

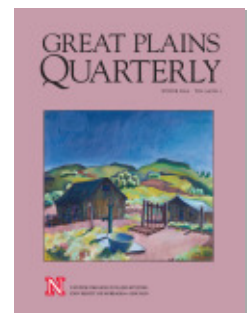


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*Civilizing the Wilderness: Culture and Nature in
Pre-Confederation Canada and Rupert's Land* by A. A. den
Otter (review)

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***Civilizing the Wilderness:
Culture and Nature in Pre-Confederation
Canada and Rupert's Land.***

By A. A. den Otter. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2012. xxxiv + 438 pp. Maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$49.95 paper.

Civilizing the Wilderness is a study of civilizing as a process and perception of the natural world in Canada prior to 1867. In his introduction A. A. den Otter reminds the reader that civilization in pre-Confederation Canada was intrinsically tied to British ethics, customs, religion, and institutions. For the landscape, "civilized" meant a developed countryside complete with fields, fences, and irrigation, intersected by roads and rail; for people, "civilized" meant education, religion, and agriculture. The term "civilized" is significant for the Aboriginal population and the Canadian wilderness because they both fell outside its narrow scope. Furthermore, the duality between civilized and uncivilized was entrenched by a geographic component that tied wilderness to Rupert's Land and civilization to Britain, exacerbating a preexisting tension between wilderness and civilization.

From the mid-nineteenth century, the colonial goal was to establish British social and economic values for the forests and plains of Rupert's Land because they were considered wasted land and "inherently evil." Den Otter's work uses the tension between savagery and civilization as an overarching framework to explain how, and most importantly why, the civilizing project in Rupert's Land and pre-Confederation Canada was undertaken in the manner it was. Each chapter is a stand-alone essay that contributes to the argument that civilization is a complicated concept involving both people and the land. For example, Bishop David Anderson, the subject of chap-

ter 4, embodied the civilizing process for both the landscape and the Indigenous people of the Red River. First, Anderson saw civilizing as encompassing conversion and education: conversion to save souls and education to better prepare the Aboriginal population for European encroachment. For Anderson the landscape was similarly dichotomous. The Red River wilderness was hostile, alien, evil; however, tilling the soil could make it productive, familiar, and good. Anderson, therefore, used a message of civilization that was part religion and part agriculture. Other missionaries and settlers who traveled into Rupert's Land understood that agriculture and settlement were synonymous with civilization, and so the landscape was changed by cutting down forests and plowing up native grasses.

Historiographically, this book makes specific contributions to pre-Confederation Canadian history. Environmental, borderlands, and colonial historians, however, will find value here as well. Perhaps what is most appealing about this work is that its author examines civilizing through stories of individual settlers and missionaries who saw the land through their cultural lens. By structuring his book about the people involved in the process, he has given a human face to an abstract concept.

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Kansas City and How It Grew, 1822–2011.

By James R. Shortridge. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012. xiii + 248 pp. Photographs, maps, illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95.

Award-winning geographer and historian James R. Shortridge is well qualified to write