goal was to take their mother country back from the controlling British. The Irish diaspora in America saw opportunity in the transparent northern border, and sought to use a takeover of Canada as a political bargaining chip.<sup>116</sup> Beginning in the late 1860, Fenian bands attempted several raids of Lower Canada, with the hope of eventual invasion. Though the Fenians were unsuccessful in achieving this goal, their raids drew international attention to the northern border, especially the section shared between Vermont and Quebec. The raids were perhaps the first instance when border security, and local feelings of national identity, were called into question in the once united Memphremagog valley.

Despite any tensions caused by cross-border crime, Vermont and Canada were firmly linked together through bilateral trade since the time both areas were colonized (though, it should be noted that trade in the region between different cultural communities extends back into to native North Americans and later French fur traders). While industry on the Canadian shores of Lake Memphremagog closely mirrored that of Vermont, the two economies were most firmly united by the timber trade.<sup>117</sup> In 1807, following President Jefferson's embargo on trade, the northern border became a black

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<sup>115</sup> Desmond Morton, *A Short History of Canada*. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2006) P.84.

<sup>116</sup> Morton, *A Short History of Canada*, P. 91-101.

<sup>117</sup> Wynn, *Timber Colony*.



market portal for the smuggling of American goods, particularly lumber, into Canada.<sup>118</sup> At the time, America had the advantage of a larger labor force and plenty of uncut Appalachian forest. However, the direction of the flow of timber resources would reverse by the second half of the nineteenth century, as American lumber reserves had been depleted and demand for the construction of new infrastructure had rapidly increased.

News reports from Newport, Vermont in 1886 noted this change, and commented on the region's attention to trade decisions in Washington, declaring, "The proposed imposition by Congress of a duty of \$12 on every thousand feet of lumber imported from Canada has had a very stimulating effect on the article for the past week or two."<sup>119</sup> How two communities in such close proximity could have their commercial interactions impacted by a policy decision made hundreds of miles away is strong evidence of the increased regulating role of the Vermont/Quebec border by the height of the Gilded Age. So intertwined were the economies of the two nations that in 1887 a representative of the Canadian government went to Washington to appeal to the American Secretary of State against domestic tariffs. The local *St. Albans Messenger* reported on the meeting, detailing that in the conversation it was said

Canada paid more money into the United States last year than the United States paid into Canada for the same purpose...The producing power of the United States

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<sup>118</sup> Jeffrey A. Frankel, "The 1807-1809 Embargo Against Great Britain." *The Journal of Economic History* 42, no. 2 (1982) P. 294.

<sup>119</sup> "Newport Notanda." *Argus and Patriot*. (Montpelier, Vermont) XXXVI, no. 28, June 9, 1886: 2.

is greater than the producing power of Canada. Our markets are better stocked than theirs.<sup>120</sup>

If the international border impeded or complicated some types of economic development, it actually enhanced others. It offered a marketing angle that set Memphremagog apart from other summer resorts of New England. The appeal of the border was twofold. On the one hand, the close proximity of Canada afforded ample opportunity for unique day trips, by both steamboat and train. Conversely, there was an exoticism that came with visiting an “international” region. The northern border seemed mysterious and alluring. It was an advantage that Gilded Age advertisers milked, and their modern counterparts continue to do so. The irony was that much of this advertising was promoting the town of Newport, Vermont. Located at the far southern end of Lake Memphremagog, Newport is a full ten miles from the Canadian border.<sup>121</sup>

Despite this fairly significant distance, advertisers and visitors took the border narrative and ran with it. Visiting author Fredric G. Mather said he could feel the atmosphere shift when he stepped off the train in Newport. Writing in the magazine *The Continental* in 1883, Mather declared,

You may travel ‘in English’ from Boston on the train we have named, but when you awake in the morning you are on the borders of the Queen's Dominions, and a

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<sup>120</sup> "The United States and Canada." *St. Albans Messenger* (St. Albans, Vermont). June 9, 1887: 2. Accessed January 18, 2018. Readex.

<sup>121</sup> Google Maps. “Lake Memphremagog.” Aerial, 2018. Accessed March 3, 2018. <https://goo.gl/nmMGcu>

foreign tongue disputes precedence with your own. You are but little farther from home than if you had gone to Saratoga or Lake George; but how different are the shores of Lake Memphremagog!<sup>122</sup>

Puzzlingly, this passage references both the British and French heritage of Canada, implying that the ‘international’ appeal of the area was multifaceted.

In addition to language, the physical geography of the lake (aided by folklore), reinforced the mystique of the border. Many commented on the visibility of nearby Canadian mountains at any given moment, and others remarked about the striking rocky caves along the lake, which had come to be associated with smuggling. Travel writer C.C. Alice excitedly recalled a visit to noted Skinner’s Cave, supposed home of a notorious bootlegger, in 1866, writing,

It is about ten feet wide at the entrance and fifteen feet high, so that he could and did row his boat inside with all ease. He came to grief however, in the end; and some poet had immortalized the event, closing thus:

*’Twas needless to say, In this latter day, ’Twas the smuggler’s bones in the cave that lay, All I’ve to add is, the bones in a grave Were placed, and the cavern is called Skinner’s Cave.*<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Mather, “A Summer at ‘Magog’ Lake.”

<sup>123</sup> C. C. Alice, “On the Wing.” *The Independent ...Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* (1848-1921), 18, 1. August 16, 1866. Accessed March 2, 2018 <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.bucknell.edu/docview/90054593?accountid=9784>

Whether in the air, in the land, or in the general spirit of the place, visitors were in agreement that the presence of the international border loaned the entire Memphremagog region a certain *je ne sais quoi*. But whether this appeal was markedly French or English was debatable. Rather, writers seemed to muddle the (very) different cultures of French and English Canada together, finding national ground through building a brand that was international, but focused on physical wilderness. One visitor to the Memphremagog region in 1891 referred to the entirety of Lake Memphremagog as Canadian. Defending their choice of words, the visitor wrote, “I call it Canadian because Canada is fortunate enough to possess within its borders the lion's share of this beautiful body of water, including the mountains and the principal islands, and because the social atmosphere of the lake is Canadian.”<sup>124</sup> Though the visitor does not elaborate on what a Canadian “social atmosphere” entails, one can assume it differs significantly from what this author deemed “American” standard the time. Through this lens, Canada itself is reduced to pure acquiescent scenery; the country is transformed into something exotic and quaint, to be gazed upon with no sense of involvement or investment.

No two communities in the Memphremagog region share a closer and more complicated border history than the towns of Derby Line, Vermont and Stanstead, Quebec. From a street level perspective, the downtown areas appear to be one, with

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<sup>124</sup> “The Spectator.” *Christian Union*. (1870-1893), 44, 403. August 29, 1891. Accessed February 12, 2018 <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.bucknell.edu/docview/137083409?accountid=9784>

buildings and streets intersecting an invisible border. From my earliest memories of visiting Derby Line, I can remember jumping near a granite fence post, thrilled by the prospect of having one foot in either country. In recent years border security has increased because of the threat of terrorism, and the unique challenge of dividing a community that truly supersedes the international boundary has emerged. Despite being divided by the border, the two communities have a storied and strong joint past. They truly evolved and acted as one, particularly during the early era of the railroad. Traces of the communities shared history are evident in the infrastructure and architecture to this day. At one point, the communities shared a train station, then called the Derby Line & Rock Island Station.<sup>125</sup> Historian Matthew Farfan describes the linkage in his book *The Vermont-Quebec Border: Life on the Line*:

The village shares a water system, sewers, church services, sports facilities, and a library and opera house with Stanstead, Quebec. Several homes actually straddle the boundary...Cooperation and a sense of community are cherished by the residents of villages like these. These people see the border as a minor obstacle, a necessary inconvenience. Their profoundest wish is that it not become such a nuisance that it alienates communities that have coexisted peacefully on opposite sides of the line for over two centuries.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> “Derby Line Street Scenes.” *Derby Line Historical Society*. 2017. Accessed February 10, 2018. <http://derbyhistoricalsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Derby-Line-street-scenes.pdf>

<sup>126</sup> Farfan, *The Vermont-Quebec Border: Life on the Line*.

Though Farfan is referring to present-day Derby Line/ Stanstead, his comments on shared public entities and infrastructure are noteworthy because they are relics of a time in which such collaboration was possible. These shared public institutions and infrastructure remain as testaments to this bygone era. The Library and Opera House he is referring to is the Haskell Free Library and Opera House, a community institution that was constructed in 1901, “to provide the border communities with a centre for learning and cultural enrichment.”<sup>127</sup> Intentionally built straddling the border, the Haskell was the passion project of a wealthy widow who wanted to commemorate the connection of Stansted and Derby Line, and it remains today a testament to their continual collaboration, which has been complicated by polarizing border politics.

Inhabitants of the area likely never imagined the border would become as *physical* and commanding as it has today. Derek Lundy, writing for *Canadian Geographic*, pondered the past in a 2010 piece on Stanstead. Reflecting on the layout of the towns, Lundy notes:

The boundary is always butting in, getting in the way. But for long after the towns were founded in the late 1700s, the boundary line was meaningless. Roads crossed it with their own commonsensical logic. Houses were built right on top of the boundary — a family might cook dinner in the United States and eat it in Canada. River mills were set up so that they straddled the line, allowing people

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<sup>127</sup> Matthew Farfan, “The Haskell Free Library and Opera House: A Century of History on the Canada-U.S. Border.” *Townships Heritage Web Magazine*, 2017. Accessed February 8, 2018. <http://townshipsheritage.com/exhibit/haskell-free-library-and-opera-house-century-history>

from both sides to use them....If you'd wanted to give future border security guards nightmares, the whole place could not have been set up any better.<sup>128</sup>

Regardless of the current status of the border, the communities of Stansted and Derby Line stand as memorials to what was once a collaborative, environmentally linked, international crossroads. Though it lies directly on the shore of Lake Memphremagog, Newport seems much more distanced from Canada. The lake as a natural feature appears to reinforce the border in ways that land-based communities do not.

Despite having distinctive national ties and unique local identities, the American communities on the southern end of Lake Memphremagog were linked intrinsically to the greater lake region during the Gilded Age. Whether it be due to flows of environment extracted resources, the boxed appeal of an "international" adventure, or collective affinity for their shared body of water, Memphremagog communities on both sides of the border were united during the Gilded Age. The weight of the looming border was felt in nearly all facets of community life.

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<sup>128</sup> Lundy, "Stanstead: A Town on the Border."

## Conclusion: The Realization

My goal in this research was to chart changing land use patterns around Lake Memphremagog, specifically focusing on the transition from traditional extractive industry to place based tourism. Additionally, I hoped to examine reflections of Memphremagog that were documented in literature and art, to learn what facets of an environment were valued during the Gilded Age, and by whom. Finally, I planned to investigate the increasing influence of the Vermont/ Quebec border on lakeside communities' overtime.

After completing my analysis, I have to admit the results surprised me and shattered a few of my long-held assumptions about Vermont history. My study showed that traditional extractive land use came to northern Vermont in waves. Regardless of the type of extraction that occurred, following the decline of each industry the landscape was left decimated, and 'nature' had been altered beyond prior understanding. When urban tourists began retreating to Memphremagog as a vacation destination, the 'nature' they were encountering was secondary<sup>129</sup>; it still bore the scars of recent extractive industry. Despite this fact, elite Gilded Age tourists were not fazed, and accepted the landscape as appropriate nature, because they were not looking for authenticity in 'wilderness', but rather generality. Wealthy tourists of the Gilded Age were searching for an escape from crowded East Coast cities, which were stressed by the pressures of rapid urbanization. Visitors had expectations for their retreats: these included spiritual renewal through

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<sup>129</sup> Judd, *Second Nature*.



reflection in nature and restored health from time spent in a 'clean' environment. These requirements could be fulfilled at any number of locations.

Regardless of the similarities between summer resort destinations, seasonal visitors sometimes developed an affinity for a specific place because of the repetition of their annual pilgrimages. But because of their function as advertisements, many of the primary documents that I analyzed praise Memphremagog in a nondescript way. Though these promotional pieces attempt to elevate Memphremagog to an elite category of famed bodies of water worldwide, they also demonstrate a distressing trend in Gilded Age literature: the theft of Native American and East Asian iconography in nature writing.

The landscape around Memphremagog was groomed and altered to fit the mold of a wilderness destination, and any infrastructure that did not mesh was erased in materials such as advertisements and works of art. This erasure extended to local people, local industry, and even the railroads that brought visitors to the region. At times it even extended to the international border, which grew in influence throughout the time era. At times, the border had no impact on traditional industry, later it was used as an angle in tourism marketing, and eventually it became a challenge for adjacent international communities.

To respect the integrity of this scholarship, I will acknowledge that there were limitations to my research. These limitations included a robust field of primary documents that I had to sort through. This thesis was necessarily selective, looking for those sources that would best speak to the framing questions of environmental history. There are many other stories to be told about this area. Additionally, much of the primary

documentation I utilized was crafted specifically for marketing purposes, whether it was acknowledged in the document or not, as some materials were secretly funded by organizations with stake in the tourism market, like railroad companies. With regard to secondary sources, there is a limited collection of environmental histories of New England, and many deal primarily with the Colonial Period. Few secondary texts focused on my time period of interest.

Regardless, this research contributes to the existing literature by offering a succinct case study that addresses the Gilded Age phenomenon of rural land use transition and wilderness tourism. The summer resort boom occurred up and down the East Coast, ranging as far north as Maine's Mount Desert Island, and as far south as North Carolina's Great Smoky Mountains. But Memphremagog was an anomaly among its peers because the international border has always been a looming presence. This thesis draws attention to how a natural feature, positioned as Memphremagog is, could be simultaneously national and transnational. American histories - regardless of subfield - traditionally tend to focus on the story of nation-building, confined to and within domestic boundaries. The history and discourse around Lake Memphremagog is complicated by the border, which I suspect is why it gets passed over in broader American anthologies. I believe there is unique opportunity and value in considering not only Lake Memphremagog, but other landscape features and environments shared across borders, for the insight they can provide about international collaboration and environmental health over time, while helping us recognizing the artificiality of a man made border.

Despite this being a study of environmental history, there are modern implications that arise from this research. One implication of this study is a new perspective on public lands that were designated during the late nineteenth century. The origins of many parks and preserves can be traced to the Gilded Age. While these places are now considered historical artifacts, and valued individually, we should consider them collectively as a system or genre of place: many fit the generic mold of a natural space for leisure as was idealized during these decades. This uniformity makes sense when you consider it was often elite Americans donating the land, funds, and political power to preserve these spaces. Remembering the somewhat elitist origins of public landscapes from this time period informs us as to why they were designed a certain way (think carriage roads and scenic overlooks), and who specifically they were intended for.

The modern implication of this realization is to actively strive for fairness and justice in these once exclusionary spaces as they are managed and preserved moving forward. The National Park system, and most publically accessible land, has historically come up short when it comes to promoting access for minorities and people of various economic standing; the primary population visiting parks continues to be white and wealthy. For these spaces that were said to be conceived with the intention of access for all too truly live up to their legacies, great strides must be taken to improve the diversity of Americans visiting public lands.

Now we are facing perhaps the greatest environmental challenge that humans have themselves contributed to: anthropogenic climate change. Some are beginning to see the value in nature as a lifeline; a reserve that produces oxygen, filters the air, and keeps

water tables stable. Again, as with extractive industry, and later with nature tourism, this mode of thinking is itself anthropocentric: considering how to manage nature for our survival. But understanding the history of our cumulative effect on these natural systems over time, and the ways and places in which people understand “nature,” is an important first step.

If there is one takeaway from this environmental history it should be that a community’s relationship to its surrounding environment - what people value in nature and what they do not- changes with the contexts of time, wealth, and trends in industry. A given landscape can have a multiplicity of users who individually find different value in the space. And while I have pointed out that Memphremagog provided a predictably constructed ‘wilderness’ location for a certain class of visitors to enjoy to nature, that does not mean the benefits or spiritual renewal they experienced in the space were in any way artificial. There is a reason that wilderness or nature tourism of this kind has continued to persist. Many people do find pure joy and meaning in connecting with nature, myself included.

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## APPENDIX



**[Figure 1]:** Cornelius Krieghoff, *Owl's Head and Skinner's Cove, Lake Memphremagog*, 1859. Oil on Canvas, 43.3 x 63.8 cm. Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada. Accessed January 24, 2018. <https://www.gallery.ca/collection/artwork/owls-head-and-skinners-cove-lake-memphremagog>



**[Figure 2]:** W.S. Hunter Jr., DeVolpi and Scowen, *Eastern Townships, A Pictorial Record*, plate 44. Cited in Little, “Scenic Tourism on the Northeastern Borderland: Lake Memphremagog’s Steamboat Excursions and Resort Hotels, 1850–1900.”



**[Figure 3]:** John A. Fraser, *Mount Elefantis and Owl’s Head from across Lake Memphremagog*, 1869. Watercolor and gouache on wove paper, 25.8 x 49.6 cm. Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada. Accessed January 24, 2018. <https://www.gallery.ca/collection/artwork/mount-elephantis-and-owls-head-from-across-lake-memphremagog>

