



**MOVING NATURES: Mobility and the Environment in Canadian History** Edited by Ben Bradley, Jay Young, and Colin M. Coates

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## PART I: Production, Pathways, and Supply

The chapters in this first part of the collection examine how Canadians have confronted the physical challenges of the Canadian environment, taking advantage of seasonal mobility to move people and things across the large distances that define the country. The natural world has influenced Canadians' patterns of movement, often with greater power and less predictability than they would have preferred. In many cases they learned to move "with the grain" of the environment, taking advantage of river, ocean, and wind currents, as well as smooth, level, low-friction surfaces such as frozen waterways and packed-down snow. Thomas Peace, Jim Clifford, and Judy Burns show how some Maritimers put their proximity to forest, high tides, and an ice-free sea to business advantage during the age of muscle and wind power. Andrew Watson describes how the earliest lakeside summertime supply networks in Muskoka country involved travel by rowboat—intense work to keep a dispersed population of cottagers stocked with relatively low-value foodstuffs. Merle Massie's chapter shows that the earliest roads in northern Saskatchewan, cut through the boreal forest, were impassable most of the year due to mud—the sticky, slippery nemesis of those travelling on foot in most of Canada prior to the twentieth century. For decades, the more sensible way to move freight overland in that northern region (and many other parts of Canada) was to pull it across the low-friction surfaces provided by frozen lakes and muskeg. To do so, people and draft animals worked outdoors in very low temperatures, coping with the dangers posed by thin ice and blizzards, but

this was faster and easier than extricating feet and wheels sunk deep in mud. As these chapters illustrate, important components of Canadians' mobility depended on the ability to leverage the natural pathways and conditions that already existed.

But significant parts of Canadian history also entail efforts to overcome seasonal and natural restraints. The increased availability and affordability of fossil fuels in the nineteenth century allowed Canadians to move more and more "against the grain" of the environment. The power offered by coal and petroleum products made it easier to contemplate and execute ambitious path-building projects that remade the environment and facilitated faster, easier mobility, whether by dredging channels, digging tunnels, plowing snow, cutting through hillsides, or climbing mountain passes. Several chapters in this section examine changing and overlapping energy regimes, from wind, muscle power, and cordwood to coal, electricity, and gasoline. Massie traces the gradual motorization of overland freight hauling, and Watson shows how rowboats were replaced by larger, cordwood-burning vessels, which were subsequently supplanted by smaller, gasoline-powered speedboats. But while fossil fuels certainly permitted mobile subjects to move at greater speeds and with more force, Cruikshank's chapter on the Intercolonial Railway cautions against attributing too much power or reliability to them. At the turn of the last century, railways were the ultimate symbol of industrial modernity: amalgams of coal, steel, and steam, annihilators of time and space. Conditions on the ground, however, may belie this popular image. Even with a full head of steam, express trains and snowplows could get trapped in deep drifts, and railway managers had to scramble to assemble the muscle power needed to free trains and clear tracks.

By the middle decades of the twentieth century, the availability of flexible, inexpensive gasoline-powered construction machinery made it increasingly feasible to shift enormous volumes of material in order to build new and improved mobility infrastructure. Jay Young and Daniel Macfarlane show how the application of large quantities of gasoline to the digging and hauling process allowed engineers whose goals were to create new corridors of mobility to move earth and rock for use in an array of new building projects, from dams to jetties to artificial islands.

These excavations and new landforms were clear environmental impacts of the desire to enhance mobility. The same period saw the rapid, concurrent growth of North America's arterial highway network and commercial trucking industry. The large-scale environmental consequences of using internal combustion engines—which burned diesel fuel and leaded gasoline—for hauling freight remain surprisingly little understood. Tor Oiamo, Don Lafreniere, and Joy Parr urge historians to consider not only the physical reordering of urban environments to accommodate heavy vehicle traffic, and the pollution directly associated with automobile manufacturing, but also the pollution associated with the use of trucks to transport auto components back and forth across the Detroit River via the Ambassador Bridge, which inevitably involved large amounts of idling on the off-ramps and approaches leading towards the chokepoint at the Canada-U.S. border crossing.

These chapters provide case studies of how Canadians have taken advantage of and physically rearranged the environment in order to facilitate their own comings and goings, often while carrying or hauling certain items along with them. They describe Canadians building vehicles and networks of mobility in a wide range of environmental contexts and using them to get provisions, move commodities, and travel to and from work. There are also instances of pleasure travellers who “piggybacked” along corridors of mobility that had been developed primarily for supply and commodity circulation—this theme is developed further in the second half of the book. The six chapters in part one are arranged in roughly chronological order. Together they reveal both historical changes and continuities, including the important (but uneven) effects of the increased power and flexibility offered by fossil fuels on moving through the environment; the emergence of new ways of knowing the environment through the business of mobility; and the persistent and unpredictable influence of Canadian seasonality.

