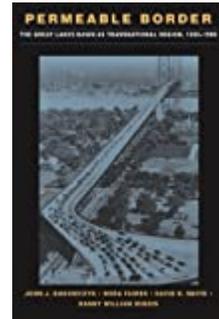




John J. Bukowczyk, Randy William Widdis, Nora Faires, David R. Smith. *Permeable Border: The Great Lakes Basin as Transnational Region, 1650 - 1990*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005. xii + 298 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8229-4261-0.



Reviewed by Justin Carroll (Department of History, Michigan State University)

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The Great Lakes as a Transnational Experience

Growing out of a conference held at Wayne State University, and funded by the Michigan Council for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Humanities, *Permeable Border: The Great Lakes Basin as Transnational Region, 1650-1990* is a welcome exploration of the often intertwined and interconnected histories of the United States and Canada. It was the recipient of the Albert B. Corey Prize at the 2007 annual meeting of the American Historian Association, a prize that biennially honors scholarly work that advances the study of American-Canadian history.

Comprised of seven chapters, *Permeable Border* explores and contains a wealth and variety of information. Historian John Bukowczyk authored the book, but aside from the introduction and the conclusion, two other chapters are built predominately from a wide array of secondary sources. These detail the economic and political history of the Great Lakes region from 1650 to about 1890, focusing primarily on the competing projects of French, American, and British/Canadian capital-formation and nation-building, which for various reasons came to be dominated increasingly by the United

States.

Bukowczyk sets forth the central argumentative and theoretical thrusts in the first and last chapters of the book. By framing the Great Lakes of North America as primarily an economic region with its own internal coherence and logic in spite of the international border separating the two nascent and expanding polities, Bukowczyk argues that the region is central and informative to the understanding of the economic and political relationships between the United States and Canada, because it served as a “place in which fluid, dynamic cross-border economic connections have happened in day-to-day economic operations and exchanges; in social (and cultural) relations, and in the patterned movements of people” (p. 177). As a result the border between the two nations is a “permeable border” allowing American and Canadian capital, goods, and people to move relatively free back and forth across it. This border appeared at times nebulous and concrete, meaningful and pointless, and real and imaginary depending on the point of view of the actors and their position relative to it.

Historian David Smith’s contribution to the volume

explores Canadian and American federal policy as it relates to the regulation of cross-border trade. In the era before the arrival of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Smith writes that the border in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century “serve[ed] as both a protective yet permeable barrier that selectively permitted capital, goods, and labor to migrate through the Great Lakes region” (p. 121). Generally, the border and policy sought to protect American markets from Canadian goods, while allowing for the unfettered movement of Canadian people and various capital.

Historian Nora Faires provides in her chapter a summary of the early twentieth-century scholarly literature on Canadian emigration to the United States and explores the sheer size, the seeming invisibility, and the concentration of these emigrants in the Great Lakes region. Using personal history and biographies from individuals coming primarily from Ottawa, Faires writes that Canadian migration “was so extensive and so woven into the economic (and perhaps social) fabric of life as to be commonplace and expected” (p. 119).

Geographer Randy Widdis analyzes the historiographic and intellectual understandings of borderlands and examines national identity as it relates to the bor-

der and the processes of migration. Furthermore, he provides an appendix that details American and Canadian migration primary sources, exploring their scholarly limits, their historical value, and their archival locations.

Permeable Border: The Great Lakes Basin as Transnational Region, 1650 -1990 is a solid introduction to many of the relevant issues and actors of the Great Lakes, but its scope and broadness leaves the reader occasionally desirous for a little more depth on certain topics. However, this is far from a serious flaw, as the book lends itself to working well with other scholarly volumes on similar subjects, such as historian Beth LaDow’s *The Medicine Line: Life and Death on a North American Borderland* (2002), which focuses on similar issues relating to the Canadian-Montana borderland west of the Great Lakes. Also, with respect to Canadian-American migration, this volume could be used in conjunction with Bruno Ramirez’s book, *Crossing the 49th Parallel: Migration from Canada to the United States, 1900-1930* (2001).

All in all, *Permeable Border* should be of great interest and use to regional, national, and transnational historians and scholars alike, and will surely find a place in the university classroom and garner more academic attention.

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