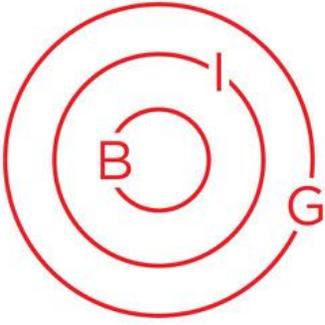




**BORDERS IN
GLOBALIZATION**





Borders in Globalization Research Project 100

The "Sweet Seas" of Culture: A Consideration of the role that the Great Lakes have played in the Creation of a Cultural Borderland

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Introduction

The great French explorer, Samuel de Champlain, created the metaphor of “mers douces” (sweet seas) to describe the Great Lakes. In both the pre-contact and colonial eras, the interlocking lakes and rivers of the Great Lakes region constituted the major conduits and passageways for cross cultural interactions, settlement, and exchange. This continued to be the case after the establishment of the international border, only to be tempered when land transportation mediums, most notably the railroad, directed cross-border flows and networks away from traditional marine spaces. This paper offers some reflections on the role that the Great Lakes have played in the development of a distinctive cultural region.

Reflections on Marine Spaces, Culture and the Great Lakes Borderland

The presence of water can exert a profound influence on landscapes, including those of borderland regions, and, consequently, upon the lives of people who dwell there. Processes of cultural exchange and fusion, facilitated by the transportation and communication opportunities afforded by water, shape societies in many ways. The adaptation to and exploitation of shared bodies of water among proximate groups can generate shared cultural responses, values and spaces. In the relationship between societies and the water/land interface, there develop sets of features and material and non-material cultural expressions that give rise to unique and distinctive regional identities. The Great Lakes region, a space of crossroads, junctions and corridors, where people traveled, fished, traded, and fought wars, have for millennia been a place where cultures have formed and where cultures have intermixed.

Pre-Contact Period

For thousands of years prior to contact, the Great Lakes and their tributary rivers served as mediums of cultural diffusion among indigenous societies living in this part of North

America. For a number of reasons, the original Paleo-Indians settled close to water, either along or near the rivers and lakes. Cold winds blowing off the larger lakes slowed forest growth, thus providing attractive grazing for herbivorous mammals which in turn attracted hunters. Fishing and wildfowling provided important diet supplements. Archaeological evidence shows that pre-contact fishing activity around the Great Lakes was substantial. Fishers developed and used a broad range of gear including spears, hooks and weirs. It is also believed by some that these early peoples built boats that allowed them to use the lakes for travel, at least in the warmer part of the year.

About 7,000 years ago, Paleo-Indians perfected techniques of *annealing*, which is the process of heating metal until it is red-hot and then allowing it to cool in order to make it soft and malleable. Deposits of copper discovered in the upper lakes region were used to make jewelry, projectile points for spears, and tools. The people of this “copper culture” traded these goods with Native groups located throughout much of North America as well as within the Great Lakes region itself. Watercraft (e.g. skin boat, dugout canoe and bark canoe) developed in the region was essential to this commerce. Through such activity, material and non-material culture was diffused to and from the Great Lakes basin. Great Lakes groups between 200 BC and 500 AD were part of what is called the Hopewell Tradition which was a widely dispersed set of related populations connected by a common network of trade routes extending throughout eastern North America.

Following the original Paleo-Indians, most of the people living in the region belonged to three language groups: *Algonquian* (Ojibwa, Ottawa, Potawatomie, Sauk, Fox, Miami, Illinois), *Iroquoian* (Haudenosaunee [how-da-nis-o-aw-nee], Hurons, Neutral, Petuns), and *Siouxian* (Winnebago, Dakota). These groups are generally considered as belonging to a part of the

continent known as the Woodland Culture Area. Traditionally, Woodland Indians were farming, hunting, and fishing people whose cultures were adapted to the area's environments: forests and park-like woods, rivers, streams and lakes, and coastal areas.

The Anishinaabe, an autonym for the Odawa, Ojibwe, Potawatomi, Oji-Cree, Mississaugas, and Algonquin (Algonkin) peoples were the largest group in the Great Lakes region, particularly the western half. Like their predecessors, the Anishinaabe, particularly the Ojibwe who lived in present-day northwestern Ontario, the upper peninsula of Michigan, and Wisconsin, were involved in far-reaching trade. The Ojibwe continued the practice of making copper items which they traded with southern tribes, making use of the many rivers that connected with the Great Lakes. The Odawa and Potawatomi had direct access to Lake Huron and Lake Michigan for aquatic resources that supplemented the maize they grew.

Farther east and south, the Five Nations (Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca) of the Haudenosaunee (how-da-nis-o-aw-nee) Confederacy occupied an area in present-day New York. The Haudenosaunee were horticulturalists who supplemented their traditional diet of corn, beans and squash with wild fruits, nuts, roots and various kinds of game (deer, bear, beaver, squirrels, etc.) and made extensive use of the Great Lakes basin's waterways despite their limited consumption of fish. Like the Anishinaabe, the Haudenosaunee traded with other groups, in this case with tribes to the east and north with whom they exchanged excess corn and tobacco for pelts and wampum (shell beads).

In the St. Lawrence-Great Lakes littoral, pre-contact Algonquian- and Iroquoian-speaking peoples participated in population, trade and military movement. This circulation of people moved along a transportation system that featured several strategic points, in fact, geopolitical linchpins: the St. Marys River, the Mackinac Straits, the Detroit River, and the Niagara

peninsula. The groups who commanded these strategic avenues, as for example the Neutral of the Niagara peninsula and the Mohawks in upstate New York, could control the movements of goods and persons. Such gateways also served as sites of cultural confluence. Traders within the region met at important river passages or portages where they exchanged foodstuffs and other items.

Contact and Colonialism

Networks of trade and cultural exchange fostered by the Great Lakes and its tributaries did not disappear after the arrival of Europeans. Through contact with the French, British, and, for a brief period of time, the Dutch, tribes in the Northeast began to exchange beaver pelts for manufactured goods. Initially this trade followed the traditional pattern of reciprocal exchange with the French forming a partnership with the Anishinaabe and the Iroquoian-speaking Hurons (Wendats) of Georgian Bay, and the British trading primarily with the Haudenosaunee (how-danis-o-aw-nee).

Europeans and native peoples occupied what Richard White (1991: x) terms a “middle ground,” a sphere of hybridity and accommodation which was “in-between cultures, peoples, and in between empires and the non-state world of villages.” White’s middle ground was the region around the Great Lakes the French called the *pays-don-ho* (1991: x). In such a setting, made possible by the fur trade system, economic negotiation and cultural accommodation took place, and native agency played a major role in dictating the evolution of the space-economy even though the system was managed by and catered to the demands of distant metropolises. Niagara, the Detroit River, and the Strait of Michilimackinac continued to function as key passage points in this network. In these places, trade, cultural exchange and cohabitation were most pronounced. The

1776 Thomas Pownall revision of Louis Evan's 1755 map entitled *Map of the Middle Colonies in North America* shows intercultural settlement and cohabitation around Fort Detroit.

During this time, the Great Lakes was a region of cultural accommodation, even though underlying power relationships and conflicts made the middle ground fragile. The basin was the hinterland of competing empires and served as a gigantic trade zone in which culture became the economic goods of demand. A hybrid Pan-Indian/European fur trade culture developed. The rivalry between English and French interests in connection with the fur trade stimulated aboriginal travel and migration. New goods, weapons and systems of organization associated with the fur trade transformed Native societies. Europeans borrowed from Natives and Natives borrowed from Europeans. When cultural relationships began to break down, the sides involved created rituals as a means to attenuate stress.

The middle ground of the Native-European frontier produced a transitional 'meeting space' characterized by some degree of cultural hybridity. Here was a space where the local (indigenous) and the global (European) interacted and produced a new arrangement of culture and power in which Native peoples were anything but subordinate. But once the British entered the scene and along with the French moved to establish their territories in the same space, Native groups took on a different role in the fur trade and formulated new relationships with whites and each other. The process of bordering turned a liminal frontier into a contested borderland in which Native groups had to negotiate a path that would best suit their needs (Haefeli 1999: 1223). The process of negotiation included alliances and conflicts which, combined with the impacts of disease, a declining resource base and changing demands for fur, would eventually result in dependency and marginalization. The Seven Years War marked a turning point, and with the British victory in 1760 came the decline of the middle ground as the British favoured

force over accommodation. The Americans simply ignored the idea of the middle ground, seeing the Indians as inferior and as an obstruction to their imperialistic designs.

The Transition to Modernity

The removal of decimated Native peoples, the in-migration of settlers, massive immigration, industrialization and urbanization transformed the Great Lakes region. More and more, the Great Lakes basin came to resemble a functional borderland region, i.e., an area organised by flows and interactions that are maximised within the region and minimised across its borders so that the principles of internal cohesiveness and external separation regarding spatial interactions are met (Farmer and Fotheringham 2011). The rise of industrial America during the middle and late 19th century was particularly pronounced in the Great Lakes states. From architecture and city planning to literature, automobile production and steel-making, the Great Lakes states served as the major engine driving America's industrial transformation. The availability and accessibility of mineral resources, especially iron ore and bituminous coal, along with the development of a relatively inexpensive intra-regional transportation system and inter-regional connections with international markets and the eastern seaboard of the United States favoured the region. The development of Ontario's economy during the late 19th century mirrored that of the Great Lakes states, which is not a surprise, given the fact that the former benefited greatly from its proximity to the American Manufacturing Belt. The province also profited from its plentiful natural resources and cheap power, and convenient transportation links to markets elsewhere in Canada, and overseas, as well as the United States.

Early on, cross-border marine trade was much more important in the lower than upper lakes, and much of this traffic was local in nature. Further integration occurred during the middle of the century when a number of factors, including the repeal of the Corn Laws and the

negotiation of reciprocity, resulted in increased flows of goods between Ontario and the Great Lakes states. It was also during this period that railways began to replace boats as the primary mode of trade transportation. The placement of the international boundary ensured that the southwestern part of Ontario constituted the most direct line between New York State and Michigan, thus ensuring its primacy as an international rail corridor with Buffalo-Fort Erie, Detroit-Windsor and Sarnia-Port Huron as the major termini of the Ontario section and gateways in the continental context.

On the upper lakes, cross-border trade between the ports of this region and the lower lakes increased in response to the growing demand for lumber, minerals, and other resources by expanding cities and industries. Increasingly, the asymmetrical character of cross-border trade became apparent as the volume of flows favoured the United States. In this context, new corridors developed as older gateways continued to prosper or decline. Within the larger trade network of the Great Lakes basin, certain arteries of trade became clogged or closed up whereas others were opened (Widdis 2011). Key to the functioning of this international economic region, at least at the local level, was the significant emigration of Ontarians to the Great Lakes states at the turn of the 20th century. Among many factors, decreasing land availability in Ontario, combined with the unequal levels of industrial development between the two countries, spurred this movement (Widdis 1998, 2010).

By the latter half of the 20th century, the US-Canada trade relationship had evolved to the point where millions of American jobs, primarily in the Great Lakes states, depended on Canadian imports from the United States. In this regard, Ontario was by far the largest importer of American products. Over time, an extensive highway system linked the most populated Canadian province with major American centres. The increasing liberalization of trade between

Canada and the United States prior to the signing of the free trade deals furthered integration between the province and its American neighbours. The Auto Pact in particular played a huge role in solidifying Ontario's position of power within the Great Lakes borderland. Detroit automobile-makers favoured a shared economic space and integrated market where single plants could produce vehicles for both Canadian and American markets, thereby achieving greater efficiency in scale. Today, a multi-modal transportation network fans out from Great Lakes/Seaway ports across the continent. More than 40 provincial and interstate highways and nearly 30 rail lines link the 15 major ports of the system and 50 regional ports with consumers, products and industries all over North America.

While the Great Lakes continue to play a huge role in the economy of North America, it also continues to be a source of inspiration for writers and artists. Victoria Brehm (2001: 168) points to the long tradition of literature focusing on the lakes, particularly what she calls "the novels of freshwater merchant marine culture." The more heroic and romantic literature of the past gave way to a more realistic literature with industrial and working-class themes such as Jay McCormick's *November Storm* (1943), a book that captures the rough existence of the men who worked on lake freighters and the severe conditions they faced when the weather turned nasty. "As the 20th century progressed, Brehm asserts (2001: 169), "Lakes merchant marine literature became a culturally contested site ... divided between realist and postrealist indictments of industrialization, such as David Mamet's play *Lakeboat* (1970)..." Another piece that fits into this category is Thunder Bay resident Joan Skelton's *The Survivor of the Edmund Fitzgerald* (1985), a fictional novel about a dying woman who meets the lone survivor of the Edmund Fitzgerald, a young man who jumped ship when he believed he had information to save the doomed vessel. Skelton interweaves the tragedy of the sinking of the Edmund Fitzgerald with the

tragic fate that faces the woman. Lake Superior plays a significant role in the unfolding of the drama as Skelton incorporates critical reflection on the impacts of development and resource extraction on the environment. Brehm (2001: 170) argues that this book is an example of more recent Great Lakes literature that “critiques the ideologies of the postindustrial cultures of the Lakes”, implying that this kind of writing occurs on both sides of the border. Nevertheless, while the lakes present a common theme for literary reflection, a considerable extent of the Great Lakes states and Ontario, particularly the latter, lie inland and so we must be careful about making too much of a shared maritime culture.

One evident difference is the emphasis Canadian writers place on the border in this region. There exists a tradition of Ontario novels and short stories that use the border as a liminal frame of reference and include border-crossing as a leitmotif (light-mo-teef). The negotiation of identity is associated with the act of border-crossing in a number of novels and short stories. Liminality is concerned with the space of the borderline itself, with feelings of ambiguity and ambivalence. For example, in Jane Urquhart’s novel *Whirlpool* (1986: 221), a character stands, “Looking across the distance of the [Niagara] River to the foreign country on the other side,” thinking about “how there was always a point where one set of circumstances ended and another began.”

The Great Lakes has also been the subject of many artists who have in different ways imagined and illustrated how these waters are part of the identity of people who live within their reach. From the Group of Seven to contemporary painters such as Kim Dorland, Tom Campbell, Steve Driscoll, Meryl McMaster, and John Hartman, Ontario artists have been inspired by the landscapes of the Great Lakes, in particular, their scale, light and colour, and the interface of land, sea and sky. The lakes have also captured the imagination of American artists including

Charles Burchfield and Philip Koch. However, it appears to my untrained eye that the physical environment and the wilderness leitmotif (light-mo-teef) have captured more of the attention of Ontario artists than their American counterparts based in the Great Lakes states. There, regional artists such as Edmund Brucker and Richard Fayerweather Babcock adopted realist and impressionist styles and addressed diverse themes such as rurality, urbanization, industrialization and immigration. Ontarian paintings that have focused on human settlement, such as *Lake Superior Village* (1937) by Charles Comfort, have tended to emphasize cold and isolation. The lakes themselves, at least the land-water interface, I would argue, have held less of a grip in the artistic imagination south of the border.

Conclusion

For thousands of years, the Great Lakes and their tributaries have facilitated the meeting of cultures. They have also generated similar and different responses as articulated in shared activities ranging from trade to sports fishing and dissimilar emphases placed on the symbol of the border and the idea of wilderness in place definition. Currently, governments and businesses support efforts to create some sense of cross-border cultural affinity but do so primarily from an economic rationale. In this context, cultural tourism has become important. For example, the Great Lakes Circle Tour, a scenic 6,500 mile road system connecting all of the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River established by the Great Lakes Commission in 1988 in cooperation with its eight member states and the province of Ontario, promotes travel and tourism along the shores of “North America's Fresh Coast.” The “circle” transforms the cultural resources of the Great Lakes into cultural tourism products that promote the idea of a transnational region where people on both sides of the border share an environment, history, art, architecture, and ways of life unique to this part of North America. The Great Lakes Commission website states that “the

Circle Tour offers an opportunity to showcase the Great Lakes resource where promotion can be both collaborative and localized". The key word here is promotion because it invokes the possibility that left to their own devices, promoters might produce an experience that adheres to what John Urry (1990) has termed the "tourist gaze". The "tourist gaze" is the set of expectations that tourists place on local populations when they participate in heritage tourism, in the search for having an "authentic" experience. In response to tourist expectations and often cultural and racial stereotypes, local populations reflect back the "gaze" of the expectations of tourists in order to benefit financially. In other words, there is a concern that such development will result in commodification, loss of authenticity and staged authenticity. Whether this is now happening or will happen, I cannot say; that is the subject of another paper.



Borders in Globalization

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Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada

Reflections on Marine Spaces, Culture and the Great Lakes Borderland

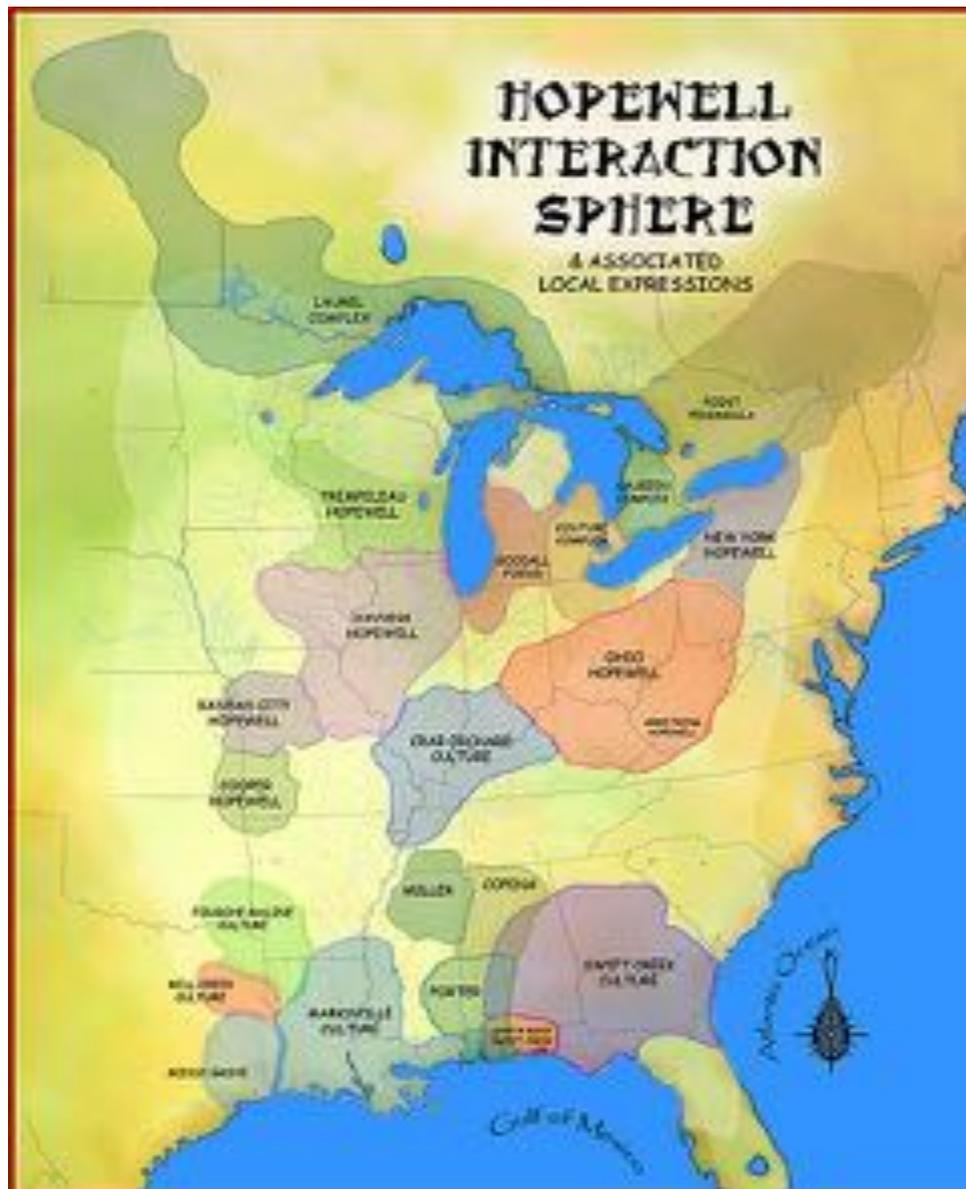
- **influence of water on landscape, cultural diffusion**
- **generates shared cultural responses, values and space**
- **water/land interface**
 - **features and material and non-material cultural expressions that give rise to unique and distinctive regional identities**
- **Great Lakes region a a space of crossroads, junctions and corridors**

Pre-Contact Period



- Paleo-Indians located close to water
- *annealing*
- “Copper Culture”
- watercraft (skin boat, dugout canoe and bark canoe)
- “Hopewell Tradition”





Hopewell Interaction Sphere

Pre-Contact Period

- **Language groups**
 - *Algonquian* (Ojibwe, Odawa, Potawatomie, Sauk, Fox, Miami, Illinois), *Iroquoian* (Haudenosaunee, Hurons, Neutral, Petuns), and *Siouxian* (Winnebago, Dakota)
- **Woodland Culture Area**
- **Anishinaabe - autonym for the Odawa, Ojibwe, Potawatomi, Oji-Cree, Mississaugas, and Algonquin (Algonkin) peoples**
 - trading people, especially Ojibwe
- **Haudenosaunee – Five Nations (Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca)**
 - traded corn and tobacco for pelts and wampum (shell beads)

GREAT LAKES TRIBES,
CIRCA 1600



Contact and Colonialism

- **fur trade**
 - French forming a partnership with the Anishinaabe and the Iroquoian-speaking Hurons (Wendats) of Georgian Bay
 - British trading primarily with the Haudenosaunee
- **Richard White (1991): “middle ground”**
- *pays d'en haut*



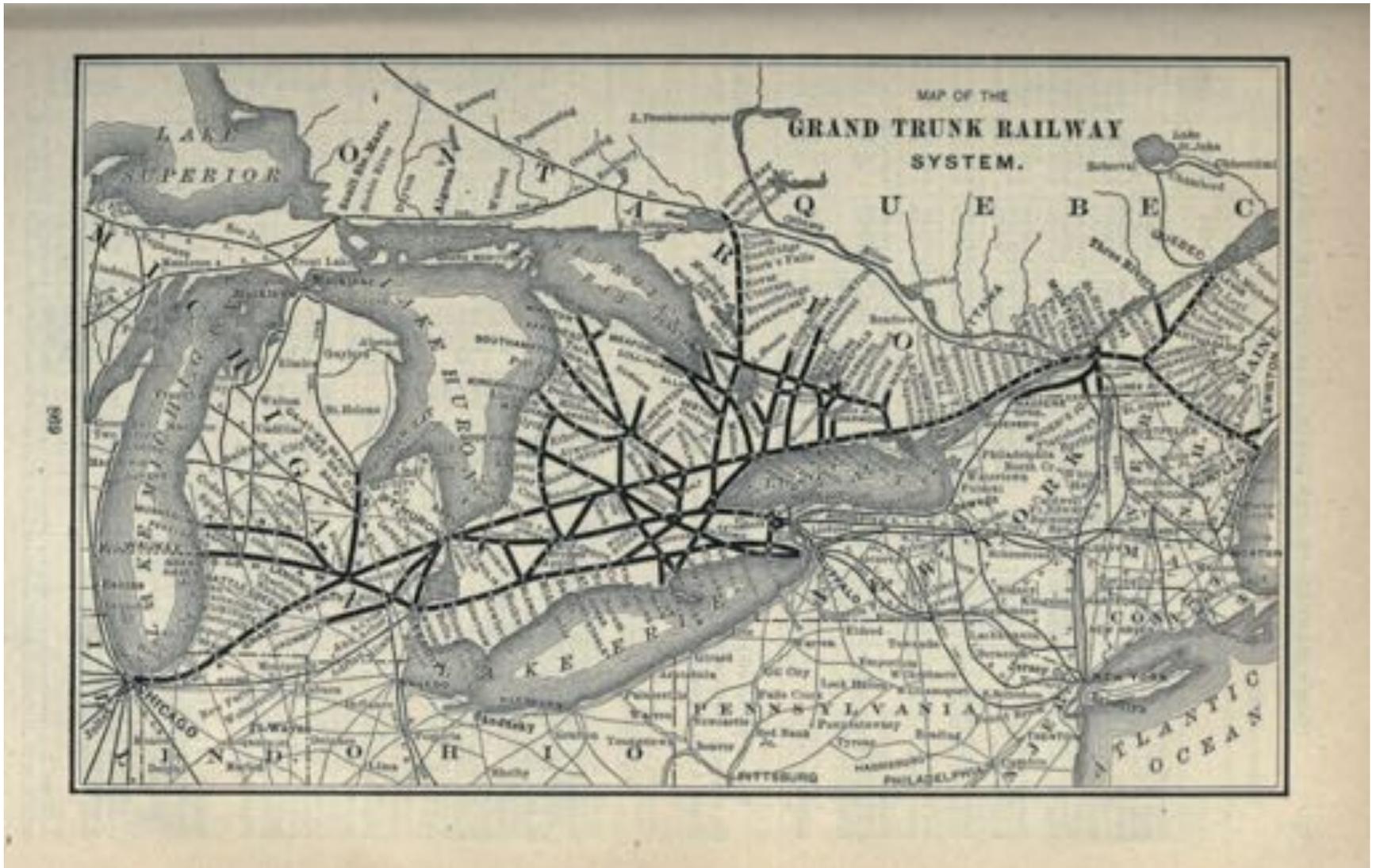
1776 Thomas Pownall Revision of Louis Evan's *A General Map of the Middle British Colonies of America* (1755)

- **middle ground**
 - a region of cultural accommodation, although fragile
 - Great Lakes a hinterland of competing empires and served as a gigantic trade zone in which culture became the economic goods of demand
 - hybrid Pan-Indian/European fur trade culture developed
 - fur trade stimulated travel which brought about cultural change
 - rituals
 - some degree of cultural hybridity
 - a space where the local (indigenous) and the global (European) interacted and produced a new arrangement of culture and power in which Native peoples were anything but subordinate

- **impact of British-French competition on Native groups**
 - **European competition for territory**
 - **different roles for Native groups**
 - **process of *bordering* turned a *liminal frontier* into a contested *borderland* in which Native groups had to negotiate a path that would best suit their needs (Haefeli 1999: 1223)**
 - **negotiation included alliances and conflicts which, combined with the impacts of disease, a declining resource base and changing demands for fur, would eventually result in dependency and marginalization**
 - **Seven Years War and decline of the middle ground**
 - **Americans ignored the idea of the middle ground**

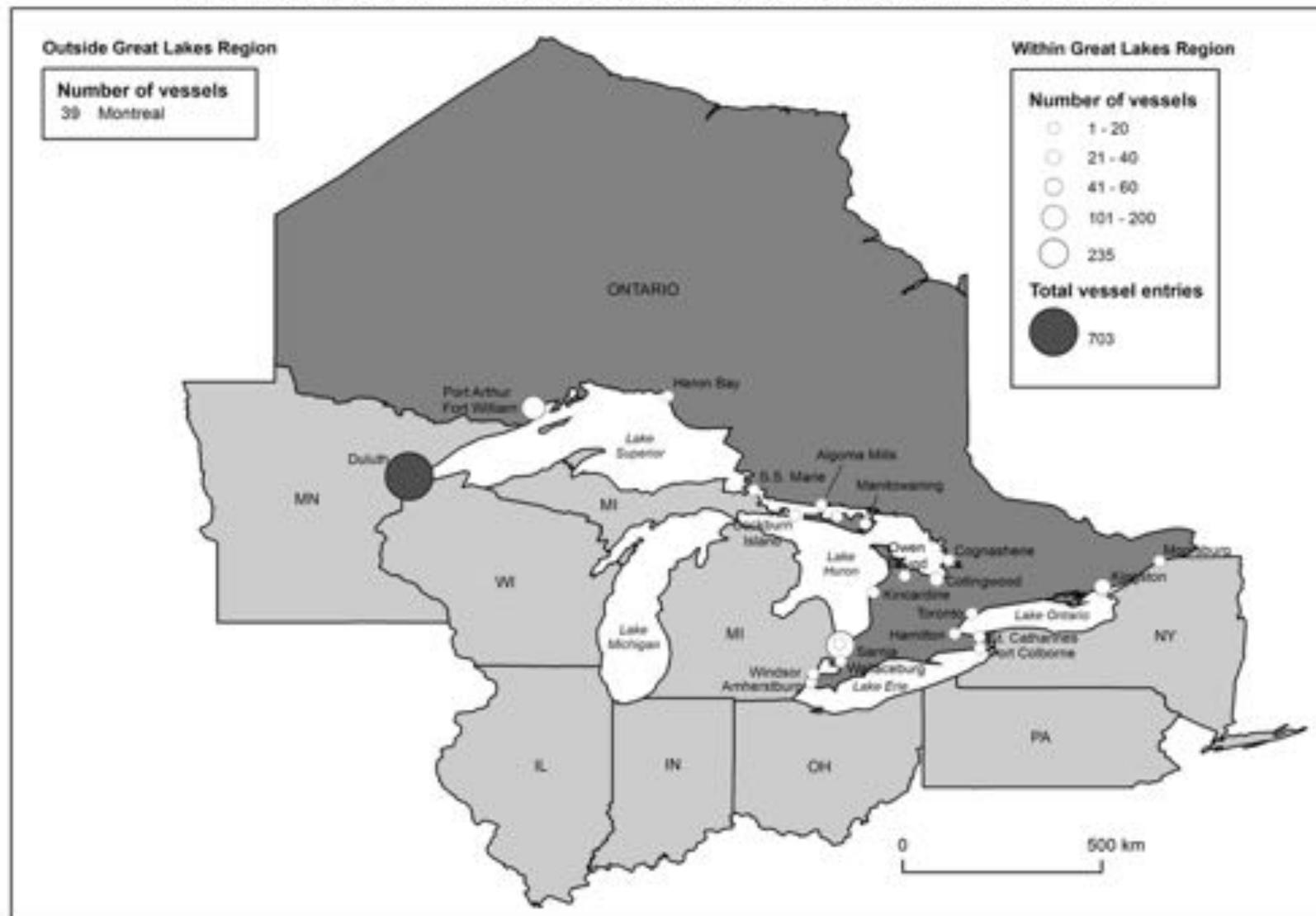
Transition to Modernity

- development of a *functional* borderland region
- industrialization and urbanization of Great Lakes states and Ontario
- developing transportation network and increasing trade (maritime and land-based)
 - impact of the repeal of the Corn Laws (1846), Reciprocity Treaty (1854-66)
- southwestern part of Ontario constituted the most direct line between New York State and Michigan
 - international rail corridor with Buffalo-Fort Erie, Detroit-Windsor and Sarnia-Port Huron as the major termini of the Ontario section and gateways in the continental context
- expansion of marine trade on the upper lakes
- within the larger trade network of the Great Lakes basin, certain arteries of trade became clogged or closed up whereas others were opened (Widdis 2011)
- significant emigration of Ontarians to the Great Lakes states at the turn of the 20th century (Widdis 2010)



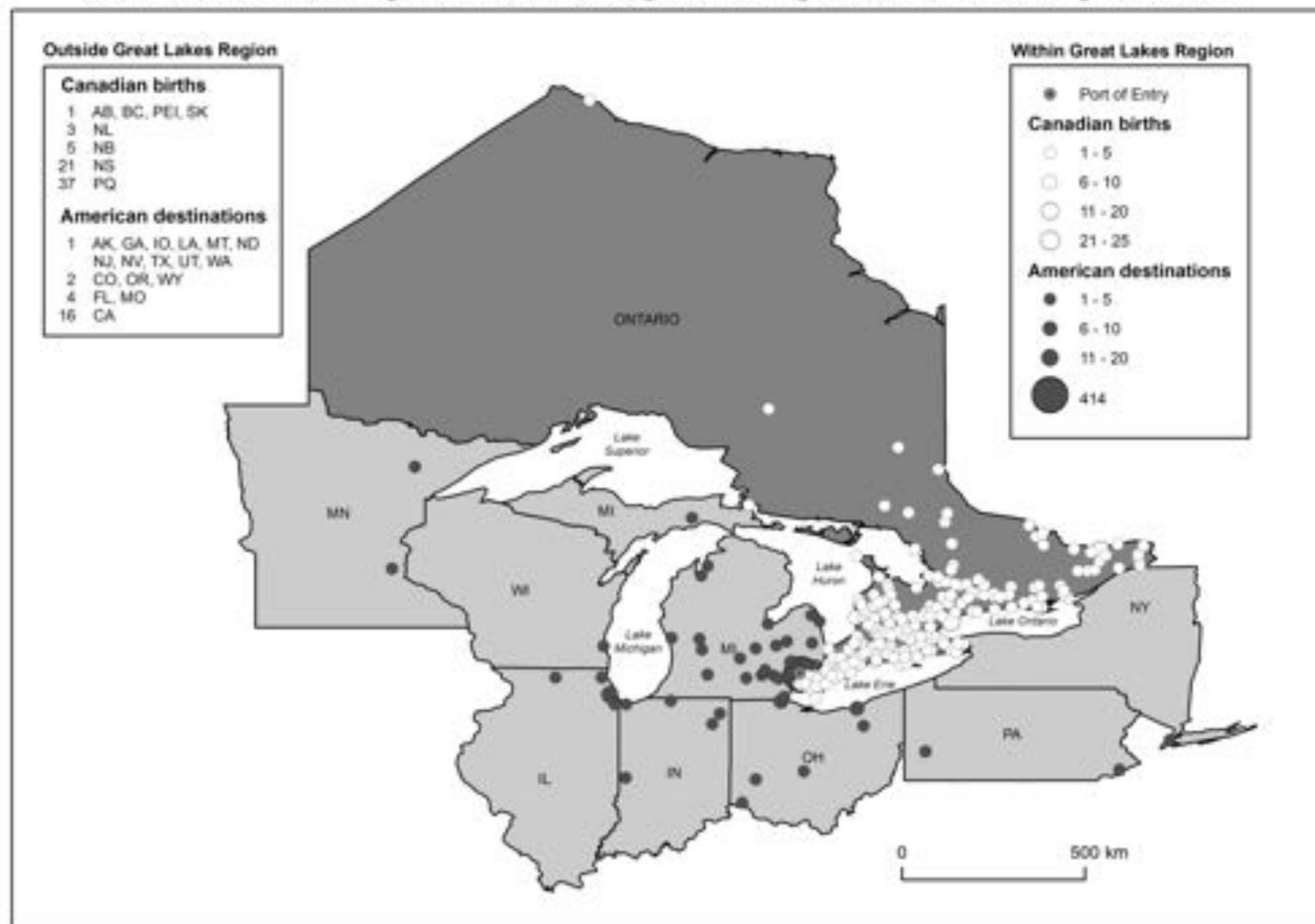
1897 Map of Grand Trunk System

Great Lakes Borderland Region: Canadian Vessel Entries at Duluth, Minnesota, 1887-1892



Source: U.S. Custom-House and Port Records

Great Lakes Borderland Region: Canadian-Born Migrants Entering the U.S. at Detroit, Michigan, 1895-1915

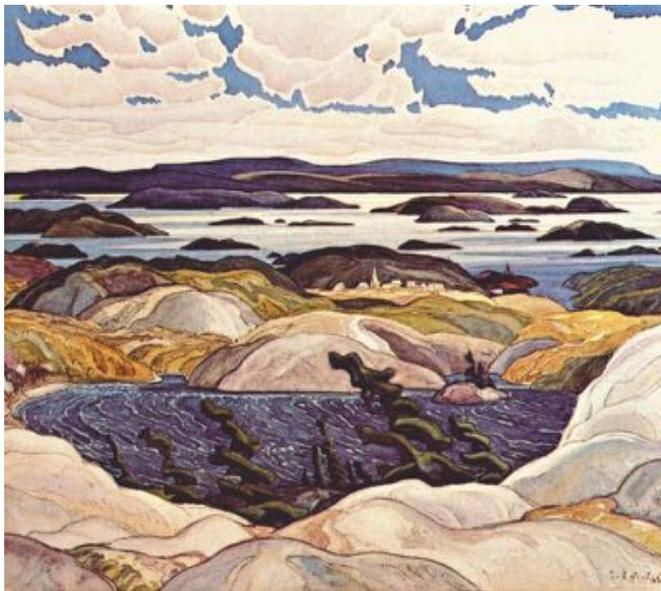


Source: Soundex Index to Canadian Border Entries

- **recent developments**
 - **extensive highway network**
 - **trade liberalization before and after free trade deals**
 - **Auto Pact (1965-2001)**
 - **shared economic space**
 - **multi-modal transportation network**

- **Great Lakes as source of inspiration to writers and artists**
- **Brehm (2001): tradition of merchant marine culture novels**
 - transition from historic and romantic treatments to a more realistic literature with industrial and working-class themes (e.g. Jay McCormick *November Storm*, 1943)
 - “lakes merchant marine literature became a culturally contested site ... divided between realist and postrealist indictments of industrialization, such as David Mamet’s play *Lakeboat* (1970)...” (Brehm 2001: 169)
 - Joan Skelton *The Survivor of the Edmund Fitzgerald* (1985)
 - this book critiques the ideologies of the postindustrial cultures of the Lakes, implying that this kind of writing occurs on both sides of the border
 - because much of the Great Lakes states and Ontario, particularly the latter, lie inland we must be careful about making too much of a shared maritime culture
- **border as liminal frame of reference for Ontario novelists**
 - border-crossing as a leitmotif (e.g. Jane Urquhart *Whirlpool*, 1986)
 - “Looking across the distance of the [Niagara] River to the foreign country on the other side,” [thinking about] “how there was always a point where one set of circumstances ended and another began” (Urquhart 1986: 221)

- **artists have in different ways imagined and illustrated how these waters are part of the identity of people who live within their reach**
 - **Ontario interpretations: Group of Seven, Kim Dorland, Tom Campbell, Steve Driscoll, Meryl McMaster, and John Hartman**
 - **inspired by the landscapes of the Great Lakes, in particular, their scale, light and colour, and the interface of land, sea and sky**
 - **lakes have also captured the imagination of American artists (e.g. Charles Burchfield, Philip Koch)**
 - **physical environment and the wilderness leitmotif have captured more of the attention of Ontario artists than their American counterparts**
 - **traditionally, American-based Great Lakes artists (e.g. Edmund Brucker, Richard Fayerweather Babcock) addressed diverse themes such as rurality, urbanization, industrialization and immigration**
 - **Ontarian paintings that have focused on human settlement, such as *Lake Superior Village* (1937) by Charles Comfort, have tended to emphasize cold and isolation**
 - **lakes themselves, at least the land-water interface, I would argue, have held less of a grip in the artistic imagination south of the border**

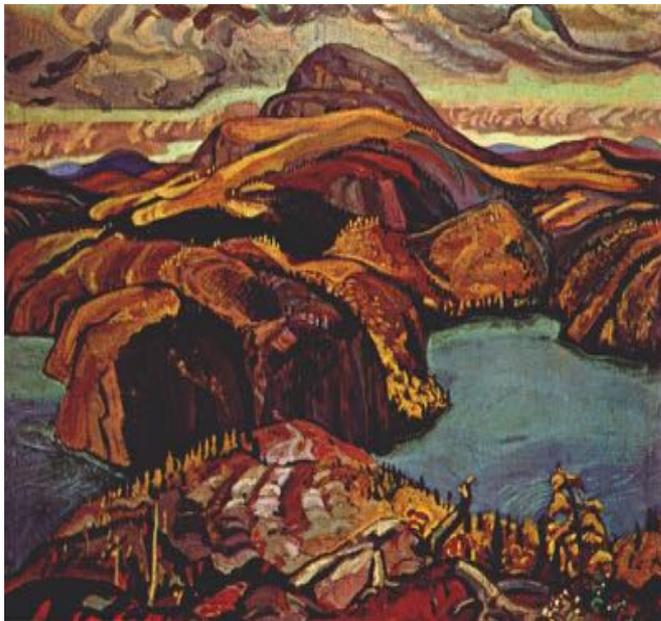


Frank Carmichael, Bay of Islands, 1930



Lawren Harris, North Shore, Lake Superior, 1926

Group of Seven treatments



**A.Y. Jackson, Georgian Bay,
November, 1921**



**Arthur Lismer, October, North Shore,
Lake Superior, 1927**



Tom Campbell, Things Old and New, 2013



Steve Driscoll, Evening Sun, 2013



Meryl McMaster, Viage, Lake Ontario, 2010



John Hartman, Looking North from Above Cunningham's Channel, 2014



Charles Burchfield, Icebound Lake Boat, 1924



Philip Koch, Great Lake, 2016



Edmund Brucker, Cleveland Flats, 1930



Richard Fayerweather Babcock, Industrial Waterfront, Great Lakes, 1930

Conclusion



- Great Lakes and their tributaries have facilitated the meeting of cultures for millenia
- have also generated similar and different responses as articulated in shared activities ranging from trade to sports fishing and dissimilar emphases placed on the symbol of the border and the idea of wilderness in place definition
- governments and businesses support efforts to create some sense of cross-border cultural affinity but do so partly from an economic rationale
 - Great Lakes Circle Tour, established in 1988
 - the “circle” transforms the cultural resources of the Great Lakes into cultural tourism products that promote the idea of a transnational region where people on both sides of the border share an environment, history, art, architecture, and ways of life unique to this part of North America
 - “the Circle Tour offers an opportunity to showcase the Great Lakes resource where promotion can be both collaborative and localized” (Great Lakes Commission website)
 - John Urry: “the tourist gaze” (1990)