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Review of *Useful Pleasures: The Shaping of Leisure in Alberta, 1896-1945* by Donald G. Wetherell and Irene Kmet

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Useful Pleasures: The Shaping of Leisure in Alberta, 1896-1945. Donald G. Wetherell with Irene Kmet. Regina, SK: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1990. x + 430 pp. Photos and references. \$C20.00 cloth.

Modestly touted as a preliminary exploration of leisure themes and topics in Alberta during the first half of the twentieth century, this book at first glance might be rejected as too esoteric by potential readers who are neither leisure specialists nor Albertans. This would be unfortunate, since the authors have produced a most informative and relevant work with implications reaching far beyond its intended geographical and topical scope. The first three chapters constituting Part One examine the institutional, social, and technological context within which leisure in early Alberta developed, while the last eight chapters (Part Two) focus upon a comprehensive array of leisure activities ranging from team and outdoor sports to radio and cinema. With over 1500 endnotes drawing upon an impressive collection of primary and secondary sources, this carefully researched book will no doubt take its place among specialists as the seminal work on leisure in early Alberta. Moreover, a broader audience of non-specialists, particularly in Alberta, will appreciate the lucid and unpretentious prose, the contemporary photographs distributed throughout the text, the anecdotes, and the avoidance of a strictly chronological format.

However, as suggested earlier, the significance of the work extends far beyond these two groups. For social scientists in general, the book offers an excellent case study of a dominant culture's attempt to perpetuate and impose its own values and ideals in a settler society experiencing rapid change. The dominant "British" culture in Alberta had its own peculiarities (e.g. the notion of "fair play"), yet shared a broader north European ethos which perceived leisure as an adjunct to work, serving to "re-create" the individual so that an efficient work routine could be resumed and the socio-political status quo maintained. Institutions representing the dominant culture thus encouraged only those leisure activities which would contribute to the correct intellectual and physical development of the individual hence the title: *Useful Pleasures*. But challenges were encountered. Canadian readers in particular will appreciate the omnipresent and irresistible centrifugal forces emanating from the United States which threatened to supplant the would-be British society. (Most Albertans, to the chagrin of some, seemed to welcome this influence.) Technological change increased the risk of such intrusions, as vaudeville gave way to the more ubiquitous influences of radio and Hollywood. Other challenges would be familiar to residents of the American Great Plains, including rural isolation, urban biases, and the presence of cultural and racial minorities who were expected to conform to the values of the "superior" dominant culture.

Shortcomings arise from a sense that the authors seem content to target only the parochial readership. For example, the absence of any contextual maps frustrates the reader who is unfamiliar with Alberta's geography and implies to this reviewer that the book is intended only for Albertans. The potential readership is clearly much broader, and it is for this reason as well that additional contrasts and comparisons could have been made between circumstances in Alberta and the broader Canadian, American and Great Plains contexts, thereby inviting readers outside of Alberta to benefit from exposure to the book. **David Weaver**, *Department of Geography, Luther College, University of Regina, Saskatchewan.*