

## No Kidding Around: They Meant to Leave a Mark

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## No Kidding Around: They Meant to Leave a Mark

THE HISTORIES OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN CANADA remain relatively unexamined in academic historiography, but thankfully this is changing (albeit much too slowly). And while this sub-field of history has been enriched by a growing number of titles from historians, the young historical subjects that animate these narratives have been relatively invisible and silenced. Linda Mahood's *Thumbing a Ride: Hitchhikers, Hostels and Counterculture in Canada* along with Joel Belliveau's *In the Spirit of '68: Youth Culture, the New Left, and the Reimagining of Acadia* are two additions to the historiography that add richness and nuance to this sub-field – remedying at least some of this knowledge gap and giving voice to these important historical actors and actresses.<sup>1</sup> Belliveau's work is important for a number of other reasons, but the fact that it addresses a major gap in studies of Acadie and student activism in this period must be emphasized. At first glance, both titles may seem to hold well-travelled themes and images to many readers (the Sixties, hippies, rebelliousness, youth countercultures, and so forth); however, they also offer new insights and important original research into groups of young people who were historically marginalized, and, only occasionally, centrepieces to histories focusing on the 1960s and 1970s. Mahood's book focuses primarily on youth, and while Belliveau's work moves beyond a history of youth in exploring other topics and themes there is, at its core, a focus on activities driven by post-secondary student activists who were late-stage teens or in their early twenties.

Linda Mahood is a professor of history at the University of Guelph. In *Thumbing a Ride*, Mahood takes readers on a series of trips across much of the country with stops in hostels; such trips, for young people in the late 1960s and

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1 Linda Mahood, *Thumbing a Ride: Hitchhikers, Hostels, and Counterculture in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2019); Joel Belliveau, *In the Spirit of '68: Youth Culture, the New Left, and the Reimagining of Acadia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2019). *In the Spirit of '68* was originally published in 2014 as the award-winning *Le moment 68 et la reinvention de l'Acadie* (Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa); the English version has been skillfully translated into English by Käthe Roth for UBC Press in 2019. *Thumbing a Ride* was also published in 2019.

early 1970s, represented more than a simple struggle for access to an economical means of transportation (4). It was also a personal journey in many ways, including for Mahood. As she explains, the catalyst for her book came from her students' interest and astonishment when she shared that she had hitchhiked along with her own friends during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Anecdotally, I can share that the large majority of post-secondary students whom I have queried on this topic – students born in the late 1990s and early 2000s – have never hitchhiked and that some did not fully understand what “hitchhiking” meant. While hitchhiking as a “craze” ended right when Mahood was hitching her rides, she posits that a significant legacy of this transient youth subculture has been the widespread acceptance of the value of travel for older teenagers and young adults (248). The hitchhiking and hostelling phenomena, in the late 20th century, meant that thousands of youngsters became tourists, drifters, or happy wanderers to other provinces, and, more widely, across the continent (and beyond), during which they experienced coming-of-age moments (248). Mahood emphasizes that hitchhiking by baby boomers did not in fact threaten the social order more than any other previous generations; yet civil society's angst concerning freaks, dropouts, and youth unrest created a shadow over young persons' mobility, especially for girls and young women (23). According to Mahood, widespread hitchhiking effectively ended in the late 1970s with pressure from provincial and federal police forces enforcing restrictions and by-laws that banned the practice in towns and cities (248).

Mahood's introductory material is exceptional. She provides fascinating points such as the etymology of “hitchhike” and tracing youth mobility and alternative travel, more generally, from the late 19th century to the early postwar period. She also explains her research methodologies alongside an impressive array of resource materials, which includes, but is not limited to, dozens of oral histories, Canadian newspapers and magazines, archival materials from across the country, and the invaluable newswire service Canadian University Press – all of which often gave voice to hitchhikers across different eras. Chapter 2 considers adventure hitchhiking and the perceptions of it in the first half of the 20th century. Her third chapter considers the baby boomers, risk, and the concerns of parents in that immediate postwar era. In chapters 4 and 5, Mahood focuses less on the hitchhikers and their everyday experiences and more on government policies affecting youth and how those changed over time. Chapter 6 returns to youth subcultures and how the road, ethical codes, and quite simply, survival, was managed by the 1970s. The seventh chapter returns

to more of a macro view – including contemporary research and police reports, judicial rulings, and missing persons cases – and how this all influenced the discourse about teenage risk-taking and sexual violence impacting young people’s everyday lives. She closes the book with a pithy concluding chapter that discusses how police services and local governments influenced policy to help bring about the enforcement of new by-laws that outlawed hitchhiking across the country by the early 1980s.

Mahood’s excellent book contains many strengths. She provides succinct and pertinent quotes to open each chapter that will engage readers immediately. She also provides some evocative images that help bring the narrative, themes, and most importantly, these young people, to life for readers. For some, these quotations and images may provide a mirror if they happen to have lived in these times and have shared some of these experiences. For others, the book provides a window into the cultures of hitchhiking and hostelling in Canada. She also offers hitchhiking in historical context over the course of a number of decades and makes some convincing and important links to young people’s travel, which at times served as a means to action for political activists and protesters (36) while often, during earlier times, serving as a bourgeois activity for some young people from wealthier families. Coupled with this is her ability to not romanticize these activities, particularly those in the latter part of the 20th century. While nostalgia can be, and oftentimes is, productive, Mahood does not allow sentimentality to seep into her analysis, especially as she details the endings to widespread hitchhiking. She talks about the countless young women and a few young men who have gone missing on our highways and, in so doing, uses some case studies while emphasizing the thousands of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls – many of whom disappeared while hitchhiking the “Highway of Tears.” This important section adds to the scholarly articles and books focusing on these tragic and horrifying events in the 1960s through to today<sup>2</sup> despite the relative decline of hitchhiking among many young people. It should be noted that Mahood’s research is exceptional and pointed in terms of her diversity of archival sources and also in her use of

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2 There are several recent texts focusing on murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls. For a small but significant sample, see Kim Anderson, Maria Campbell, and Christi Belcourt, eds., *Keetsahnak: Our Missing and Murdered Indigenous Sisters* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2018); Jessica McDiarmid, *Highway of Tears* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2019); and Pamela Palmater, “Shining Light on the Dark Places: Addressing Police Racism and Sexualized Violence against Indigenous Women and Girls in the National Inquiry,” *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law* 28, no. 2 (August 2016): 253-84.

earlier groundbreaking work on the 1960s by Owram and Palmer<sup>3</sup> alongside the foundational work in child and youth histories in Canada by Comacchio and Sutherland.<sup>4</sup>

The shortcomings are few in Mahood's *Thumbing a Ride*, but there are some. While the organizational framework of the book is logical and reader friendly, a bibliography would have helped readers navigate the range of sources used (although this may well have been outside of the author's control). This means that outside of their mention in the opening pages, there are no lists of the primary sources – especially the archival collections or periodicals that informed her analysis. Necessarily, these can be found in the excellent Endnotes, but that kind of tracking is asking a lot of readers and researchers as the reader must carefully comb through Mahood's notes for such information. Related to this is that while she provides some biographical information for her oral history informants, there is no bibliographic detailing of them. While anonymity is a priority for some informants, there are ways around providing this important information. Another shortcoming regards some of the main thrust of her conclusion. While there can be no questioning of hitchhiking's steep decline by the late 1970s and early 1980s, there may have been some further consideration and exploration of the actual numbers of violent encounters (which, granted, are difficult to determine in any era) rather than the main emphasis on perceptions and influence of the popular media as central. Unquestionably there were pressures to change policing and municipal by-laws, but further clarity here was needed in considering cause and effect here. Finally, it should be noted that there is no discussion of hitchhiking in Atlantic Canada and this necessitates future scholarship focusing on this region

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3 For further reading on 1960s counterculture, see Doug Owram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996). Owram argues throughout his book that this generation was and is powerful, influential, and distinct from previous generations – and that much of this due to the postwar experience and the relatively large size of this cohort. See also Bryan D. Palmer, *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008) as well as, more recently, Greg Marquis, *John Lennon, Yoko Ono and the Year Canada Was Cool* (Toronto: Lorimer Press, 2020).

4 For an excellent discussion of generational impacts, see Cynthia Comacchio, *Dominion of Youth: Adolescence and the Making of Modern Canada, 1920 to 1950* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 2006) and Neil Sutherland, *Growing Up: Childhood in English Canada From the Great War to the Age of Television* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002). Both Comacchio and Sutherland demonstrate the importance of young people in reflecting on and creating their own "scripts," which can then be compared and contrasted with those of other young people and the archival records from the historical period. Woven together, a rich historical tapestry can be created.

of the country. But all of these shortcomings do not undermine the overall effectiveness of Mahood's outstanding contribution to academic scholarship.

One of the most noteworthy years during the period covered by Mahood's *Thumbing a Ride* was 1968. Historian Joel Belliveau critically analyzes the "spirit of '68" as it was experienced in Acadie and at the Université de Moncton in particular during the lead-up to the late 1960s, with a particular emphasis on that landmark year – 1968 – and its immediate aftermath. The year 1968 was significant in most corners of the globe, and featured political activism, widespread protests, demonstrations, and general political unrest as young people sought more participation in decision-making in organizations and civil society more generally. The author expertly weaves in this history of New Brunswick with these wider currents. Belliveau explains that Francophone New Brunswick also had its "1968 moment," as this was a "time of protest comparable in scope – in proportion, of course – to the crises disrupting Quebec and "English-Canada" at the time" (1). Much like the peaking hitchhiking phenomenon of this period, Belliveau is clear that these episodes created considerable public interest (granted for a shorter period of time) and that the "events" grew to mythic status not only regionally but beyond as well. Ultimately, Belliveau sets out to unpack how broader global developments influenced the local events (and vice versa) and formed a powerful student movement that had local markings yet reflected larger influences (7). He succeeds in doing so – an interplay that is not easy to trace and analyze effectively.

Belliveau's "Introduction" provides some essential overview material and is well organized. If one is not well versed in some of this regional history, Belliveau offers [some] important insights into the significant happenings related directly to the events, themes, and people he focuses on in the book. Chapter 1 provides some excellent historical material in exploring the economic, political, and ideological conditions influencing New Brunswick Acadians in the immediate postwar period (1945-1960). Belliveau's second chapter documents the primary changes for students in Acadie from 1957 through 1964, which were foundational years for the movement. In Chapter 3, the author delves into the intellectual elements that defined the student movement as it moved beyond its genesis (1964 through 1967). Chapter 4 focuses on the crux of his study – the "radical" phase of the movement – with a focus on 1968 and the following two years. In Belliveau's final full-length chapter, he illustrates how the vital second phase of this influential movement

spread to society and contributed to the neo-nationalism of the 1970s. The conclusion provides some additional context and reinforces, for Belliveau, that the demonstrations at the Université de Moncton were inspired by the spirit of these times yet were not merely an echo of other actions in North America; rather, in some instances, they preceded them (181).

Much like Mahood's excellent book, there are numerous strengths to *In the Spirit of '68*. Belliveau argues persuasively that the political leadership that emerged in the late 1960s, and continued to be influential in New Brunswick in the years following, was undoubtedly neo-nationalist and the result of the efforts of the student radicals, who were not simply blaming Anglophones but who also held francophone elites responsible for serious inadequacies. This is no small point and a significant takeaway. Belliveau also establishes that there were radical transformations in civil society, higher demands and expectations from the public, the exposure of a fractured elite lacking cohesive actions for their stated intentions, and smaller political issues that led to further unrest; in other words, there was nothing straightforward about the developments as has been articulated in earlier historiography. Another real strength of this book is its demonstration that the intellectual basis for the student movement resided in its subversive relationship with elements of tradition and its adherence to the ideal of liberal modernization (72). Belliveau also illustrates the profound shift in the late 1960s, as many students abandoned the earlier adherence to technocracy and liberal ideology of participation and helped to shape and fully embrace a new ideology of communitarianism (177). He also firmly establishes that the emergent neo-nationalism and recognized cultural duality was "recognized, and it had real legal, institutional, and programmatic consequences" (178). For these students this meant the realization of not only securing comparable funding but, even more significantly, increased funding for Francophone institutions, which addressed multiple decades of chronic underfunding – a point that will resonate powerfully with many present-day readers given the financial constraints placed on most post-secondary institutions across the country. Another critical strength is that, much like Mahood, Belliveau uses an impressive array of primary sources. His research draws on student government records, student newspapers, various popular media, and the archival fonds of nationalist and student leaders at the Centre d'études acadiennes. He also uses a wide selection of informed opinions from pertinent student and nationalist leaders.

As with *Thumbing a Ride*, there are drawbacks in Belliveau's otherwise outstanding study. For example, there have been campus studies of this period from Hugh Johnston and James Pitsula on Simon Fraser University and the University of Regina respectively that could have been considered.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, conspicuous by their absence are several other books: Stuart Henderson's *Making the Scene*, Marcel Martel's *Not This Time*, and Bryan D. Palmer's *Canada's 1960s*,<sup>6</sup> which would have helped create further comparative contexts regarding some broader contemporary movements. All of these titles were actually published well in advance of the 2014 French edition. Another small point is that the student movement is taken as the de facto voice for youth more generally. Even if other older teenagers and young adults were not involved in the movement to any large degree (something left to conjecture), this should have been clarified.

*Thumbing a Ride* and *In the Spirit of '68* both hold broad appeal for readers as both are highly readable and accessible to a diverse audience. This fact should not be taken lightly as it seems more important than ever that excellent scholarship should be accessed by as broad an audience as possible – and readability certainly helps considerably in this regard. Both books are suitable for undergraduate and graduate courses in several disciplines – history, Canadian studies, and sociology – and are important additions to the sub-fields of youth studies and the Long Sixties. General readers and non-subject matter experts will find much here as the writing is lively and straightforward for anyone interested in this era – especially for those readers who hitchhiked and stayed in hostels in the 1960s and 1970s and for those involved in the student movements across university and college campuses during this remarkable period. *In the Spirit of '68* harkens back to some of the earliest social history efforts that focused on communities, specific regions, and underrepresented groups of people (based on class, “race,” and gender). These types of studies are welcomed by scholars and history students and Belliveau does not disappoint with this effort. While still making important national and international links, Belliveau's work invites further studies considering not only the many untold histories within Acadie but also the potential connections – regionally,

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5 See Hugh Johnston, *Radical Campus* (Toronto: Douglas and MacIntyre, 2005) and James M. Pitsula: *As One Who Serves: The Making of the University of Regina* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006).

6 See Stuart Henderson, *Making the Scene* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); Marcel Martel, *Not this Time* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); and Palmer, *Canada's 1960s*.



provincially, nationally, and transnationally with other institutions – both anglophone and francophone. While the book is focused on university students, and not necessarily youth per se, it still provides valuable insights into youth cultures. And it is not often that I can recommend a book as “the definitive” work on a specific topic. Mahood’s *Thumbing a Ride* is now that book for hitchhiking in Canada. It is unsurpassed in its breadth and is quite simply, a must read. These two titles should be added to the bookshelves (or digital repositories) of everyone interested in gaining new understandings of the Long Sixties in the context of youth, resistances, and everyday struggles that have marked, and continue to define, so many young people’s lives in Canada as well as globally.

JAMES ONUSKO

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