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**The Adirondack Guide: The Wilderness
Representative of Invasion and Invitation in an
Imagined Community**

American expansion westward in the nineteenth century left behind in its wake certain eastern locations of perceived inhospitable ground and unusable wilderness. The Adirondacks of northern New York were one of these areas. Overlooked in the first sweep of expansion, the early nineteenth-century colonization of this region by the nation's poor and desperate created a community of Adirondackers-depicted in Victorian culture as a sturdy group of independent, self-sufficient and wilderness-worthy Americans.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, with the beginning of the reversal of American mentality of wilderness as a dark, evil, and foreboding place to wilderness as a regenerative landscape, a romantic environment, a religious haven, and a site for outdoor sports, the rest of the nation discovered the Adirondacks. Wealthy urban campers, hunters, and wilderness seekers began to impose a recreational utility upon the Adirondack region while generally ignoring the perspectives of the region's earlier and less financially fortunate settlers. The new recreational tourists turned the Adirondacks into a wilderness park. This invasion of the Adirondackers' community for recreational purposes created an "us" versus "them" conflict, which litters the political discussions

of the region even today. The Adirondacks became, as the leading historian of the region, Philip Terrie, argues, "contested terrain." This paper examines the function of the Adirondack guide as a key product and component in the development of the Adirondack Park. The study explores the connections and conflicts between the two main communities that created and defined the Adirondack guide. The permanent residents of the region, the Adirondackers, defined the guides and shaped their duties. So too, did the upscale urban campers who descended on Adirondack Park every tourist season. Through the medium of outdoor sports and recreation, the guides became a buffer between the Adirondackers and the urban interlopers. As a result of this oscillation of invasion and invitation, the guide became the paradoxical Adirondack ambassador providing restricted access to a permanent wilderness community for the temporarily "feral" wilderness camper. In the popular literature of the era, the guide became the romantic icon of the Adirondacks, a heroic figure shaped by both local residents and the tourist masses.



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