

Listening to the Fur Trade: Soundways and Music in the British North American Fur Trade, 1760-1840 by Daniel Laxer

Matthew Jollineau

Volume 116, numéro 1, spring 2024

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1110105ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1110105ar>

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Éditeur(s)

The Ontario Historical Society

ISSN

0030-2953 (imprimé)

2371-4654 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Jollineau, M. (2024). Compte rendu de [*Listening to the Fur Trade: Soundways and Music in the British North American Fur Trade, 1760-1840* by Daniel Laxer]. *Ontario History*, 116(1), 119–121. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1110105ar>

ple, the first championship game that the All-Stars played against Penetanguishene in early October 1934 ended prematurely and controversially, as it was said by officials to be too dark to safely continue play. This game was contested in recorded accounts; players recall that the opposing team used underhanded tactics to stop the All-Stars from their much-deserved victory. The All-Stars produced a definitive victory later in the series ending 18 October 1934 and were crowned the undeniable champions of the Ontario Baseball Association.

A microhistory of 1934 is a snapshot in time and does not encapsulate the longer history of sports and baseball culture in the region. While the author does mention a longer history of Black baseball teams in the region, a more detailed overview of the significance of baseball as an outlet for young Black men as an escape from racism and poverty would have better grounded the continuities of intergenerational pro-

gress and the significance of the 1934 Chatham All-Stars victory for the regions' historic Black communities.

1934: The Chatham Coloured All-Stars' Barrier-Breaking Year provides an important study of the ways in which oral and public histories can tell us about the complex lives of Black Canadians, and how historians record and amplify these local stories. Jacobs was invited to preserve and record family histories and worked with the University of Windsor, Black Mecca, and the Chatham Black Historical Society to expand the public reach of this history. Serving as an accessible microhistory of the Chatham Coloured All-Stars, this book validates listening and placing a diverse range of sources to combat historical silences in Canadian sports history.

Catherine Grant-Wata
PhD candidate, Department of History,
University of Toronto

Listening to the Fur Trade *Soundways and Music in the British North American Fur Trade, 1760-1840*

by Daniel Laxer

Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022. 304 pages. ISBN 978-0-2280-0859-0

With his book, *Listening to the Fur Trade: Soundways and Music in the British North American Fur Trade, 1760-1840*, Daniel Laxer makes a profound contribution to the historiography of the Canadian fur trade in a way that helps to illuminate the power and influence of an often overlooked and disregarded element of human history; the sounds of the past. Through this lens, this work provides deep insight into the social and economic realities of the fur trade. Laxer explores the various ways in which music, and other

soundways—such as the sounds of muskets and canons—were integral to the lives of participants in the fur trade. He also demonstrates how this kind of activity can show how participants in the fur trade expressed, celebrated, and interacted with one another, and how they expressed both individual and collective identities. It helps to provide a new lens on the lives of those in the trade, and of how Europeans and Indigenous peoples shared their cultures and forged connections that were not limited to just their material exchange of goods and furs.

LISTENING *to the* FUR TRADE

Soundways and Music in the British
North American Fur Trade, 1760–1840



Daniel Robert Laxer

Laxer examines both how music and various other kinds of sound shaped the interactions between European traders and Indigenous peoples, and how the traders and their employees themselves interacted with sound. Laxer's discussions can be broadly summarized into two categories: firstly, the music and sound ways that provided the soundtrack of the work lives, social lives, and leisure time of fur traders and their employees; and secondly, the sounds that accompanied the various ways that European traders and their Indigenous trading partners interacted and the sounds that were indicative of the changes that the fur trade brought to Indigenous society and the North American landscape. The first of these categories helps to bring to light the music that brought joy, comradery, and entertainment to fur trade posts, and to those traveling by canoe across the

continent. It also illuminates the identities of the Europeans and those of European descent who chose to work in the fur trade, and how those identities were shaped by their work and their interactions with one another and their Indigenous trading partners. For example, Laxer examines how voyageurs sang songs about feasting and women, which expressed their liveliness, but also reflected their anxieties about working in harsh environments that often left them without food and working far away from loved ones.

The latter category of examination is perhaps less jovial, but more evocative. One of Laxer's most interesting examinations is how the Cree people in James Bay first assumed the sounds from the cannons on the Hudson's Bay Company ships on Hudson Bay must have been thunder. This observation, along with his discussion of the prominence of the firing of muskets across the continent after Europeans began trading muskets to Indigenous communities, helps to show how the fur trade changed the literal soundscape of the continent. But even more importantly, Laxer shows how dances, sounds, and ceremonies were used to allow Europeans and Indigenous peoples to introduce themselves to one another, and how these things were used to establish and solidify trading partnerships. The sounds of music helped Europeans and Indigenous peoples understand one another and then create bonds between each other. Laxer, as well, takes care to discuss how the meeting and melding of European and Indigenous dance traditions, and the adoption of the fiddle by Indigenous peoples were major components of the rise of the Metis people.

Musical historians primarily concerned with the content and musical structure of the songs that made up the soundscape of the fur trade—as opposed to the

social and economic meaning behind the music—will also find much to appreciate. Laxer—an experienced musician himself—takes time to appreciate the content and structure of some of the musical pieces of the time.

Furthermore, the combination of the abundance of detailed examples and vivid writing will help to provide any reader with an understanding of daily life and important social and economic interactions in fur trade society. As well, there is a clear

and careful effort in this work to provide ample contextual information on fur trade history and on the culture and societies of Indigenous peoples at the time. As such, even the most novice of fur trade historians and Indigenous ethnographers can understand and appreciate the more specific detailed information.

Matthew Jollineau
Historical Interpreter Volunteer, Fort William Historical Park

***Lost Movie Theatres,
Niagara Falls, Ontario
Movie-going in a Cross-border City***

by Joan Nicks

Niagara Arts Centre, 2022, 256 pages.
\$30.00 Soft Cover ISBN 978-0-9784464-3-7.
artists@nac.org, ph: 905-641-0331.

***Disappearing Motels,
Niagara Falls, Ontario
Cultural Decline of a Post-war Travel Icon***

by Joan Nicks

Niagara Arts Centre, 2022, 319 pages.
\$35.00 Soft Cover ISBN 978-0-9784464-2-0.
artists@nac.org, ph: 905-641-0331.

Deeply personal without being autobiographical, celebratory while maintaining a critical edge, Joan Nicks' pair of local histories offers an intensely local perspective on her lifelong hometown, Niagara Falls. *Lost Movie Theatres* and *Disappearing Motels* survey the history of two types of vernacular

buildings, "their social dimensions, thriving periods, decline, and closure" (p. 20, *Theatres*). The city's local cinemas were built between 1910 and 1940, with a trio of drive-ins opened in 1946-1947. All are now gone save for a façade and an emptied hull. Likewise, 1920s and 1930s tourist cabins gave way to motels in the 1950s and 1960s, which are themselves fading fast. (*Disappearing Motels* is accompanied by a set of postcards depicting the current state of many, part of a photography project by Oliver Pauk and Zach Sloodsky). The twinned projects were originally conceived as a single study, but it is easy to grasp why Nicks decided to sever them in two, since *Lost Movie Theatres* is about places of local leisure to view global popular culture, while *Disappearing Motels* is about places of local labour for outsiders to rest. Both types of places existed in every city, but tourism and movies each have a strong, unique tie to Niagara Falls.

Nicks documents the significance of places where people who lived in Niagara Falls worked or gathered, treating the famous natural wonder and its ring of tourist traps as mere backdrop to the institutions, built forms, and people of the city. Perhaps more familiar to us who are visitors,